

ARTICLE

YOUTH EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOLING IN PARIS AND PORTO ALEGRE: RESEARCH REFLECTIONS IN URBAN PERIPHERIES¹

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ABSTRACT: The article seeks to draw contrasts between the schooling experiences of young people from popular classes, taking as delimitation the peripheral situation of interlocutors in the regions of *La Courneuve*, north of Paris, France, and *Cruzeiro*, south of Porto Alegre/RS, Brazil. It is inspired by contributions from the sociology of social trials and takes Anne Barrère's categorizations of the trials specifically encountered at school as references. In the field, it worked with document analysis, observation, and comprehensive interviews, in dialogue with young people in two public educational establishments. The results indicate common experiences of the trials of 'constructing meanings to scholarly knowledge and work', 'injunction for autonomy', and 'individual performances in school assessments'. However, differences can be observed regarding the place of schooling in individual itineraries, in a tense but strategic condition in the French case, and in a relative position alongside the imperative of independence in the Brazilian case.

Keywords: youth, experiences, schooling, urban peripheries.

EXPERIÊNCIAS JUVENIS DA ESCOLARIZAÇÃO EM PARIS E PORTO ALEGRE: REFLEXÕES DA PESQUISA EM PERIFERIAS URBANAS

RESUMO: O artigo procura traçar contrastes entre as experiências da escolarização de jovens de classes populares, tomando por delimitação a situação periférica de interlocutores nas regiões de *La Courneuve*, a norte de Paris, França, e *Cruzeiro*, zona sul de Porto Alegre/RS, Brasil. Neste sentido, inspira-se nas

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contribuições da sociologia dos desafios sociais e nas categorizações de Anne Barrère sobre as provas enfrentadas especificamente na escola. Em campo, trabalhou-se com análise documental, observação de aulas e atividades de intervalo e entrevistas compreensivas, mediante diálogo com jovens adolescentes estudantes em dois estabelecimentos públicos de ensino. Os resultados indicam experiências comuns dos desafios da ‘construção de sentidos a saberes e trabalho escolares’, da ‘injunção à autonomia’ e das ‘performances individuais ante as avaliações’. Contudo, observa-se diferenças quanto ao lugar da escolarização nos itinerários individuais, em condição tensa, mas estratégica no caso francês, e em posição relativa junto ao imperativo de independência no caso brasileiro.

Palavras-chave: juventudes, experiências; escolarização; periferias urbanas.

EXPERIENCIAS JUVENILES DE ESCOLARIZACIÓN EN PARÍS Y PORTO ALEGRE: REFLEXIONES DE INVESTIGACIÓN EN PERIFERIAS URBANAS

RESUMEN: El artículo traza contrastes entre las experiencias de la escolarización de jóvenes de clases populares, tomando como delimitación la situación periférica de interlocutores en las regiones de *La Courneuve*, norte de París, Francia, y *Cruzeiro*, a sur de Porto Alegre/RS, Brasil. En este sentido, se inspira en la sociología de los desafíos sociales y en las categorizaciones de Anne Barrère sobre las pruebas afrontadas específicamente en la escuela. En campo, se trabajó con análisis documental, observación y entrevistas comprensivas con jóvenes adolescentes estudiantes de dos escuelas públicas. Los resultados indican experiencias comunes de los desafíos de la ‘construcción de sentidos a saberes y trabajo escolares’, de la ‘injuncción de autonomía’ y de las “performances individuales en evaluaciones”. Sin embargo, se observan diferencias en cuanto al lugar de la escolarización en los itinerarios individuales, en una condición tensa pero estratégica en el caso francés, y en una posición relativa junto del imperativo de independencia en el caso brasileño.

Palabras clave: juventudes, experiencias, escolarización, periferias urbanas.

INTRODUCTION

Approaching educational experiences can lead us to studies from both the Sociology of Education and the Sociology of Youth, with diverse emphases on the characterization of social actors' actions. Our argumentative trajectory will indeed traverse analyses from both specializations, yet it will also draw on the sociology of social trials (*épreuves*) to interpret the challenges that working-class youth face, specifically within the context of high school boarding facilities.

Amidst processes of individualization and singularization, we consider this a pertinent approach to social relations in late modernity, as it directs our attention to the “work of individuals” and to what this may reveal about the understanding of *in loci* experiences, informing our reflection on our macro-analytical frameworks. In the words of Martuccelli and Santiago (2017): “social trials are historical challenges, socially produced, culturally represented, and unequally distributed, that individuals are compelled to confront” (p. 84). This invites us to undertake interpretive efforts that shift our focus from structural frameworks to individual actions, thereby problematizing the linkages between them.

We opted to undertake an investigative exercise anchored in a contrast of experiences across distinct educational realities situated in Brazil and France. However, we did not disregard the relevance of comparative studies, which highlight differences between the two countries, weighed in terms of educational outcomes and historically produced educational infrastructures (Gomes & Sampaio, 2021; Sardá, 2021), we have chosen to adopt a complementary approach. While we worked to delineate specific socio-institutional contexts, we also sought out interlocutors within public schools in the regions of Paris

and Porto Alegre/RS². To this end, it was essential to engage in a dialogue with Anne Barrère's contributions (2003, 2011, 2020), using the current trials facing young people as the guiding thread of our analyses.

This text is organized into three sections. In the first part, we outline the theoretical and methodological frameworks underpinning our work and provide information on the research sites. In the second part, we undertake a macro-contextual characterization, drawing upon documentary analysis (Cellard, 2008) and secondary data. We seek to highlight differences regarding normative regimes and institutional supports by examining social domains that intersect with the daily lives of youth in both metropolitan settings. In the third section, we turn to the findings from our engagement with high school students, highlighting the trials encountered and the nuances identified within each specific context. Finally, at the conclusion of the article, we offer reflections and a synthesis intended to guide future research on this topic.

PATH REFERENCES

Research on youth has highlighted the diversity of experiences constructed by young people, at times framing peer practices as part of socialization processes coproduced by individuals, and at others delineating biographical trajectories forged within different social spaces and involving varied potential forms of belonging (Dayrell & Carrano, 2014; Galland, 2017; Tella, 2020). This is also the context for discussing the tensions between school practices and youth cultures, as well as the questioning of school routines among young people (Barrère, 2021).

Our approach to the contributions from the sociology of social trials (Martuccelli, 2006, 2007; Martuccelli and Santiago, 2017) seeks theoretical-methodological inspiration to enable us to work within this scenario, problematizing the actions young people undertake during their school experiences. Martuccelli (2006; 2007) has proposed that we pay attention to what is lived through by social actors, in order to recognize their everyday ordeals and the ways in which their responses to these challenges are individualized. This is not a matter of compiling an inventory of biographies or individual actions, but rather of employing a heuristic device to re-engage with macro-social analyses that are then revisited through the lens of understanding the “work of individuals.” Thus, the author emphasizes the necessity of combining macro-analytical knowledge with an in-depth exploration of experiential narratives to identify how structural issues refract at the individual level and, from that vantage point, formulate renewed sociological interpretations.

Thus, this approach to challenges is attentive to the dynamics of individualization and singularization prevalent in late modernity, a condition that prompts an examination not only of socio-institutional prescriptions but also of the forms of agency exercised by actors within their processes of

²The research underpinning this article forms part of the activities of the project ‘Youths and Educational Experiences: On the Relations Between Individuation and Reflexivities’ (UFRGS), carried out with funding from CNPq/MCTI – Call for proposals 10/2023. We wish to express our gratitude to Anne Barrère (Université Paris Cité) for her review and significant contributions to the writing, as well as to the teachers and young students from the participating schools for their generous willingness to engage in dialogue.

socialization (Martuccelli & Santiago, 2017). First, the category of “social trial” points to a narrative dimension through which actors make sense of their life trajectories and situate the challenges they have undergone, viewing themselves as heirs to a distinctly modern adventure. Second, it references the capacities individuals possess to confront these trials that are, by and large, framed as personal burdens. It also directs our attention to processes of social evaluation, through which one may observe the variations in response and the resources effectively mobilized in the face of such trials. Finally, it articulates with a set of structural issues that are both compulsory and significant within the framework of a given society, whether institutionalized or related to the formation of social bonds, and which vary across historical periods (Martuccelli, 2007).

The configuration of trials leads us to the notion of “supports,” which performs a complementary interpretive function, addressing the foundations that sustain the existence of social actors. In this context, we refer to the set of resources and forms of assistance that constitute lived experiences, understood as an existential ecology of elements appropriated during processes of individuation and/or socialization. The author emphasizes that this is not merely an inventory of conditions and forms of capital available according to one’s social position, but rather a recognition of what is inscribed within the web of actual interdependencies shaping individual life histories, elements that enable individuals to constitute themselves as such (Martuccelli, 2007). We may consider supports that are institutionalized and legitimized, as well as those that are more subtle and obliquely present in everyday life, such as cultural consumption or peer interactions within the context of youth experiences.

In our analyses, we adopt a sociological approach to social trials by positing education as a historically produced structural issue to the realities of the countries under examination. A trial that entails a constellation of challenges for youth experiences which we try to understand based on the contributions of Anne Barrère (2003; 2011; 2013; 2014; 2020; 2021). Adhering to this same approach, the author frames the experiences of French students in terms of three main tensions: the construction of meaning regarding school-based knowledge and work; the institutional injunction for autonomy; and individual performance in the face of assessments.

With regard to the “construction of meaning to knowledge and schoolwork,” Barrère (2020) identifies a certain sense of the general utility of studies, whereas the content taught on a daily basis is not always perceived in the same way. In other words, students recognize the importance of the school, whether for gaining access to the labor market or as a vehicle for social mobility, yet they question, or do not fully grasp, the relevance of the knowledge presented when viewed through the lens of their activities outside the classroom. Thus, a tension emerges between a strategic interest in one’s studies and an uncertainty regarding the intellectual interest in the knowledge and work demanded by the institutional form of education (Barrère, 2020).

In the second trial, the institutional injunction regarding autonomy, Barrère (2003; 2020) argues that this requirement is generally framed around the expectation that individuals be diligent and dedicated to their intellectual development. Drawing upon Lahire (2001), we can point to school mechanisms aimed at the transparency, objectification, and public dissemination of rules and agreements, mechanisms that anchor, in written artifacts, the call for students to participate in normative consent. In the final analysis, this amounts to the expectation of an active subject, capable of self-determination in their studies while remaining in alignment with rules constructed within the institutional framework. However, as Barrère (2020) notes, students may respond to this imperative in a variety of ways, or, in their teachers’ estimation, in an insufficient manner. This occurs even as they exercise autonomy in their actions and learning in other social domains, engaging in activities that are not always known to their teachers.

Regarding the third challenge, “individual performance in the face of school evaluations”, tension arises from two interrelated aspects. On the one hand, confronting the varied and regular forms of individualized performance assessment (tests, exams, individualized guidance, etc.), such that the school’s judgment may come to be internalized as a form of self-assessment. On the other hand, from feelings of (in)justice regarding the effort expended by students, viewed in comparison with the effort put forth by their peers. Thus, students respond to an institutional normalization that posits a direct link

between workload, results, and, consequently, academic success. However, their demands for fair evaluations, along with the attendant feelings of connection or alienation, may go unnoticed by teachers, who are preoccupied with what they perceive as a lack of student interest (Barrère, 2003; 2020).

Viewed through the lens of the trials individuals faced and the work they undertake, socialization emerges as a terrain marked by contested boundaries and heterogeneous experiences. This perspective strikes us as particularly pertinent for reflecting upon the agency of young people in shaping the daily life of the school, and for problematizing the coherence of school processes and their role in producing the contemporary condition of youth, especially as the school has increasingly become the predominant occupation of young people (Sposito, Souza e Silva, 2018; Pinheiro et al., 2024). To advance our understanding of the experiences generated within this interrelationship, we have opted for a heuristic-reflective device: a contrast between two distinct school realities characterized by differing institutional configurations. The analytical boundaries we established during our fieldwork aim to support our reflections in this regard.

In the Field

The information in this text is based on research underway since 2022 in public schools in impoverished urban areas, focusing on the experiences of youth from working-class backgrounds. In this article, we focus on the contrast between the lived experiences of students at two public institutions: one in the *Cruzeiro* district, in the southern zone of Porto Alegre, RS; and the other in *La Courneuve, Seine-Saint-Denis*, north of Paris, France³. The localities where these schools are situated are topologically peripheral, characterized by a relatively higher degree of social vulnerability within both metropolitan contexts (Boussad et al., 2017; ObservaPoa, 2023), a condition further compounded by a higher concentration of self-declared Black individuals in the former setting, and of immigrant populations in the latter.

The localities were selected for their high concentrations of markers of social inequality. Even with economic and cultural differences, we employed approximate comparative parameters, underscoring the asymmetries in social positions across the two metropolitan regions, asymmetries that are, by and large, disadvantageous to actors subsisting in peripheral territories. The Human Development Index (HDI) serves as an apt illustration in this regard: in the Porto Alegre locality, the index (standing at approximately 0.667) is 17% lower than the municipal average; conversely, Seine-Saint-Denis records a Regionalized HDI of 0.48, 37% lower than in Paris⁴.

³Access to the French educational institution was gained through research conducted by the author during his tenure as a visiting professor at *Université Paris Cité* and the *Centre de Recherche sur les Liens Sociaux* (CERLIS), between September 2023 and February 2024. This investigation also is part of the activities of the research project '*Juventudes e experiências da educação: das relações entre individuação e reflexividades*,' based at UFRGS in Porto Alegre, RS.

⁴This information is available at: Seine-Saint-Denis, France – *Indice de développement humain régionalisé* (IDH-2), 2021; Cruzeiro, Porto Alegre/RS: UDHS – Human Development Units, 2010. It is worth noting that the Regionalized HDI used in France employs more rigorous parameters. Among the dimensions typically considered for this index (health, education, and income), the French variant, specifically regarding education, takes into account not only average years of schooling but also the proportion of people aged 15 and over with a diploma.

In selecting the schools, we followed approximate parameters. In France, we considered the Social Position Index (IPS-*Indice de Position Sociale*) of *lycées* within the Paris metropolitan area, adopting values typical of socially vulnerable localities (between 70 and 90 points). For Porto Alegre and in the absence of an equivalent benchmark, we used the Human Development Index (HDI) of the neighborhoods, combined with the Basic Education Development Index (BHDI) of schools located in the most impoverished areas (averaging 3.5). Thus, we narrowed our selection to a public vocational *lycée* in *La Courneuve* and a state school in the *Cruzeiro* district; engagement with these institutions was facilitated by our research contacts, with support from university colleagues in Paris and community leaders in Porto Alegre.

At the time, the selected *lycée* accommodated approximately 530 students (predominantly from immigrant families) and about 50 teachers, all holding higher education or postgraduate qualifications, distributed across general curriculum subjects and three vocational training tracks within the tertiary sector⁵. The school in Porto Alegre had approximately 600 students, with slightly more than one-third enrolled in High School. Also staffed by around 50 teachers with undergraduate or postgraduate degrees, the institution primarily served students from the most vulnerable communities in its immediate vicinity. Since 2022, it has offered two educational tracks, which, ultimately, derived their emphases and redistributed their workloads from the previously utilized curriculum framework, without providing specific vocational training⁶. Furthermore, the two institutions differed in the condition of their physical infrastructure, which was quite dilapidated at the Brazilian facility.

The periods of immersion in school routines were preceded by document analysis (Cellard, 2008), considering both education systems. The documents considered were: Federal Constitution (1988); Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (Law No. 9394/1996), Novo Ensino Médio website;

⁵French secondary education is structured around *collèges* and *lycées*, corresponding approximately to the second half of Brazilian elementary education and to high school, respectively. Here, we are considering the practices produced within the latter.

⁶The courses offered at the *lycée* are: *Assistance à la Gestion des Organisations et de leurs Activités*; *Métiers de la Relation Client*; and *Accompagnement, Soins et Services à la Personne*. At the high school, the pathways focus on the health axis: Body Expression, Health and Well-being; and Health, Culture and Social Inclusion. They do not provide for vocational training.

National Common Curricular Base; National Education Plan (Law 13005/2014); Report of the Fourth Cycle of Monitoring the Goals of the National Education Plan – 2022; *Constitution du 4 octobre 1958; Valeurs et engagement/Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Jeunesse; Organisation de l'école/Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Jeunesse; Organisation de l'école - Lycée/Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Jeunesse*. In addition, we incorporated into the analysis information from the *lycée* website and student agenda, as well as that identified in the political-pedagogical plan and the Instagram profile for the Porto Alegre school. This stage of the work was also completed with the study of secondary data on the school-work relationship and on youth cultural practices, relevant areas of action for young people in both cases under consideration.

For each case, we conducted an observation period (Rocha and Eckert, 2008) during class time and recess (totaling approximately 70 hours at each institution). At the *lycée*, our fieldwork took place between November 2023 and February 2024; at the state school, it occurred in two periods: from April to July 2023 and from March to June 2024. We observed classes in Portuguese, Physics, Geography, History, and Physical Education at the school in Porto Alegre, and attended classes in French, Spanish, Mathematics, and Geography at the institution in the Paris region. In both cases, the classes consisted of approximately 20 students.

The immersion periods concluded with the conducting of comprehensive interviews (Kaufmann, 2013) focused on the social trials identified by the young people. There were 12 students in each region, distributed equally between boys and girls, and grouped by academic performance (satisfactory or unsatisfactory, based on assessments provided by school administrations). All of them resided in the immediate vicinity of their respective schools. Seven of the Brazilian students self-identified as Black, as did nine of the French students. While taking care not to infer a direct equivalence, we can note that family incomes ranged between 1 and 2.5 minimum wages in Porto Alegre (R\$ 1,412.00 in 2024) and between 1 and 2 in the Paris region (in 2024, the *salarie minimum interprofessionnel de croissance* – SMIC: €1,747.20).

Thus, we seek to establish approximate social contexts for young people's experiences of schooling, delineating the confluence of markers of social inequality and nuances of the institutional supports at play. In short, this provides a framework for interpreting and distinguishing the challenges narrated by young people, which we will discuss in the following section through an analysis of the institutional configurations that permeate them.

NORMATIVE REGIMES AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORTS

Without claiming to be exhaustive, we will seek to highlight contrasts across three domains within the social and institutional contexts that shape the experiences of formal schooling among working-class youth, drawing on the specialized literature we will subsequently engage with and our own fieldwork interactions. These domains are: i) high school systems, analyzed in terms of their general normative frameworks and the inequalities they engender; ii) the relationship between schooling and the world of work, examined through the lens of existing patterns of integration and synchronization; and iii) youth cultural practices, discussed in terms of young people's preferred activities and their level of active engagement.

High School Education: Prescriptions and Inequalities

Within this domain, we will summarize three aspects we consider pertinent to the configuration of the social trials facing young people in high school, and comment on the similarities and differences between educational systems. We will address: the presumed interactions between academic knowledge and social reality; the configuration of educational pathways; and the coverage and inequalities observed within the school networks. Let us proceed immediately to the first point.

In both France and Brazil, educational systems are articulated around the objectives of cultural development, preparation for the exercise of citizenship, and occupational qualification. School education for students aged 15 to 17 is directed toward consolidating competencies in scientific and

technological fundamentals, preparing for the workforce, forming ethical-political stances, and developing autonomy in learning and thought.

In Brazil, even the historical disputes brought to the fore during the implementation of the current High School reform⁷ (Leão, 2018), competencies are inferred from the various knowledge areas, conceived as a broad and diverse set of instructed tasks aimed at developing capabilities. Ethical-political propositions tend to be embedded within the descriptions of each individual competency, outlining practices for the exercise of citizenship without explicit reference to national symbols, while the accompanying rationale simultaneously emphasizes the diversity of youth practices and forms of knowledge. In the French context, the presentation of competencies by area is quite objective and succinct, serving to delineate the forms of knowledge to be internalized by students (e.g., learning to learn, communicating, etc.); moreover, the orientation toward republican values is highly explicit, being presented as a distinct domain of knowledge in its own right.

As can be inferred, ‘presumed interactions’ point to relatively similar, generic principles of socialization regarding the relationship between the school institution and other social spaces. However, they also signal distinct normative regimes; this implies that the French documents examined more forcefully demand individual participation aligned with established institutional norms, whereas the corresponding Brazilian documents frame such participation with an emphasis on the diversity of engagement forms. While in Brazil, extensive frameworks, rich in detail and alternatives, are established based on the premise of potential regional and/or local variations, the French frameworks are lean and directive.

With regard to the ‘configuration of itineraries,’ the French system, through individualized guidance, specialized subjects, and a series of scheduled and progressive examinations, establishes distinct academic pathways⁸ (from *collège* to *lycée*, culminating in the *baccalauréat*), formalizing both meritocratic recognition and the demand for intellectual autonomy, while presupposing the engagement of active, committed, and critical-minded subjects.

Within the Brazilian educational framework, the assertion of competitiveness appears either understated or imprecise in official documents. While standardized national examinations do exist, the emphasis on evaluative progression is not particularly pronounced; consequently, the guiding principles

⁷ Law 14,945/2024. In Rio Grande do Sul, see information at: ensinomediogaicho.educacao.rs.gov.br.

⁸Here, a distinction is necessary. In the Brazilian context, alternative educational pathways are offered within each school. In France, careers are defined less by individual choice, as institutional assessments serve as the primary basis for distinguishing between “general,” “technological,” and “vocational” tracks, each offered in specialized public institutions.

primarily highlight students' individual choices and underscore the importance of individualization and the support of personal life plans. In this context, it can be said that the active engagement of the individuals involved is also presupposed; however, the call for autonomy is, at the very least, qualified by a critical question regarding the actual support structures available to facilitate it. Criticisms are frequently raised about the infeasibility of offering high-quality educational pathways and, by extension, genuine individual choices, given the prevailing pedagogical and infrastructural conditions in most public educational institutions across the country (Leão, 2018; Silva et al., 2023).

The ‘observed coverage and inequalities can assist us on this point. Young adolescents attending high school accounted for approximately 75% of the 15-to-17-year-old population in Brazil in 2022 (net enrollment rate), with even more unfavorable figures for the most impoverished quartile (around 61%). Enrollments in vocational and technical education reached 20% of the total at the secondary level in 2022, and the net enrollment rate in higher education reached 25.5% in the same year (with less than 10% in the lowest income quartile) (INEP, 2023). Nationwide, 43% of students performed below the minimum proficiency level in reading, mathematics, and science (OECD, 2019). Socioeconomically advantaged students outperformed disadvantaged students in reading by 97 points, with the concentration in specific elite schools (generally within the private school system – IBGE, 2023a).

In France, on the other hand, the net enrollment rate among young people in **lycées** approached 96% in 2020, with a *baccalauréat* success rate exceeding 90% in 2023: 95.7% for the general **bac** and 82.7% for the vocational *bac*, the track where the majority of working-class youth are found. Approximately 28% of students are enrolled in vocational secondary education, and 78.9% of all basic education graduates entered higher education in 2023 (DEPP, 2023). The country achieved average PISA scores slightly higher than those of other OECD nations (OECD, 2019). However, France ranks among those countries where the correlation between socioeconomic status and academic performance is most pronounced (a difference of 107 points, compared to the OECD average of 88 points). It also exhibits notable disparities among secondary school students in the vocational versus general tracks (100 points in favor of the latter) and between immigrants and non-immigrants (52 points).

Chart 1: Contrasts between High School Systems Based on Document Analysis

Aspects Considered	Brazil	France
Presumed interactions between school knowledge and social reality.	Emphasis on the diversity of engagements, with specific mention of youth participation and regional diversity.	Explicit call for individual participation aligned with institutional norms (the Republic).
School Route Configuration	Emphasize individualized formative pathways and life projects. A subtle mention of meritocracy.	School itineraries segmented by practices and examinations that formalize meritocratic recognition.
Coverage and Observed Inequalities	High dropout rates in secondary education and weakened proficiency levels, particularly for the lowest-income quartile. Access to higher education remains restricted.	Comprehensive school integration, including in higher education. Unfavorable educational outcomes for the working classes.

Source: Official documents made available on the websites of the governments of both countries, as stated in the methodology section.

Chart 1 highlights differences between secondary education systems, drawing attention to the prescriptive nuances at play. The French context reveals a highly comprehensive institutional arrangement regarding the inclusion of individuals. However, the asymmetries generated within the school system have been the subject of strong criticism for their role in reproducing social inequalities. School-based assessment has proven decisive in shaping youth trajectories (Millet, 2010), and the weight attributed to academic credentials in defining social positions becomes problematic, insofar as a high level of school integration does not necessarily result in greater social justice (Dubet, 2012). The situation

becomes even more critical when educational institutions are socially and territorially segregated (Van Zanten, 2012).

In the Brazilian context, the documents do not show the same objective in their arguments, nor does the system enjoy the same level of coverage. Consequently, its tenuous integration with the school system tends to reinforce the status of a higher education diploma as a significant marker of distinction (Moris et al., 2022). The current format of secondary education faces criticism on several fronts: for the risk of perpetuating a certain duality within the school system (for example, between public and private institutions), accentuating inequalities regarding available educational pathways, for the recurrence of the historical precariousness surrounding the implementation of public educational policies, and for the establishment of mechanisms that place the burden of accountability upon young people in the face of a labor market rife with inconsistencies (Freitas & Bueno, 2018; Leão, 2018; Silva et al., 2023).

School and the World of Work: Insertions and Synchronizations

While the relationship between school and the world of work has become a strategic issue in both countries, the status of this linkage and the conditions for accessing employment differs. In France, the schools play a decisive role in shaping social positions, operating under political imperatives regarding intellectual and professional efficiency (Dubet, 2010). The youth unemployment rate stood at 14.5% in 2022 (nearly double the overall average), with rates of 7.2% for those with long-cycle higher education and 40.8% for those without a basic education diploma (DEPP, 2023a), a disparity accompanied by a wage gap that can reach 30% (INSEE, 2018 – trend 1990–2016).

In Brazil, the importance of school in the social mobility expectations of working-class families has been growing since the 1990s (Arretche, 2015; Zago, 2012). However, we could argue that this connection is not institutionally organized with the same degree of alignment: the unemployment rate stood at approximately 8.8% in 2023, reaching around 23% among young people; it was higher among those with incomplete secondary education (15.2%) and lower among individuals holding higher education degrees (4.5%) (IBGE, 2023a). The entry into the workforce is shaped by the timing of this initiation, whether occurring concurrently with or at the expense of one's studies (Abramo, Venturi, and Corrochano, 2020), with the necessity to work cited as one of the primary reasons for school dropout among the working classes (39.1% – IBGE, 2023).

Table 1: Employment Status and Study Status – Brazil and France, 2022

Age groups (years)	Brasil				França		
	Only Studying	Working and studying	Only working	No working or studying	Only Studying	Working and studying	Only working
15 to 17	79.9%	13%	25%	4.7%	91.3%	5%	1.4%
18 to 24	18.6%	18.1%	38.9%	24.4%	37%	15.1%	30.1%
25 to 29	4.7%	13.8%	59.1%	22.4%	3%	5%	73%

Sources: PNAD *Continua Educação* (IBGE, 2023a); *Repères et références statistiques* (DEPP, 2023). Table created by the author.

As shown in Table 1, we can observe a drastic decline in the exclusivity of time dedicated to study in Brazil starting at age 18, and an increase in labor force participation (including among young adolescents). It is important to highlight, in this context, that the informal labor market, where a lack of completed elementary education is prevalent, has historically been substantial in the country (standing at around 39%, according to IBGE, 2023a)⁹. This includes the activities undertaken by young people and

⁹ According to the International Labour Organization, in France, informal jobs accounted for just over 3% of the labor market in 2024. See: *Statistiques sur l'économie informelle* - ILOSTAT.

the strategies they must mobilize to access or construct alternative means of living (Oliveira, 2018; Pinheiro, 2020).

In summary, and as we know, school influences job retention and shapes the expectations of the working classes in Brazil. However, the institutional frameworks governing the school-to-work transition do not yield results comparable to those found in France. For the most socioeconomically vulnerable groups, labor force participation may occur concurrently with school among young people; yet, as they transition out of adolescence, the support structures available to them tend to favor work over study, or else prove to be increasingly fragile in relation to both domains, work and education (Peregrino, Prata, & Souza, 2024). Drawing on Lahire’s (2006) analysis of the constituent domains of youth experiences in France, which identifies the family, the school, and peer groups as key factors, it is essential to further emphasize the world of work as a critical domain in the Brazilian context, including for young adolescents.

Youth Cultural Practices: Preferences and Intensities

Drawing on specialized literature, it is possible to identify a broadly similar condition regarding cultural consumption and youth practices in Brazil and France. In both contexts, we can observe: expanded and diversified access to cultural goods; participation, at times as authors or producers, in artistic and sporting activities; the construction of spaces for action that are relatively autonomous (vis-à-vis adult control); the importance of sociable interaction among peers; and, more recently, the intensive use of the Internet and virtual social networks (Galland, 2017; Dayrell & Carrano, 2014; Kubota, 2016). However, we need to introduce some data to nuance these differences.

Table 2: Regular Cultural Activities Among Young People (Aged 15 to 29) – Brazil and France, 2019

Activities	Brazil	France
Listen to music	61%	86%
Watch TV	58%	60%
Access the Internet	86%	96%
	[45% for interpersonal interaction]	
Play video games [ages 20 to 29]	14.6%	26%
Gather with friends	49%	-----
Play sports	28%	77%
Participate in collective actions	29%	23%

Sources: Youths in Brazil Survey (Silva et al., 2021), *GamerBrasil 2024*¹⁰, *Cinquante ans de pratiques culturelles en France* (Lombardo and Wolff, 2020) and *Baromètre des pratiques sportives 2022* (INJEP, 2023). Table created by the author.

¹⁰For more information: “*Videogame é coisa de criança? Não no Brasil, revela pesquisa*”.

Despite the limitations inherent in comparing the studies cited in Table 2, one about the leisure time of young people, the other focused on the cultural practices of the general population, it is evident that the French figures are substantially higher across most indicators. On the one hand, and as the scope of the historical survey series suggests, we observe in the French context a growing engagement over the last four decades with formal alternatives available to individuals (Barrère, 2013). On the other hand, young people's cultural activities in Brazil tend to focus on social interactions (both in person and virtually) and audiovisual consumption.

Thus, we posit that the hypothesis of an *éducation buissonnière*, a form of “education by wandering”, occurring alongside elective activities (Barrère, 2011), while plausible in both contexts, is likely more representative of youth experiences in France. In other words, the construction of an “education through challenges,” unfolding through trial and error within peer interactions and involving a maturation process that both eludes and, at times, competes with formal schooling practices, appears to find more fertile ground in the French context. Even though both contexts share the trend of expanding and diversifying cultural consumption (with a particular emphasis on sociability and the use of digital technologies), Brazilian youth appear to exhibit comparatively lower rates of regular participation. The scarcity, or indeed the territorial concentration, of public facilities may be among the explanations for this divergence, as highlighted in the critiques presented in the aforementioned report (Silva et al., 2021); this factor renders the public-school environment all the more crucial to the lived experience of youth, particularly when viewed based on the recent historical expansion in school attendance.

WITH THE SCHOOLS: THE SITUATION, THE ACTIONS, AND THE SOCIAL TRIALS

In the previous section, we sought to outline structural distinctions that would aid in understanding the conditions from which young people operate in each region. We observed that not only do school systems constitute distinct normative regimes regarding coverage and directiveness, but their interfaces with the world of work and the alternatives to cultural practices also vary in scope and synchronicity across the two countries. We will now turn to examining how these elements manifest in daily life; to this end, it is fitting to briefly examine the residential environments of the young students with whom we interacted, in order to succinctly contextualize the social challenges and, subsequently, the relative position of their schooling experiences within that context. To achieve this, we will draw upon common themes found in the narratives of our interlocutors, individuals whose lived experiences are shaped by the intertwined inequalities of class, race, and territory, and which we shall refer to here as a “peripheral situation.”

The localities housing the selected schools are geographically adjacent within the Paris and Porto Alegre metropolitan areas. Paris is characterized by a significant concentration of immigrant populations, and the Porto Alegre by substantial contingents of self-identified Black residents, both situated within metropolitan contexts marked by a relatively heightened state of social vulnerability (Boussad et al., 2017; ObservaPoa, 2023). This peripheral status evokes a specific experience of the “margins”, articulated through musical and audiovisual consumption as well as collective action (particularly within the social movements of Brazilian metropolises; Buzo, 2010), and constructed around social issues directly relevant to the lived experiences of these young people. To varying degrees, our interlocutors described their urban circulation and leisure activities as being restricted to their immediate localities, circumscribed by their families' economic circumstances and fraught with tension arising from aggressive police encounters. In this regard, and particularly among the boys, the conduct of state agents was also interpreted as a manifestation of the racism that these young people were compelled to confront. Thus, a certain ambivalence within their testimonies, particularly in Porto Alegre, oscillates between, on the one hand, chronotopic evocations and a sense of belonging to their place, and on the other, a deep-seated resentment toward the violence and precariousness endemic to their communities.

In this context, the familial sphere would constitute an environment of protection for childhood and adolescence, and, by extension, for the enjoyment of youthfulness, but would also involve the delineation of responsibilities, whether through assistance with domestic chores or the care of

siblings. Schooling was safeguarded and encouraged; however, parental oversight was often limited to monitoring academic results, and in this context, young people were expected to demonstrate both commitment and autonomy in their schoolwork. In the Brazilian context, this dynamic appeared to be intensified by a moral imperative toward self-reliance in the face of material needs; here, work sometimes figured as an occupation pursued concurrently with studies (in 6 out of 12¹¹) and, more broadly, as a normative expectation capable of situating the role of "student" within the domestic division of labor (Pinheiro, 2021). In both instances, however, we are speaking of expectations regarding social mobility linked to children's schooling, expectations that, particularly among the French interlocutors, could encompass a desire to escape the urban peripheries (Truong, 2015).

References to elective activities were also frequent, with particular emphasis on sports (basketball and soccer), virtual social networks, and the consumption of music and videos via mobile phones, which occurred during the interstices of school time or, at times, competed with classroom activities. Regarding sports engagements (and more commonly among boys), there was a palpable sense of intense enjoyment and "decompression" from daily obligations, including schoolwork, as previously noted by Barrère (2011). As for digital media consumption, music was cited in both identity-related (ethnic and territorial) and existential contexts. A similar observation could be made regarding access to videos, the content of which blended narratives of individual self-elevation and self-help with what Cicchelli and Octobre (2021) term a "consumption of alterities," a process of navigating through lived experiences of diverse global origins without necessarily implying cosmopolitan ambitions.

In the Schools: Ambiances and Actions

We will continue with the relational consistencies identified in the schools where we conducted our research. We will analyze how norms and expectations were structured, considering, in articulation, the conduct of the teachers and the actions of the young students within these settings.

On the *lycée* website and in the planner distributed to students, we found presentations on the Republic's values, the vocational tracks offered, the available school services, the internal regulations, and the procedures for recording absences. The disciplinary measures outlined in these documents were generally directed at students, specifying potential sanctions and punishments while calling on each individual to uphold their responsibility toward the collective and the school community. Within the institution's educational project, we observed lines of action focused on academic success and socioprofessional integration, themes closely aligned with the documents analyzed in the first section, with particular emphasis placed on national assessment indicators. The word "success" (*réussir*) appears multiple times, reflecting an educational emphasis that is manifestly proleptic.

Regarding the regulation of behavior, the wearing of headscarves (*hijabs*) or caps, as well as any aggressive conduct or noisy disruption, was curbed by the staff members present. In conversations with teachers, we observed their concern for their students' academic success, which often manifested as appeals for greater effort and dedication from the students. In remarks addressed to students during class,

¹¹The occupations mentioned among young Brazilians include: administrative assistant (3); caregiver; website producer; and restaurant cashier. These were remunerated at a maximum of one minimum wage, with the last three being performed informally.

the correlation between academic results and time invested was affirmed in general terms, while a lack of diligence, side conversations, and acts of incivility were criticized. We also observed tangible efforts to regulate classroom schedules and routines. During activities, the teachers devoted themselves to monitoring students' diligence and concentration, employing a variety of strategies: they inquired about class materials, reprimanded cell phone use, demanded silence, relocated students who were talking, or used student participation as a means of control.

The activities conducted by the teachers consisted, on most occasions, of exercises that called for the young students' active participation and application, employing systematically structured, step-by-step analytical dynamics for the handling of cultural artifacts and the use of codes, maps, and schematic representations. The relationship between teachers and students clearly delineates their differing roles and positions, focusing particularly on students' intellectual work and the pressure to succeed in assessments, a process characterized by frequent tests and graded assignments. The objective of socioprofessional integration appeared, in this context, to manifest through practices and expectations primarily oriented toward dedication to the craft of being a student.

For the school in Porto Alegre, we identified an Instagram profile showcasing its activities; however, we found no publicly available information on the institution's educational aims or regulations. Nevertheless, the Political-Pedagogical Project (PPP), along with the action plan to which we gained access through the administrative team, outlined, among various objectives, the pursuit of higher pass rates, support for students entering the job market or higher education, respect for diversity and critical thinking, as well as the “formation of individuals who are the subjects of their histories” (PPP, p. 09). Thus, we highlight the differences in how these matters were publicly presented, the educational objectives bore a strong resemblance to one another, particularly in their proleptic nature¹².

While the routine regarding time allocation and classroom exercises, and the accompanying appeals for participation, resembled what was observed in the other case, the variations were significant, and the regulation of behavior did not appear as overt. Although teachers expressed disapproval of cell phone use and side conversations during class and demanded greater dedication, lessons could proceed amid a certain simultaneity of practices (smartphone use, chatting, etc.). This arrangement appeared to be tolerated, provided it did not disrupt the instructor's activities. Even among those teachers who were strictest in monitoring the completion of assignments, for instance, by assigning grades to tasks completed in individual notebooks, the methods employed resulted in a lax form of regulation, wherein the students' scope for independent action seemed malleable (albeit still subject to the coercive pressure of formal assessments).

The relationship between teachers and students can vary in its configuration, ranging from a structure organized around the prescription of content to more interactive approaches that are attentive to students' experiences in the learning process and in the formation of bonds. For the most vulnerable groups or individuals, the interactive nature of this dialogue could tap into a sense of identity-based connection among some students, whether through shared interests or shared social conditions and a mutual sense of belonging. Although the activities also conveyed an analytical dimension, the exercises designed in class did not exhibit the same level of written systematization and progressive sequencing found in French school practices; instead, they varied depending on the specific teacher or the time of

¹²It is worth noting that we did not identify any allusion to the theme of ‘youths’ in this case, unlike what was observed in the documents analyzed in the first section.

year¹³. Against this backdrop, the educational objectives discernible in the teachers' discourse reflected their understanding of the social vulnerability present in both the surrounding community and their student body, as they sought to offer these students protection or avenues for inclusion (even if, in their own accounts, such measures appeared vague or contingent).

Turning to the actions of the young people, we can distinguish between moments during breaks, in the hallways and courtyards, and those spent inside the classroom. Within the *lycée* premises, we observed the adolescents divided into two groups: those who headed out to the small square in front of the institution and those who remained in the indoor spaces. In both settings, the predominant pattern was the formation of small, clearly segregated conversational groups, girls on one side, boys on the other. In the hallways, we encountered a few individuals (mostly girls) on their cell phones, wearing headphones. At times, we noticed louder conversations, laughter, or, among the boys, some playful banter with peers, involving shoving or physical contact. However, far more common were subdued dynamics of sociability. In the Brazilian context, conversely, while the majority of young people also gathered in small conversational groups, there was more frequent movement, and the interactions were noisier. Cell phones and headphones were also in use, and the intervals between classes might occasionally be filled with informal games (on the soccer field or in a volleyball circle), depending on the time available (for example, in the absence of a teacher).

In the classroom, in the face of the proposed content and tasks, the majority of young French students followed the class agenda, with many attempting to focus on what was required of them. This engagement, however, was intertwined with various minor tactics of divergence: occasional side conversations, the use of cell phones hidden beneath desks, inactivity during exercises, or even resigned immobility, their attention directed instead toward the gestures and remarks of their classmates. This dynamic could vary depending on the subject and the students' individual preferences and histories of academic success or failure. It was clear that some students, particularly the boys (typically four or five per class), would avoid performing their tasks, turning their attention to the worksheets only when a teacher was in close physical proximity or intervened directly. There were also those who sought to participate orally and engage in classroom dynamics, even if, ultimately, they had no interest in actually completing the assigned exercises.

While we can assert that the French youths at that *lycée* sought to “play the game” and perform the role of students, at the school in Porto Alegre, their actions revealed a different dynamic. We encountered similar tactics and stances. However, as previously noted, the presence of diverse and simultaneous forms of engagement served to de-escalate the atmosphere, transforming the classroom into a space characterized by relative or flexible directiveness. There were those who remained glued to their smartphones, those who worked on assignments for other subjects, and those who simply drew or chatted. Among the students, some remained attentive, others were completely disengaged, and the majority alternated between multiple activities. In this context, the negotiation of time was also tacitly permitted, specifically, by allowing students to leave for recess early once their assigned tasks were

¹³It is worth noting that the systematic nature of classes in Brazilian schools suffered the consequences of teacher absences due to illness, a situation that is not exclusive to that particular institution and is linked to working conditions (Farias and Wagner, 2024).

completed, which, when combined with occasional delays in returning to the classroom, subtly extended the duration of their unstructured social time with peers. We understand that, within this configuration, the youths' participation differs significantly, even if it operates predominantly in a tactical realm. Their conduct constitutes a less rigid enactment of the student role and, furthermore, entails an appropriation of institutional time, often by filling those allotted periods with activities of their own choosing.

Even though we took different paths, we observed that students' stances converged on a single important aspect. In both cases, the young people sought to understand and retain the lessons; thus, a certain level of attentiveness in class was considered essential, as were teachers who “explained things well”, a point previously analyzed by Barrère (2003).

Contrasting the Trials in High School

By briefly outlining the environments and actions of young students in schools, we have contextualized the pertinent challenges we can now analyze, drawing specifically on the narratives constructed during the interviews.

Chart 2: Selected excerpts from the narratives of young students, according to the trials faced (Barrère, 2020)

Trials	<i>La Courneuve/Seine-Saint Denis – França</i> ¹⁴	Cruzeiro/Porto Alegre – Brazil
Meanings of Knowledge and Schoolwork	There is school, and there is religion. They are kept very separate. You don't learn anything else here. Here, you come to study. It's primarily about professional life. [In the family] We always strive not to give up, to keep moving toward our goal, to never quit. It feels good to succeed in life, to focus on what you want to do. [...] And I want to at least get my <i>Bac</i>. That's it! Once I've got it, no more school. (Silvie). Without school, it would be difficult because, even if you don't learn anything beyond the actual lessons, you make friends. It happens at school, through that social interaction. If I don't have school, I don't have friends; I'm not a very sociable person otherwise. To be honest, we do prepare for it, but having to go over the same things constantly gets stressful. It really puts a lot of pressure on you, and I hate being under pressure. I know full well that the <i>Bac</i> is coming; I know exactly what awaits me. (Mariah).	I don't think it's something you just have to study, because a lot of the things you learn in school, you won't actually use in real life. So, I just go there, study the basics, and then I goof around, have fun, chat with my friends... (Bruno). Like in English class, I rarely get distracted, because we talk a lot; it's mostly conversation-based. In Math, we do the calculations, the teacher explains things, and we also chat a bit every now and then, keeping our voices down so we don't annoy anyone. In Biology, we grab our textbooks and work while listening to music. Honestly, the only class where I actually end up sleeping a lot is Portuguese... (Igor). [...] I take notes, I copy everything down properly, but I really prefer the explanation; I prefer it when they actually speak... Especially with examples, the kind of examples teachers give verbally that really stick in your head... (Camile).

¹⁴The interviews in *La Courneuve* were conducted in French, and the excerpts presented in the article were translated by the author. Please note that the names used are fictitious.

Injunction for Autonomy	But there are students, when you ask them to work autonomously, who simply don't do it, because they have other things to do. They are focused on other things, since not everyone actually likes school. So, when you ask for autonomy, people prioritize things. They rank them: "I'll do this first because I prefer it..." So, some people do it, and others don't. In reality, I'm sticking with school. I'm going to try to get my <i>Bac</i>. But alongside my schoolwork, I'm already going to start another training program, because over there [at the club] they offered me sports-related training (Martin). It's my technique; I invented it myself. Basically, I recount my day: "Oh, Mom, I learned this today." That way, I tell her everything I learned. I mean, I go over all my lessons, without even realizing it, and recap everything from my classes (Juliete).	Working was something I wanted to do so I could buy my things without having to keep asking [my parents]. For example, there were times when I'd ask for something knowing they didn't have the money, only to see them later working themselves to the bone just to manage to give me what I'd asked for... because the worst thing is asking for something without knowing what the financial situation is like... (Luan). ...because I've actually learned a lot of school material without even attending the classes. For example, there might be a subject I'm interested in, but I don't enjoy the actual class; so, I go out and look for something else to listen to, you know? ...In a podcast, they rely entirely on conversation; so the host talks about a topic, cracks a joke, and everyone laughs. It's just more laid-back... (Igor).
Individual Performances in School Assessments	For me, the best method is one where you don't even need to review. The only thing you have to do is pay attention in class. From the moment the teacher announces that there will be an exam and assuming you have a class session beforehand, you just need to focus intently during that class; that alone will help you with your assessment. (Benjamin) I do my homework every day. So, when it comes time for an exam, I look over what I've already attempted at home, and I don't bother reviewing that material again. Next, I identify the key points, create a study sheet, and practice the topics I've studied the least. I write them down on my review sheet, go over it, and then take the exam, whether I pass or not. Either way, it doesn't really matter; a single grade doesn't define my intelligence. (Junie)	I don't usually study; I really only study during class. For example, on the very day of the exam, or maybe a couple of days beforehand, I try to pay attention in class and, if I have any questions, get them cleared up before the test. [...] We have a [WhatsApp] group, so we send a lot of stuff back and forth there. For example, if some classmates couldn't make it to class, we'll send them the material we covered, you know? [...] [...] (Larissa). "Oh, I need a 6." So, I go study just enough to maintain that 6 average, not to get a 10 every single time [...] because then I'd just be killing myself studying. I mean, there are people who get nothing but 10s, just 10s, all the time, but they didn't have any fun at all during their entire time in school. [...] "Oh, you have to get a 10 to be 'somebody'." But isn't someone who gets a 6 essentially in the same boat as you, getting nothing but 10s? So that's really my mindset: the important thing is just to pass. [...] (Bruno).

Source: Interviews conducted in the field between 2023 and 2024.

Constructing Meaning to Scholarly Knowledge and Work

As previously noted, Barrère (2020) identifies three central trials regarding student work in French secondary schools, challenges we will problematize in the course of the interpretation we undertake below. We begin with the "construction of meaning in school knowledge and work."

In the context of the *lycée*, we observed that the strategic significance of obtaining a diploma, along with the prevailing evaluative climate, influenced the stances young people adopted as they performed the "craft of the student". However, this did not preclude deviations from their actual school experiences. Their narratives revealed a relationship with academic knowledge that was constantly being interrogated through the lens of utility (Barrère, 2003; 2020), often linked to the world of work. Thus, among those whose academic performance diverged from institutional expectations, the assertion of the relative importance of school knowledge was clearly evident, even if remaining in school also served, for some, as a temporary sanctuary shielding them from the harsh realities projected onto future occupational roles.

School practices were also interpreted endogenously within the institution's own sphere. This suggested a certain naturalization of school routines in daily life, while simultaneously highlighting a

detachment from other social domains and the forms of knowledge recognized therein (whether religious, ethnic, or technical-sporting). Moreover, the way school was experienced diverged subtly from the expectations typically associated with student status, positioning peer interactions and sociability as significant components of one's daily journey within these institutions.

Revisiting the points considered in the first section, the school did not enjoy the same strategic status among youth in Cruzeiro, Porto Alegre. More specifically, we observed that school is an expectation of social mobility, as the literature has previously noted (Arretche, 2015; Zago, 2012), albeit within a limited scope. A sense of utility placed particular pressure on the relationship with academic knowledge, prioritizing its relevance for current or future employment. Not infrequently, the institution's own practices assumed this same endogenous functionality, with the distinction that these Brazilian youths felt quite at ease in asserting the lack of utility of the academic content in other social domains. Moreover, moments of peer-group sociability were the most prominent factors in how meaning was ascribed to their time at school; this can be linked to the configuration of time described earlier, wherein institutional rhythms were frequently negotiated, thereby making room for elements of youth culture and establishing interactivity as a primary mode of navigating daily life.

Let us underscore the nuances of each case's experience. Among the French youths, school practices were navigated, albeit not without tension, from a standpoint of relative ontological security: at times driven by a sense of strategic foresight¹⁵, and at other times by the everyday temporality of interactions and affiliations. Within this configuration, we observed a distinction between relationships formed with academic knowledge and those formed with schoolwork. Both through observation and in their personal accounts, the students found academic knowledge engaging primarily when embedded in interactive, playful, or experimental dynamics, that is, when it diverged from the cadence, repetition, and rigor typically demanded by the institutionalized form of school.

Regarding the young people at Cruzeiro, the accounts did not suggest a strong sense of security about their experiences at the school. While the necessity of school was taken for granted, this did not preclude divergent actions. The distinction in the relationship with knowledge and with work was evident here as well, albeit accompanied by more explicit forms of agency on the part of the young people. In this sense, we can return to the concept of interactivity and offer a more specific definition. In the Brazilian context, this may refer to teachers' attempts to engage students by drawing on their personal life experiences, with the aim of fostering students' connection to the instructional activities. However, it also refers to the stances adopted by students in favor of classes that, without dispensing with the aforementioned approach, sought less rigid, hierarchical relationships, interspersed work with sociability, or allowed for the simultaneous performance of activities, often incorporating digital media. These dynamics were not necessarily conducive to uncritical acceptance of academic content as prescribed by the institution; consequently, a certain degree of contention emerged, creating tension in the relationship with knowledge, particularly with schoolwork.

¹⁵ It is necessary to point out a possible influence stemming also from expectations linked to vocational training, distinct from that offered to students in Brazilian schools. Even so, it must be borne in mind that this research focused on the meanings constructed within classroom interactions in the core curriculum, where tensions were a regular occurrence, as we have sought to demonstrate.

The Institutional Injunction for Autonomy

In the French context, the institutional imperative for autonomy within school practices was often framed as a challenge, particularly by those whose academic performance (in terms of both conduct and grades) had already led them to disengage personally. For others, the most common experience was ambivalence about the tutored autonomy found within the school setting versus the autonomy required in other domains, such as elective activities or household chores. In the former examples, as aptly analyzed by Barrère (2014; 2021), actions unfolded within contexts where, despite the prevailing “rules of the game,” the interactive nature and the trial-and-error temporality of the process enabled both practical and reflective experimentation. The experience of autonomy (auto-nomos) among peers could be more horizontal in nature and less subject to adult regulation; it was often generated through dynamics that teachers frequently overlooked.

In the domestic sphere, however, we observed that safeguarding children's educational investments, alongside aspirations for social mobility, coexisted with daily responsibilities toward the broader family collective. The narratives revealed a range of duties of varying scope; while these most commonly involved mutual aid agreements for household chores, they could also extend to caring for siblings, living solely with them in the absence of parents, and occasional work. Thus, while these young people were expected to demonstrate autonomy, they did not necessarily experience a directive structure comparable to that of the school environment; consequently, particularly among those students deemed “difficult” by their teachers, the responsibilities cultivated on a daily basis included performing caregiving roles for family members or engaging in work.

At the school in Porto Alegre, the demand for intellectual autonomy appeared less incisive and frequent as an institutionalized injunction. The written systematization of rules was scarcely visible, and, moreover, appeals to academic study faded among the teaching staff, who appeared disheartened by their working conditions. For their part, the students were practically unanimous in stating that they did not do their homework and lacked study discipline. It was moments of assessment that dictated the need to review course material, a process undertaken only when better grades were required. Within this configuration, however, we can still posit the exercise of autonomy. This autonomy was realized, then, amidst a contextual constraint born of a certain regulatory void and the impact of evaluative control; it emerged both from within and beyond the institutional curriculum, driven by school practices, but also mediated by what the young people brought to their daily school lives as they negotiated time and practices while inhabiting the school space. Thus, we can once again invoke social interactions (whether in person or virtual) as a domain of youth action and recognition, exchanges that also supported students in completing their academic tasks through the circulation of information and class assignments (Pinheiro, 2021).

The trial embodied an ambivalence regarding what was required in other domains. However, as previously noted, an imperative of independence emerged as a powerful shaping force within these narratives. This implies that, among these young people, there was a strong sense of personal responsibility to secure avenues of financial self-sufficiency and to cast off external controls (Martuccelli, 2007); yet, paradoxically, they simultaneously grappled with the dilemmas of subsistence while living alongside their close kin. This condition draws our attention to the necessity of work and to aspirations regarding consumption, factors that relegated autonomy within the school setting to a relative position, or one subservient to actions aimed at securing employment. Even more markedly than in the French context, even sporting and artistic pursuits, when undertaken with dedication, could be envisioned as forms of work. Schematically speaking, within the realm of possibilities explored in the Brazilian case, school tended to be experienced primarily through the lens of its interface with subsistence and work; work itself, however, was conceived as an arena of malleable consistency, a space of possibilities more open to individual agency, where, as the young people themselves put it, “struggle” and “overcoming” were essential.

Individual Performances in the Face of School Assessments

This trial emerged as the primary driving force behind the students' efforts in both schools. However, our interviewees noted that they relied on attentive listening in the classroom as a central strategy for learning and for achieving success in tests and exams. In this regard, a gender-based distinction warrants emphasis concerning the *lycée* featured in our study. While students generally tended to strategically manage institutional demands (Dubet & Martuccelli, 1998), the “economy” (oiko-nomos¹⁶) of their dedication and priorities varied according to their accounts. Female students more frequently described diligently completing assignments, even for subjects they did not enjoy, as well as engaging in methodical study practices at home, ranging from demand-driven efforts to regular, autonomous review routines. Although working “on demand” remained the most common approach even among the girls, the reliance on attentive listening in the classroom was notably more pronounced among the boys.

Thus, performances related to school assessment were situated within the young people's space of possibilities, and, as previously mentioned, it was there that they exercised their autonomy most overtly. Amidst daily schedules that were regularly busy (balancing classes, domestic chores, and elective activities), the strategic management of tasks and priorities constituted the forms of agency associated with the social trial of school. However, these stances were not free of contradictions: as narrated, the young people's aspirations (and their engagement with school practices) tended to project, somewhat generically, the attainment of the *baccalaureat* as a personal triumph, even with insufficient academic results and the articulation of rather vague horizons regarding the reality of the job market. Consequently, whether through study routines or through the significant investment made in elective activities (most notably sports), a disposition toward taking a leading role permeated the majority of these performances. This manifested as a recurring affirmation of their quest for success, both for themselves and in the eyes of their close relations (particularly family members), despite their lack of awareness regarding the actual conditions required to achieve it.

In the Brazilian context, assessments likewise represented the most mobilizing challenge, such that the academic effort expended resembled that reported for students in the *lycée*. However, dedication to schoolwork at home was minimal or nonexistent, and only one student mentioned being methodical regarding her studies and preparation for assessments. Quite often, the relationship with test grades was portrayed as a balancing act of efforts to pass each year, supported by information from the internet (texts and videos), interactions with classmates, and mediation with teachers. Furthermore, the need for clear, organized explanations from teachers was even more explicit, with particular emphasis on the importance of mediation through examples.

We could argue that the trial of evaluation manifested most obviously in the French context, not only because of the operative normative regime (a highly intensive evaluative environment) but also because of its strategic significance for individual career trajectories (Millet, 2010; Pinheiro et al., 2024). Among the young people with whom we engaged in Porto Alegre, evaluation served as a guiding principle for their actions and tactical investments within the school, yet without the school's formal judgment exerting such a decisive influence on their future aspirations. The world of work vied for prominence in shaping this outlook, even as (and indeed, in conjunction with) the students' sense of grievance regarding

¹⁶The reference to the Greek expression (oiko-nomos) is not coincidental. By this, we wish to avoid rationalist or economic interpretations and to define “economy” in terms of what the term signifies, “household management”, that is, the willingness of young people to establish priorities in their daily lives, navigating the realm of possibilities from within their various spheres of action.

the precariousness of the public school's physical and pedagogical infrastructure, and the uncertainties stemming therefrom.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

In this article, we sought to delineate contrasts between the experiences of youth schooling in socio-urban peripheral contexts in the regions of Paris, France, and Porto Alegre, Brazil. We were driven by the aim of understanding the social trials faced by young people in public high schools in Brazil; thus, the research presented here, beyond substantiating foundational systematizations, is a heuristic-reflective device that articulates contrasts between distinct educational realities.

Regarding normative frameworks and institutional supports, documentary analysis indicated that prescriptions converged on the presumed interactions between school knowledge and social reality, interactions oriented toward cultural development, the exercise of citizenship, and workforce preparation. The scenarios differ, however, due to the levels of formalization and prescriptiveness of the meritocratic assertion, the coverage of school systems, and the interpenetrations between academic performance and social inequality, all of which are more pronounced in the French context. This stands in contrast to Brazil, where the “New High School”, with its emphasis on formative pathways and individualized life projects, faces criticism regarding its feasibility within historically under-resourced public-school networks, as well as for the mechanisms of individual accountability it tends to impose upon young people in the face of a labor market permeated by inconsistencies (IBGE, 2023a).

We observe significantly greater access to cultural and sporting activities in France. In Brazil, we observe a concentration of young people in social interactions and audiovisual consumption, a phenomenon attributed to the inadequacy of public leisure facilities (Silva et al., 2021). Moreover, we observe a more rapid transition into the workforce in the life trajectories of young Brazilians, including simultaneous engagement in secondary education and paid labor, alongside a higher prevalence of informal employment. Thus, the nature of these contexts suggests that, in the Brazilian reality, working-class youth are compelled to navigate their existence with fewer institutional support structures than in the French context.

However, besides structural elements manifest in everyday life, we observe similarities regarding how young people situated schooling within their “spaces of possibilities.” Their peripheral status, understood as a convergence of class, racial, and territorial inequalities, partially shaped their responses to the trials we identified, drawing upon the work of Barrère (2003; 2020). In the process of constructing meaning for school-based knowledge and work, beyond a mere sense of utility, we observed a counterpoint: the valuing of knowledge acquired outside the school walls, **whereas** school time was also imbued with meaning through the enjoyment of peer interactions. The imperative for autonomy was experienced ambivalently, given the contrast between school demands and commitments undertaken in other spheres of action, particularly within the family domain. Performance in the face of assessments, quite apart from questions regarding their (in)justice, was situated within the economy (*oiko-nomos*) of priorities forged in daily life, all while never losing sight of the practical necessity of completing their basic education.

Nevertheless, even amidst this confluence, it was possible to observe divergent lines of action. Practices varied across institutions regarding the regulation of behavior and the demand for results, a form of institutional pressure prevalent among the French students. Conversely, criticism of the perceived lack of meaning in school-based knowledge and work was more pronounced among Brazilian youths, jointed by the negotiation of institutional timeframes and the construction of interactive dynamics within the school environment. Furthermore, while students at the *La Courneuve* school asserted a leading role for themselves both within and beyond the school premises, students at Cruzeiro, driven by an imperative of independence, were emphatic in contrasting the injunctions for autonomy and school judgments with the forms of agency available in the working world.

In other words, the school's place within the socialization process differed, such that the reliance on forms of agency was more pronounced in the Brazilian context, a phenomenon that can be linked to the contextual interplay between the precariousness or insufficiency of institutional supports,

the necessity of acting to ensure subsistence and consumption, and the very nature of relational dynamics within the school environment. Thus, while expectations regarding schooling figured prominently in every situation involving young people, the specific terms these youths used strike us as highly suggestive. They articulate an important nuance in the relationship between the scope for individual action and institutional frameworks: “success” (*réussir*) for those who, despite facing difficulties, seek upward mobility; and “overcoming” for those who pursue such mobility but perceive a fundamental instability in the very ground upon which they tread.

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DECLARATION OF DATA AVAILABILITY

The data will be available upon request from the reviewers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding this article.