# *Had there been someone to teach me, I would have learned*: young people's educational pathways - winding trails, possible futures

ATYPICAL ACADEMIC PATHWAYS

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# II. Theoretical framework

▶ Intending to study the social at the individual level seeks the possibility of understanding this (relatively) singular social reality constructed "by the experiences that constituted it" through the "network of constraints both interior (in the form of dispositions or habits) and exterior (contextual)" (Lahire, 2017)

▶ Analysis and construction of itineraries "from a biographical perspective" (Casal, 2003) from the consideration of three aggregating dimensions of social processes and factors. :

  ▶ *Biographical dimension* (orientations and strategies of social positioning of groups, individuals, families; choices);

  ▶ *Institutional dimension* (opportunities and constraints on education systems and other public institutions or policies);

  ▶ *Contextual dimension* (social determinants of the context of life)

# II. Theoretical framework

► This analytical proposal is mobilized to support the hypothesis that the social processes and factors aggregated in the referred dimensions intervene jointly, dynamically and interactively to construct very diverse academic pathways.

► Academic pathways that, at some point, faced diverse social and educational barriers, which questioned the participation of subjects in learning and school and their continuity and successful completion; and yet compulsory education has been, or is headed towards being, completed. Thus, these pathways seem to hold a certain quotient of *unlikely*, unexpected, atypical, since, for various reasons, and plausibly without intervention within the studied socio-educational practices (and/or the projects in which they are developed), their orientation, setting and arrival point would have been different.

# II. Theoretical framework

▶ The fifteen academic pathways analyzed are built by the structural relations of Portuguese society, clearly visible in the characterization of the disadvantaged social contexts in which the studied Practices take place and the disadvantaged publics that they involve; they are an institutional fabrication of social and educational policies and the education system, observable by the opportunities and constraints that cross them and make them visible, as well as by the conditions of agency of the subjects, which enable and within which they play a leading role..

# II. Theoretical framework

► **Nonetheless**, the academic pathways of the interviewed subjects constitute a certain paradox, given that, considering certain sociological properties, these subjects participate in social relations that constitute socio-educational regularities in Portugal.

► Are these <u>academic pathways as atypical as they are paradoxical</u>, since they seem to integrate aspects that allow us to understand, analyse and explain them as 'normal' academic pathways in the statistical sense?

► Pathway profiles/categories construction methodology, in three steps:

  i.    describe the academic pathway to identify the most remarkable moments;

  ii.   grasp the dimensions of explanatory analysis of the pathway (contextual, situational, institutional, dispositional, biographical);

  iii.  identify structuring and convergent dimensions of analysis between atypical academic pathways

# III. Winding trails… possible futures

**1. Around life. Returning to school for a decent job, education and life**

▶ Academic pathways whose point of tension rests on the relevance of the school project to the subjects' life project and the way of life of their communities

▶ Between the deep feeling that "school doesn't interest me at all" and inscribing school in the life project - it is to work this tension and expand life opportunities, that the practices under study (and other public policies with which they interact) develop processes that contribute to overcoming barriers to subjects' participation in learning and school

▶ This profile includes:

    i.    the school and life project in the Roma way of life;

    ii.    school dropout and/or institutional deviation

    iii.    institutional opportunities;

    iv.    the reinvention effort of the school and life project (in the face of a way of life that "leads to nothing")

▶ *It was this project that encouraged me to go further in my studies* – Zara's atypical academic pathway

# III. Winding trails… possible futures

*Around life. Returning to school for a decent job, education and life*

Zara is 26 years old, of Roma ethnicity, married, has one child, is a mediator between the neighbourhood's Roma community and the municipal social housing company; after a discontinuous school career with two interruptions (in 4th grade at 11 years old, and in 6th grade at 15 years old), returned to school in 2018 to complete the 9th grade and is involved with Mediation Practice1/Vila Antiqua.

*"'Project Sobreiro brought me new visions about life. For me, life… I had no other vision that wasn't the market. Now, I… Maybe I wouldn't want the future I now want for my son, as I wanted when I… before I knew Project Sobreiro. Because I didn't properly value school. I knew it was essential to know how to read and write, but to go further … I didn't have this notion, because for me it was enough to read and write, and where would we go? The market. Now I don't have that vision anymore, now I don't want my son to have that same life…"(Zara, p. 7)*

# III. Winding trails… possible futures

*2. Exercising the student's craft: walking the tightrope… with a pole*

- This profile comprises a significant presence (50%) of direct pathways (ie, without retention or interruption), although fragile in terms of school performance, marked by vulnerability to some institutional barriers, especially at times of cycle transition, aggravated by the conjunction of pedagogical deficits (Bernstein, 1996) with dispositional barriers (Elkstrom, 1972) to participation in learning.

- To overcoming these barriers contributed some determining conditions of the family environment (the parents' unconditional support), the institutional school context (guidance and encouragement of teachers) and the participation in programs that promote inclusive educational practices.

- These are pathways in which referrals are often made to the different ranks of secondary education based on a "negative orientation" (choosing the professional line because they do not see themselves or are not seen as able to follow the line oriented towards the pursuit of studies).

# III. Winding trails… possible futures

## 2. Exercising the student's craft: walking the tightrope… with a pole

▶ Caetana is finishing (12ᵗʰ grade) a Computer Systems Management and Programming vocational training degree, her father is an ironmaster (6ᵗʰ grade), and her mother is a cleaning maid (4ᵗʰ grade).

▶ *"[My parents] encouraged me to want to like school, to actually like it, to will me to go and carry on, to never give up on studying. [At the beginning of 7th grade] I lost a bit of interest in school, I didn't pay much attention to it. I skipped school sometimes, I still do, but… And I was tired practically all year[…]. The regular [courses] were complicated for me, demanding. Because, how I see it, I don't think I'm capable to get into university, and I really want, at the end of 12th grade, to start working"* (Caetana).

# III. Winding trails… possible futures

**3. A special class that is our own: taking care of happinness and learning – the institutional deviation**

▶ Academic pathways marked by tensions arising from:

    i.    social conditions and experiences of marginalization and discrimination lived by the subjects and generating *institutional* barriers to their participation in learning and school;

    ii.    articulated with unequal and contradictory responses and socio-educational and pedagogical relations;

    iii.    the action of the subjects and the construction of life projects actively based on school projects

▶ These Atypical Academic Pathways include:

    i.    *stations* marked by *institutional barriers* generated by *pedagogical* deficits (the *pace* of communication; the *rigid* and predefined sequence of contents; the *selection* of curriculum contents; *indifference* to differences);

    ii.    stations whose emphasis is on (often unequal) institutional opportunities for participation in learning and on on enabling and contradictory socio-educational and pedagogical relationships;

    iii.    stations that highlight the action of the subjects and meanings of the school project in the life project

▶ *Being able to participate in class. For me, it was fantastic* – Samuel's (and Alice's) atypical academic pathway

# III. Winding trails… possible futures

**3. A special class that is our own: taking care of happinness and learning – the institutional deviation**

Samuel is 23 years old, has finished a secondary level Vocational Training Course in Gardening, and was attending (when interviewed) a training course in screen printing and stamping. He had a continuous academic pathway, having failed during the 1st cycle, after which, in the framework of the Student Grouping/Vila Antiqua Practice, completed on time the eight years of 2nd and 3rd cycle and secondary education.

> *"For me, it was fantastic. The teacher calling me: "Come do this exercise"… Even if I wasn't able to… She would explain it, and there we were, watching her intently, listening to her… And then… Even if it was wrong, as we solved it, you know? (…) My class director, Ms. Heloísa Cabanas. And there was another one, of course, Ms. Donata Alves. She was also… She taught Portuguese. Portuguese teacher… And Theater… Which I liked very much as well, doing theater. Actually, I did Theater with her for three years, and I was in some fantastic plays. But with my class director, especially, because Math was my passion. Math, knowledge… It was. Wanting to know more about Math (…). Yes, yes. Although I struggled somewhat, but she would be there, you see, intact, to help us. Yes, always ready for whatever came and…"(*Samuel).

## 4. "The good rascals"

▶ Young people whose course of schooling presents a (more or less long) phase marked by clearly refractory attitudes and behaviours towards school culture and the student's craft and role and that, by action of various factors, especially institutional in nature, reversed the spiral of failure and risk of abandonment, often reborn as "examples to follow"

▶ The '180 degree turn' which, in a relatively short period of time, these young people operate in their student role and craft, arises, in some cases, associated with a new pedagogical atmosphere capable of activating previously inhibited dispositions, with certain "reference figures" gaining particular relevance

▶ Pedagogical *deficits* are often invoked as a major obstacle to their learning; changes in the learning context, a pedagogical relationship marked by stimulation, respect for the pace of each student and trust can make a difference and (re)activate dispositions that were thought as non-existing

▶ The young people who make up this profile also assume a "locus of internal control" (Rotter, 1966), representing themselves as co-responsible for their success

▶ These pathways, being unique and unrepeatable, have some common cross-sectional traits: the support, encouragement and recognition of one or more striking figures (parents, siblings, friends, teachers or other professionals); the opportunity to experience pedagogical environments perceived as innovative and stimulating; the possibility of taking on new responsibilities; self-represent as co-authors of their successes/failures; reveal initiative and some leadership skills

## 4. "The good rascals"

▶ Castelo Sena, 19 years old, completed the 12th grade (Vocational Training course in Sociolcultural Animation). Despite his youth, in a little over a year he had already created a human resources selection company, which he then sold to a Spanish organisation; had already opened a hotel; and was developing a project for a private hospital.

*"They [the practice's staff] were those people who wanted to keep us in line and told our parents everything, so, obviously, we didn't like them that much, we didn't like them at all, to be honest, we didn't like them at all… [but] one thing I have to acknowledge, they were brilliant in what they did… because I'm perfectly aware that if they hadn't kept us under their hand, if they hadn't sent us home when necessary, if they hadn't admonished us in a rough fashion and in a nice fashion when, when we needed it, I'm perfectly able to recognize that today we wouldn't have, we wouldn't be the people we are today, we wouldn't be as successful as we are today. […] They managed to charm us… They managed to turn bad students and bad exemples… Into school influencers"* (Castelo Sena).

# III. Winding trails… possible futures

**Plurality of profiles, of combinations of processes and factors**

1. Profiles *Around life* and *A special class that is our own* hint at the mobilising capacity of institutional opportunities (education, job and life opportunities) to inspire and generate school and life *projects*;

2. *Contexts and socialization agents, institutional or otherwise*, which contribute to enabling favorable options to overcome barriers to participation in learning and school; in all pathways and profiles we find evocations of *figures, relationships / devices or reference groups* that support and sustain courses of action, perhaps impracticable without this combination of forces.;

3. The centrality of the institutional capacity to generate enabling relationships and frameworks of social and educational action, in particular as regards the support to the domain of the exercise of the student's *craft*;

4. It also highlights the evocation of barriers generated by pedagogical deficits related to indifference to differences in *rhythm*, *selection* and *sequence* of learning *objectives*, *content* and *activities*;

5. We observe frames of action that reveal factors, contexts and dynamizing and inhibiting agents of acting courses of young subjects contributing to understand "how young people decide, what is hidden under their decisions, what prevents or encourages them to move forward with their options (...) the complexity and diversity of processes" (Tarabini, 2015)

# IV. A brief note before closing (for now…)

▶ The construction of each of the 4 profiles of atypical academic pathways to which we refer allows us to see a combination of suggestive elements involved:

i) institutional opportunities and socialization contexts that help to overcome situational barriers and reinvent meanings for school and life projects: *Around life. Returning to school for a decent job, education and life*;

(ii) relationships and frameworks of socio-educational action that support and sustain the mastery of the exercise of student's craft in situations and for subjects and publics in a situation of academic fragility and social disadvantage: *Exercising the student's craft: walking the tightrope… with a pole;*

# IV. A brief note before closing (for now…)

iii) institutional opportunities, educational (inter)action frameworks, reference figures and relationships that contribute to overcoming institutional barriers and favor the construction of school and life projects: ***A special class that is our own: taking care of happinness and learning – the institutional deviation***;

(iv) the strength of institutional contexts and frameworks of interaction, as well as significant vital experiences, to activate/inhibit dispositions, address barriers and mobilise young people for learning and school: ***The good rascals***.

# IV. A brief note before closing (for now…)

In this context, it is still open the discussion on under what terms and with what limits socio-educational practices and public policies oriented to overcome barriers and widen institutional opportunities for participation in education come to:

(i) mitigate or overcome certain effects of structural conditions and socio-educational disadvantages, also fabricated by the educational system and other powerful institutions;

(ii) influence the institutional capacity to effectively contribute to the construction by subjects of academic pathways that may extend the life opportunities of certain disadvantaged publics in relation to schooling.