

SOCIOLOGY AND LIFE PROJECT AS
EXPRESSIONS OF CONTRADICTIONS:
DISPUTES OVER CURRICULUM,
CONCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL AND YOUTH

*SOCIOLOGIA E PROJETO DE VIDA COMO
EXPRESSÕES DE CONTRADIÇÕES: DISPUTAS
SOBRE OS CURRÍCULOS, CONCEPÇÕES
DE ESCOLA E JUVENTUDES*

*LA SOCIOLOGÍA Y EL PROYECTO DE VIDA COMO
EXPRESIÓN DE CONTRADICCIONES: DISPUTAS
EN TORNO A LOS CURRÍCULOS, CONCEPCIONES
DE LA ESCUELA Y DE LA JUVENTUDES*

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ABSTRACT: This article shows that the disciplines of Sociology and Life Project, present in the *Currículo Paulista do Ensino Médio*, express disputes between social groups about different models of school and education, and how these conflicts are reflected in student mobilizations. Thus, based on bibliographical research, this paper resumes studies that historically analyze the construction of curricula and curriculum reforms, relating them to political and social contexts. Thus, the text presents how, especially from the 1980s on, Sociology was linked to the democratic mobilizations of social movements in the process of overcoming the model of

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school (and society) defended by the military governments; and how the Life Project stands out as an essential component in the formation of subjects in the school of neoliberalism; and that it was originated by the intervention of private capital institutions in the development and implementation of public policies. However, this process has not taken place without contradictions, which have youth as a determining factor.

KEYWORDS: Sociology. Life Project. Curriculum. Education reform.

RESUMO: *Este artigo tem como objetivo mostrar que as disciplinas de Sociologia e Projeto de Vida, presentes no Currículo Paulista da Etapa do Ensino Médio, expressam disputas entre grupos sociais acerca de diferentes modelos de escola e educação, e como estes conflitos são refletidos em mobilizações estudantis. Assim, a partir de levantamento bibliográfico, este trabalho retoma estudos que analisam historicamente a construção dos currículos e das reformas curriculares, relacionando-os aos contextos políticos e sociais. Desta forma, o texto apresenta como, especialmente a partir dos anos 1980, a Sociologia esteve ligada às mobilizações democráticas de movimentos sociais no processo de superação do modelo de escola (e sociedade) defendido pelos governos militares; e como o Projeto de Vida se destaca como componente essencial na formação dos sujeitos na escola do neoliberalismo, cujo conteúdo foi originado pela intervenção de instituições do capital privado na elaboração e implementação das políticas públicas educacionais. Porém, este processo não tem ocorrido sem contradições, que têm na juventude um sujeito determinante.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Sociologia. Projeto de Vida. Currículo. Reformas educacionais.*

RESUMEN: *Este artículo pretende mostrar que las asignaturas de Sociología y Proyecto de Vida, presentes en el Currículo Paulista de la Etapa de Enseñanza Media, expresan disputas entre grupos sociales sobre diferentes modelos de escuela y educación y cómo estos conflictos se reflejan en las movilizaciones estudiantiles. Así, a partir del relevamiento bibliográfico, este trabajo retoma los estudios que analizan históricamente la construcción de los currículos y las reformas curriculares, relacionándolos con los contextos políticos y sociales. Así, el texto presenta cómo, especialmente a partir de la década de 1980, la Sociología se vinculó a las movilizaciones democráticas de los movimientos sociales en el proceso de superación del modelo de escuela (y de sociedad) defendido por los*

gobiernos militares; y cómo el Proyecto de Vida se destaca como un componente esencial en la formación de sujetos en la escuela del neoliberalismo; y que se originó por la intervención de instituciones de capital privado en el desarrollo e implementación de políticas públicas. Sin embargo, este proceso no ha estado exento de contradicciones, siendo los jóvenes un factor determinante.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Sociología. Proyecto de vida. Currículum. Reforma educativa.*

Introduction

There is an extensive body of literature and policy regarding the importance of critical reading and the ongoing debates surrounding school curricula. This emphasis arises because curricula encapsulate a significant portion of the responsibilities of educational systems within societies, and thus carry immense importance.

Theoretical perspectives from diverse backgrounds contribute to understanding the significance of this debate. For example, we may consider reflections that affirm the role of schools as spaces that reproduce the dominant ideology and the prevailing social order (Bourdieu; Passeron, 1970); as sites where workers are trained not only to remain in subordinate positions but to become advocates of the system in which they live, specifically within the capitalist mode of production (Boltanski; Chiapello, 2012).

Additionally, other frameworks underscore that curricula and public schools, while serving the maintenance of domination as state structures, are historical formations and, therefore, not uniform structures. On the contrary, they are loci of conflict and struggle between opposing social classes and their representatives (Apple, 1995).

Recent years in Brazilian education, particularly the late 2010s, have been marked by the approval and implementation of substantial curricular reforms, such as the New High School (*Novo Ensino Médio* – NEM, 2017) and the National Common Core Curriculum (*Base Nacional Comum Curricular* – BNCC, 2018), which have decisively influenced educational models across states, there is a need to construct reflections that contribute to a broader understanding of these processes.

This article proposes an analysis of certain aspects of these reforms, arguing that the subjects of Sociology and Life Project (*Projeto de Vida*, PV), currently included in the São Paulo High School Curriculum approved in 2020, represent contrasting educational concepts that reflect groups contending for the direction of public education in the country. It further argues that pro-market educational reforms have not been passively received but have encountered, and continue to

encounter, varied forms of resistance, notably among youth, as has been the case in other historical periods¹.

In this study, we posit that curriculum development should be understood as a process that is both regionally and nationally coordinated. In other words, decisions about what and how to teach in schools carry important local characteristics, but their understanding must also occur from a broader perspective, in dialogue with and in relation to ongoing social and political processes across the country.

Thus, the article will focus on the example of São Paulo, which, starting in 2019, instituted the subject of Life Project and initiated the first steps of curricular change in the state, proposing new subjects and adjusted schedules, in alignment with the NEM and BNCC.

It is worth emphasizing that in the case of São Paulo, both Sociology and Life Project were designated as subjects with dedicated instructional hours. Nonetheless, the inclusion of both in the public high school curriculum does not mitigate the divergences embodied within them. On the contrary, it illustrates that curricula are the result of disputes between groups with conflicting interests.

The choice to analyze Sociology and Life Projects arises from the fact that these subjects exemplify certain contradictions ongoing in education (particularly in public education). As will be presented throughout this text, Sociology has historically occupied an unstable place within curricula, with its presence or absence reflecting the policies of the ruling governments and the dominant interests of the competing social classes (Silva, 2007). The inconsistency of this subject and the criteria defining its uncertain status make it a meaningful subject for reflection.

Life Project, in turn, was introduced more recently and formally within school curricula and is identified as a foundational component of current neoliberal educational reforms, designed to guide the educational process implemented in schools (Goulart; Alencar, 2021). Therefore, understanding its foundations and the identity of its proponents is essential.

To construct this oppositional relationship, we draw on historical analyses of curricula, linking curricular definitions to the characteristics of ongoing social and political processes. In the case of Sociology, we will summarize contributions that systematize various stages of Brazilian history, from the early debates about

¹ It is considered here that "youth becomes a kind of catalyst for collective, generational and symbolic memories, which makes them social memories internalized in the core of a given society, supporting or subverting the pillars of power/domination of that society itself. For this reason, there are youths who preserve the established social standards, and conversely, there are youths who act in favor of confronting the power structures as they are established. Therefore, youth is more than a discussion about age group, despite this being an important distinctive feature, but rather constitutes a broader discussion that encompasses the symbolic conditions of these social actors (i.e. players), who are placed on the field to dispute the game of social representation" (Guimarães; Groppo, 2022, p. 12, our translation).

introducing Sociology into school curricula (dating back to the late 19th century) to the social mobilizations advocating for the subject's mandatory status within the context of re-democratization. We will also discuss how these national-level debates impacted individual states differently.

For Life Project, we will focus on its implementation process in São Paulo, as the first instance of curricular change undertaken in the country, connected to nationally established guidelines. Within this framework, the prominent role of the private sector in the conception, formulation, and execution of Life Project will be highlighted.

Specifically, this last point has unfolded within a new context of questioning the institution of *public schooling* and, in this case, the scientific components of the curriculum, with particular scrutiny of the Humanities. Notably, Sociology was initially identified as a subject to be removed from the mandatory curriculum—a prospect that led to significant mobilizations, particularly by students.

Thus, the article is structured in three parts: Curriculum, Contestations, and the Place of Sociology; Neoliberal Educational Reforms in São Paulo and Life Project; and Final Considerations.

1. Curriculum, Conflicts, and the Role of Sociology

Various studies assert that one of the primary characteristics of Sociology's inclusion in the Brazilian school curriculum is its inconsistency. Since the establishment of the discipline in the 19th century, there have been multiple instances of its integration and removal from school curricula (Silva, 2007; Handfas, 2012; Santos, 2013).

This inconsistency suggests that sociology occupies an uncertain position unlike other well-established disciplines. In other words, it has not always existed as an independent subject with its own instructional hours but has been presented as school knowledge embedded within other subjects like History or Geography (Silva, 2007).

According to Silva (2007), this phenomenon can be explained primarily by the fact that curriculum definitions, what knowledge is to be implemented in society, and which values and worldviews are to be conveyed in schools are products of disputes among different social groups and classes. Therefore, the presence and teaching of Sociology (among other subjects) should be understood from a historical and social perspective. Pedagogical discourses and the organization of knowledge reflect these conflicts (Silva, 2007).

In this regard, Silva (2007) proposes a historical typology of the curricula implemented in Brazil, identifying four types and associating each with the role of

Sociology: the classical-scientific curriculum, the technical (regionalized) curriculum, the scientific curriculum, and the competencies-based curriculum.

Some primary characteristics include:

– **Classical-Scientific Curriculum:** Predominant until 1971, this curriculum aimed at training elites for professions such as engineering, law, and medicine (considered noble) and included intellectual and artistic activities. For the working class, however, vocational training was the primary preparation offered. According to Silva, vocational education served as an essential tool for controlling the poor and poverty (Silva, 2007). This model was thus dualistic in nature (one form of education for elites; another for workers).

This curriculum was content-driven and organized around specific subjects. “We term it ‘scientific and classical’ because it still held a strong Jesuit tradition, including the teaching of the humanities, Latin languages, bookish didactics, and memorization” (Silva, 2007, p. 411, our translation).

During this period, sociology was present in the curriculum, although it was inconsistent. From 1925 to 1940, the movement to establish Sociology as a school subject saw contributions from prominent authors who wrote instructional manuals (such as Fernando de Azevedo and Gilberto Freyre) aimed at the intellectual development of the elite. However, the inclusion of Sociology faced resistance, notably with the banning of the subject from secondary schools in 1940 under the Capanema Reform (Santos, 2013).

In Silva’s (2007) analysis, even in these initial efforts to introduce Sociology into the school curriculum, there was a discernible attempt to develop scientific interpretations of Brazilian social reality, despite the influences of positivist, liberal, and Catholic ideologies. Furthermore, its presence added a “modern aura” to the curriculum.

Consequently, Sociology was upheld as a reference science within the academic field, receiving support from intellectuals such as Luiz de Aguiar Costa-Pinto and Florestan Fernandes. Silva (2007, p. 412) asserts that “pedagogical identities were constructed in the direction of national identity and modernization, relying on these reference sciences, which symbolically directed teaching practices and curricula”. Thus, Sociology played a far from secondary role. However, it was introduced as an optional subject for secondary education under the first National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDB, Law No. 4.024/61) (Santos, 2013).

– **Technical (or Regionalized) Curriculum:** This model was characteristic of the Brazilian military dictatorship, implemented beginning in 1971 (Law No. 6.692/71). According to Silva (2007), its main features include:

During the Military Governments, the focus of education shifted from traditional disciplines to the humanities and natural sciences. The high school curriculum

reorganized knowledge by grouping it into areas with immediate technological applicability. (...) Textbooks illustrated the official scientific dilution within schools. (...) Social Sciences were entirely ideologized, weakening History and Geography as scientific disciplines. (...) Moral and Civic Education replaced what might have been the teaching of Philosophy and Sociology (Silva, 2007, p. 412-3, our translation).

While Sociology, in its initial years, sought to foster scientific interpretations of reality, Moral and Civic Education aimed at promoting a glorified vision of Brazil as a nation without conflicts, rich in “natural beauty” (Silva, 2007; Santos, 2013). According to Handfas (2012), this content served as a strategic tool for the military government, illustrating the ideological role this type of education could play in shaping the nation.

This destabilization of disciplinary identities within the humanities extended to teacher training. In this model, it was deemed sufficient for teachers to develop technical knowledge that would allow them to reproduce pre-determined modules, imposed externally to the schools (Silva, 2007).

– **Scientific Curricula:** implemented in certain states starting in 1983 and nationally in 1988, highlighted by the establishment of the Citizen Constitution.

This model was marked by the historical fervor of the redemocratization process, in which curricular reforms and pedagogical theories were contested to move beyond the military regime’s governance model and its influence on education (Silva, 2007). According to Handfas (2012), efforts to reintegrate Sociology into school curricula are expressions of this historical moment, in which “the struggle for democratizing education was also about creating a curriculum with content and subjects that would foster the development of more critical and reflective students. In this sense, the struggle for Sociology’s reintegration into the curriculum aligned with these goals” (Handfas, 2012p. 3-4, our translation).

Silva (2007) describes this phase as one where curricula realigned with scientific knowledge, reaffirmed the role of teachers as intellectuals, reinstated schools as places for transmitting sophisticated culture, and reasserted a politicized pedagogical discourse (in defense of democracy).

In this context, the gradual and contradictory reintegration of Sociology into secondary education had a distinctive feature: there were “sectors interested in Sociology’s return to school curricula; from the 1980s onward, *there was an intense mobilization among representative organizations and students (...)*” (Handfas, 2012, p. 4, emphasis added, our translation). This movement involved students, educators, politicians, and their representative bodies.

In this context, the presence of Sociology in curricula began to be discussed first at the state level, with notable discussions in São Paulo, Paraná, Minas Gerais,

Rio de Janeiro, Pará, Santa Catarina, and Rio Grande do Sul (Silva, 2007). According to Silva (2007), this discussion was elevated to the national level starting in 1996, with the new LDB (Law of Directives and Bases of National Education), precisely in the context of rising neoliberalism in the country.

– **Competency-Based Curriculum:** established in 1996. Amid the historical moment of democratic consolidation and the competing interests of various social groups (often representing opposing social classes), new educational reforms were enacted.

The conflicts defining this historical period are evident in the manner in which new education legislation was shaped. On one hand, social movements, such as the student movement and trade unions, intensely mobilized to demand more direct participation in forums for discussion and decision-making. On the other hand, market forces were also advancing, with notable constraints on channels for public participation and anti-union stances, practices associated with the administration of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-1998; 1999-2002) (Gindin, 2013).

In this scenario, the new LDB (Law No. 9,394/96) was emblematic: although it mandated that high school graduates should possess knowledge of Philosophy and Sociology, it also established, along with Decree No. 2,208/97 (which regulates vocational education) and the National Curriculum Guidelines for Basic and Secondary Education (DCNEM), the competency-based curriculum model (Silva, 2007).

From this process, the author notes a renewed emphasis on regionalized curricula tailored to immediate realities, therefore, to the detriment of scientific curricula, legitimizing eclecticism, promoted under the guise of *flexibility* (Silva, 2007).

Similarly to what had occurred under the dictatorship, these educational models led to a devaluation, particularly of the Arts and Humanities, which began to be presented in an ideologized or psychologized manner. For example, these fields could be reframed as *projects* or *transversal themes*, as if thus being “covered” and hence no longer required as subjects in their own right (Silva, 2007; Handfas, 2012).

This approach to curriculum also put forth a vision of the teaching profession—where the erosion of scientific responsibilities recalls, once again, the defining characteristics of the military dictatorship.

This discourse established pedagogical individualism and the devaluation of traditional disciplines and foundational sciences. It introduced a psychological approach to the teaching-learning process, prioritizing motivational techniques over methods for teaching specific content to particular audiences (Silva, 2007, p. 416, our translation).

However, struggles persisted. In response to pressure from social movements, the Ministry of Education in 2004 issued a document titled *Orientações Curriculares para o Ensino Médio* (Guidelines for High School Curriculum), outlining proposals for curricular reform, including the recognition of Sociology as a formal discipline (in critique of other frameworks, such as the National Curriculum Parameters and the National Curriculum Guidelines for High School, or DCNEM) (Santos, 2013).

At that time, states like São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul raised concerns regarding changes to the DCNEM, even implementing regional curricula aligned with previous guidelines. Amidst these disputes, a law was enacted mandating the teaching of Sociology throughout the three years of high school and endorsing changes in the DCNEM (Law No. 11,684/08) (Santos, 2013).

Before proceeding to the next section of this article, several observations should be noted: with the implementation of the New High School (NEM) and the National Common Core Curriculum (BNCC), Sociology's characterization as a discipline in an unstable position remains apt.

This is due to the fact that, on one hand, these legislative changes further entrenched the competency-based curriculum model (with substantial involvement from the business sector, as will be discussed below). On the other hand, Sociology was again directly challenged in the discussions surrounding the BNCC; notably, Sociology was considered for removal as a standalone subject, potentially becoming a transversal theme² – a proposal that was met with indignation and mobilization, and was ultimately excluded from the final draft.

Additionally, a defining feature of the movements advocating for Sociology's inclusion as a discipline, especially from the 1980s onward, should be highlighted: this movement coincided with a vigorous wave of democratic mobilizations across the country, driven by the context of overcoming the military dictatorship. Thus, the popular forces and social movements that supported this demand played a pivotal role in defining what this cause represented at that time: the inclusion of Sociology as one of the tools to overcome the educational (and societal) model promoted by the dictatorship.

2. Neoliberal Educational Reforms in São Paulo and the Life Project

In this section, we will outline contributions to understanding both the Life Project discipline and the process of its implementation and consolidation in the curriculum.

² Below is a publication that addresses the issue: CEBRAP – Brazilian Center for Analysis and Planning. For the mandatory nature of Sociology and Philosophy subjects in High School. Published on April 18, 2018. Available at: <https://abecs.com.br/pela-obrigatoriedade-sociologia-e-filosofia-no-ensino-medio/>. Accessed on: September 18, 2024.

Before delving into the historical and social issues surrounding the debate on the Life Project (PV), it is essential to briefly present its institutional definition. According to the training material from the São Paulo State School of Education and Professional Development “Paulo Renato Costa Souza” (EFAPE), Life Project Curriculum Guidelines (2019) describe the Life Project (PV) discipline as follows:

(...) the expression of the vision that the student builds of themselves in relation to their future. This project thus requires students to define their paths, which can be pursued in the short, medium, and long term. Therefore, for the school to fulfill this significant task, its curriculum, practices, and educational processes must ensure: (...)

- *The capacity not to be indifferent to oneself, others, and real problems in their surroundings, presenting themselves as part of the solution in a creative, generous, and collaborative way;*
- *It is expected that the school contributes to the student's ability to position themselves across different life dimensions and circumstances so they can make decisions based on their beliefs, knowledge, and values. (EFAPE, 2019, p. 3, our emphasis, our translation).*

A notable aspect highlighted in the passage above is the primarily *behavioral* definition of Life Project students. That is, this curricular component aims to equip students to make decisions in various life situations based on their “beliefs, knowledge, and values”.

But what kinds of decisions? For what types of situations?

Answers to these questions will be addressed later, following the historical and social overview of the subjects involved in implementing these curricular reforms. For now, it suffices to state that the Life Project, as a specific curricular component with its own dedicated hours, was standardized across São Paulo's state education network starting in 2020. Its initial implementation took place as a pilot project in 24 schools within São Paulo city throughout 2019 (Goulart; Alencar, 2021).

This initial curricular shift resulted from the *Inova Educação Program* (PIE), a collaboration between the São Paulo State Department of Education (Seduc) and the Ayrton Senna Institute (IAS), launched in May 2019. This program aimed to implement an educational model across the entire state network, with...

(...) a change in the curriculum framework for Cycle II of elementary school and high school, introducing five weekly class periods (one per day) with the addition of subjects titled *Life Project* (two classes), *Technology and Innovation*,

and *Electives* (one weekly class for each component). This modification was achieved by reducing all class periods from 50 to 45 minutes, thereby extending student attendance at school to five hours and fifteen minutes per day, seven classes daily, along with adjusting the scheduled time for training activities for school teams (Goulart; Alencar, 2021, p. 338, our translation).

The addition of these new curricular components occurred without the hiring of new teachers or conducting recruitment exams. Current teachers were expected to assume these classes, provided they completed a 30-hour online training course for each component of the *Inova Educação Program* (PIE). The first course took place in July 2019; its update, also a 30-hour course, was scheduled for 2020. A third edition of the course was offered in 2021. These courses, provided by EFAPE, reflect an important characteristic of these components: qualifying teachers to teach these subjects did not require a specific postgraduate degree or formal specialization, but only these designated hours of instruction (Goulart; Alencar, 2021).

It is also worth noting that, even before *Life Project* was established as a formal discipline, it appeared in state government documents as a central guiding axis for pedagogical action and development not only for students but also for teachers. As stated in the *Guidelines for the Integral Education Program* document from 2012 (and thus predating the approval of the New High School Curriculum and the National Common Curricular Base, or BNCC), “Life Project is the focus towards which all educational actions of the school project must converge, constructed based on the provision of academic excellence, value formation, and preparation for the world of work” (SÃO PAULO, 2012, p. 18, our translation)

To understand the inclusion and significance of this curricular component, it is necessary to revisit certain historical events that elucidate not only the content required by the *Life Project* discipline but also the social forces that proposed it. Thus, a brief historical overview of the educational policy guidelines implemented in São Paulo state since the 1990s is needed to understand the role of private capital in establishing neoliberalism in São Paulo’s education system.

In examining the educational policy discourse, Gomide (2019) proposes analyzing the application of the neoliberal educational model in São Paulo through three phases: the *paving phase* (1995–2002), the *implementation phase* (2003–2010), and the *consolidation phase* (2011–2018).

It should be noted that since Gomide’s thesis was completed in 2019, the author did not address events that only materialized in subsequent years. Thus, a few clarifications are needed: 1) these phases correspond to the years of governance by the Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) in São Paulo, totaling 28 consecutive years (1995–2022). 2) As Gomide (2019) asserts, the PSDB’s long-standing administration of the state government has enabled the continuous implementation

of managerial principles in education over these decades, which are carried out systematically and without interruptions.

According to the author, each of these phases can be defined as follows:

– **Paving Phase:** Occurring concurrently with the federal government led by the same party (under President Fernando Henrique Cardoso), with state governance under Governors Mário Covas (1995–1998; 1999–2001) and Geraldo Alckmin (2001–2002; 2003–2006), and Tereza Roserley Neubauer as head of the Education Department (Seduc). During this period, following national directives for state restructuring modeled on market principles, political and institutional foundations were laid for implementing a neoliberal educational model. Among these measures, Gomide (2019) highlights the application of technologies and external assessments whose results were to be interpreted based on managerial principles; the spread of the notion that education is a service that could be provided by non-state entities; and the endorsement of market mechanisms for organizing public education.

– **Implementation Phase:** Under the state governments of Geraldo Alckmin and José Serra (2007–2010), during the first and second terms of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2006; 2007–2010) from the Workers' Party (PT). According to the author, the primary feature of this period was the effort to convince public servants, students, and their families about neoliberal educational policies. Gabriel Chalita, as head of Seduc-SP (2003–2006), played a significant role in promoting consensus and co-opting support for this model through systematic training initiatives (Gomide, 2019).

In essence, this period saw the promotion of the so-called Pedagogy of Love, which advocated solving educational challenges through interpersonal relationships between teachers and students. This approach emphasized behavioral proposals, thereby diverting discussions from social and historical issues related to the deterioration of public education (Rodrigues, 2020).

Following Chalita's tenure at Seduc-SP, Maria Helena dos Santos Castro (2007–2009) and Paulo Renato de Souza (2009–2010) took charge, continuing the neoliberal agenda with a top-down approach, incorporating and deepening concepts like competencies and skills in daily school activities (Gomide, 2019).

Additionally, this period saw a prominent role for private organizations, particularly the Ayrton Senna Institute (IAS). Although the IAS had established contacts and partnerships with the São Paulo state education network since 1994, it was in 2006 that the organization began playing a more direct role in shaping policies implemented within the network, notably through the *Full-Time Schools* program (later replaced by the Integral Education Program), as well as initiatives like the *School Family Program* and *Youth Empowerment Program* (Gomide, 2019).

The IAS played a critical role in developing proposals related to socio-emotional competencies (SEC) and their associated pedagogical approaches, which

later influenced initiatives such as *Inova Educação* (2019) and the *São Paulo State High School Curriculum* (2020), establishing and consolidating SEC as curricular components.

Thus, by the end of this cycle, characteristics aligned with neoliberal ideals were already observable within the state public education network. These included: performance-based bonuses, structuring school operations around the demands of external assessments, conceptualizing teachers as facilitators in the teaching-learning process while devaluing the scientific components of the curriculum, promoting and enforcing competency-based education, encouraging competition between schools, imposing sanctions for unsatisfactory performance, and institutionalizing precarious working conditions for teachers (Gomide, 2019).

– **Consolidation Phase:** This phase occurred under the governments of Geraldo Alckmin (2011–2018) and Márcio França (2018). During this period, Seduc-SP was led by Herman Voorwald (2011–2015), José Renato Nalini (2016–2018), and João Cury Neto (2018).

These years witnessed turbulent events in national leadership, with Dilma Rousseff (PT) as president from 2011 to 2016 until her replacement, via a controversial process, by Michel Temer (2016–2018) from the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB). Additionally, the 2018 election saw the victory of Jair Messias Bolsonaro, representing the far-right.

This national context had significant repercussions. Restricting our focus to public education, there was an accelerated implementation of pro-market educational reforms. Key examples include the High School Reform (2017) and the new National Common Curricular Base (2018).

At the state level, however, there were no major shifts in the direction of educational policies. That is, the neoliberal orientation persisted, with increased involvement of private institutions in all stages of public policy development—from conception to implementation and oversight (Gomide, 2019). Additionally, education management became more firmly anchored in student performance on external assessments.

Among the significant developments in this phase was the establishment of the *Programa Educação – Compromisso de São Paulo* (PECSP), through Decree No. 57,571 of December 2, 2011.

The importance of this program can be observed in several aspects, from supporting the administrative restructuring of Seduc-SP to formulating subsequent curricular proposals. The PECSP's governing council predominantly comprises representatives from the private sector, especially those affiliated with the *Associação Parceiros da Educação* (APE), an organization that includes various private entities³.

³ Such as the Natura Institute, Victor Civita Foundation, Lemann Foundation, Unibanco Institute, Itaú Social Foundation, Tellus, Education Partners, Educar D'Paschoal Foundation, Institute of Co-

Research on this subject indicates that PECSP represents a growing complexity in the privatization of public education, illustrated through three dynamics that demonstrate:

- 1) The integration of APE within the governance structure of public education;
- 2) the permeability between educational policies and APE's mobility beyond the initial scope of the partnership; and 3) APE's role in expanding the governance network, acting as a boundary spanner⁴ and facilitating the entry of other private organizations (Cássio *et al.*, 2020, p. 1, our translation).

In summary, beyond its initial role as “government advisory,” over time, PECSP has become an essential program for implementing educational policies, with private actors becoming as central as the government itself in executing education policy (Cássio *et al.*, 2020). Through PECSP, for instance, the *Programa de Ensino Integral* (PEI) was developed, a flagship initiative of the PSDB's most recent state government in the field of education. According to the PEI's programmatic document, curriculum expansion is directed toward the development of Social-Emotional Competencies (CSE), with the pedagogical practice thus to be structured by *Projeto de Vida* (PV) (Goulart; Alencar, 2021).

In essence, we return to the reflection made earlier: even before *Projeto de Vida* was established as a curriculum component with dedicated instructional hours (between 2019 and 2020), it had already been promoted by the authors of curriculum reforms (with the private sector's structural involvement, as previously discussed) as a cornerstone of educational transformation.

Thus, we revisit the questions posed at the beginning of this section: what decisions should students be prepared to make upon engagement with PV? What types of life situations are they being equipped for? Are the objectives to foster critical individuals, or to propagate neoliberal ideals rooted in individualism and intense competition? How do young people react to these proposals?

3. Youth Reactions to Curriculum Changes

Reflecting on the recent history of this curriculum component and the social forces leading its establishment, it is possible to delineate, with notable precision,

Responsibility for Education, Peninsula Institute, the international consultancy *McKinsey & Company* (Cássio *et al.* 2020) etc.

⁴ In the authors' words, boundary spanner is: “people and organizations continually move between the public and the private. (...) These actors mobilize their specific position of access to the public and private spheres and employ their resources in corporate networking practices.” (Cássio *et al.*, 2020, p. 5, our translation).

the worldview to which *Projeto de Vida* aligns: consistent with the *Novo Ensino Médio* (NEM) and the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), the new educational proposals aim to shape individuals to meet the needs of the capitalist mode of production.

In a global context of prolonged crisis and the worldwide degradation of working and living conditions for laborers, there is a need for individuals who are engaged with the prevailing mode of production (Boltanski; Chiapello, 2012); ready to embrace their subjugation, internalizing that the only constant they will experience is a perpetuation of uncertainty and instability (Tommasi; Corrochano, 2020); and naturalizing the notion that failures must be explained on an individual basis, independent of historical and social factors (Catini, 2021). This framing implies a reality of a competitive landscape with very few winners, where the defeated are deserving of their loss—all circumstances leading to the rise and entrenchment of the neoliberal subject and mindset (Dardot; Laval, 2016).

In this context, where “the economy has been placed, more than ever, at the center of individual and collective life, with the only legitimate social values being those of productive efficiency, individual, mental, and emotional mobility, and personal success” (Laval, 2004, p. 14-15, our translation), the entire normative system of societies, particularly the educational system—is subordinated to the neoliberal world rationale (Dardot; Laval, 2016), dismantled, and reformed “in the image and likeness” of the market (Laval, 2004).

It is this reality to which the educational institution must respond. As Goulart and Alencar (2021) recall:

(...) the substitution of the term knowledge by competence aimed to narrow the lexicon in official educational policy documents to align with the terminology used in corporations, thereby acknowledging skills unendorsed by diplomas (...): competence is not validated by a qualification that securely and stably asserts personal value; on the contrary, it justifies permanent evaluation within the unequal employer-employee relationship (Goulart; Alencar, 2021, p. 347, authors’ emphasis, our translation).

In this sense, they argue, the practices, competencies, and methodologies proposed by the PIE align with processes of subordinated training of working-class individuals, subject to the shifts and uncertainties that will permeate their working and living conditions (Goulart; Alencar, 2021). In this process, *Projeto de Vida* plays an essential role.

Thus, the function of curriculum components like PV becomes evident: this emerging school model, shaped by neoliberal principles—therefore grounded in utilitarianism, with the total subjugation of schools to economic logic, rendering

them institutions that must provide services beneficial to the market—adopts as its pedagogical goal the formation of the autonomous worker (Laval, 2004). Revisiting the implementation of the *Currículo Paulista* for High School, *Projeto de Vida* would play a central role in shaping this “flexible” individual, the young person convinced to act as their entrepreneur. As Dardot and Laval (2016) point out, the entrepreneurial subject is the result of not only economic policies that benefit the market but also a broader neoliberal societal project.

However, it is necessary to underscore that this advancement of capitalist forces—economically, politically, and ideologically—over working youth, which also takes shape within curricular disputes, does not occur linearly. That is, the politicization of youth within these contexts may or may not occur. In some contexts, there is, in fact, a distancing from politics and political parties as avenues for communication between social groups and politics (Araújo; Perez, 2021). In other words, even with the BNCC and NEM at the national level and with PIE at the state level, Sociology has remained a mandatory subject.

One of the main reasons for this persistence has been the mobilization of high school students, such as their occupation of schools in São Paulo⁵ to protest the “reorganization” of educational units, the stance of organizations like the National Union of Students (UNE) and the Brazilian Union of Secondary Students (UBES), and the involvement of the student movement as a whole in the NEM voting processes. As Groppo and Sousa (2022) highlight:

Social movements, including the secondary student movement, demonstrate an ability to contest unjust elements of the social order, to halt new forms of oppression and erosion of social rights, and to reveal that, ultimately, every person is a political subject with an equal capacity to speak and act. They do so by combining cognitive and affective elements, rationality, and emotions—even adolescents, in protests that still inspire us today with their autonomy and dignity (Groppo; Sousa, 2022, p. 17, our translation).

Thus, from their demands, high school students presented issues that exposed often-overlooked aspects, including curriculum, school infrastructure, quality of school meals, and more. Studies on school occupations between 2015 and 2016 show that these mobilizations not only questioned policies such as school closures or the freeze on public education and healthcare funding but also hinted at proposals for the kind of education these students sought (Groppo; Sousa, 2022).

⁵ The restructuring of the São Paulo school system consisted of separating the schools so that each one would offer only one of the cycles of education (elementary school I, elementary school II, or high school). The proposal also provided for the closure of 94 schools, which would be made available for other functions in the area of education.

That is, as studies on this topic emphasize (Groppo *et al.*, 2021), students recognized the importance of subjects like Sociology, History, Philosophy, and Geography in their civic education. The inclusion of these knowledge areas thus became a point of debate in subsequent curriculum discussions:

(...) here are elements of the very ‘formal’ school life or curriculum that fostered some of the movement’s latent energy. The interviews highlight the formative work of some teachers, particularly in subjects like Sociology and History, and occasionally Geography and even Portuguese Language, something observed in other states as well. Thus, we see indications of critical social and political formation promoted by teachers in their pedagogical work (Groppo *et al.*, 2021, p. 11, our translation).

Therefore, if Sociology has remained part of the curriculum—despite ongoing market-driven pressures and attacks—this can indeed be understood as one of the results of student activism.

Final considerations

Throughout this text, we aim to develop an analysis of the implementation of Sociology and Life Project courses from a historical perspective, emphasizing the political and social dimensions of these processes. In doing so, we highlight studies that link curricular changes to a broader context, underscoring the complexity of such proposals by locating the disputes that shape these decisions.

When reviewing the trajectory of Sociology and its presence and absence in the curriculum, several notable aspects emerge that allow us to draw critical distinctions between it and the Life Project course. Two characteristics are particularly important here: Sociology’s connection to scientific interpretations of reality and its emergence as a product of democratic mobilizations, particularly from the 1980s onward.

In contrast, the Life Project course occupies a prominent place within ongoing educational reforms in Brazil. Even before being formally integrated into the curriculum with dedicated class time, Life Project (PV) emerged as a guiding principle for the pedagogical framework in São Paulo, Brazil’s largest state educational network.

The historical movement toward the creation of the PV course stands in direct opposition to that of Sociology, beginning with its foundational principles: it is defined by the emphasis on socioemotional competencies in structuring the curriculum and by the promotion of a pedagogical approach that demands and celebrates behavioral intervention.

Thus, the establishment of Life Project as a mandatory subject signifies a significant advance of competency-based pedagogy over scientific knowledge. As discussed throughout this text, the educational transformations that have culminated in PV's imposition on the curriculum are linked to the advance of neoliberal policies in public schooling. Such reforms are associated with the broader conflict in which capital (and its agents) seeks to cultivate individuals prepared not only to survive within an economic system that erodes basic rights but also to defend it (Boltanski; Chiapello, 2012).

It is also essential to underscore that this realization should be viewed through a historical lens, revisiting the moments when this type of immediate, fragmented knowledge, legitimized by a technocratic discourse, gained traction in Brazilian education. This brings us to the second characteristic highlighted: the mobilization of democratic forces.

As previously mentioned, Sociology was introduced as a topic in curriculum discussions during the re-democratization period by social movements, while private institutions primarily led the push for the implementation of the Life Project course. This distinction is far from trivial. As seen in São Paulo, the initial coordinating efforts that culminated in the new state curriculum were facilitated by organizations such as IAS and APE, which formed "partnerships" with public authorities and progressively moved to the forefront of public policy decisions.

While these private institutions assert that they champion consensual social interests, as though carrying the banner of the common good, in practice, they were not democratically chosen to fulfill such roles. In other words, their role in shaping public policy, often framed as partnerships, is established without public, collective endorsement—opposed, as noted earlier, by secondary student mobilizations.

Thus, unlike the struggles fought for Sociology's inclusion in the curriculum starting in the 1980s, the presence of the Life Project course signifies the solidification of market influence in defining a curriculum and school model that mirrors market functions.

There are some nuances that should inform our discussion here. First, this study does not aim to propagate the notion that Sociology inherently possesses a "civilizing mission," as if its inclusion in the curriculum inherently steers the educational institution toward a progressive or democratic trajectory. The debates presented here, regarding the origins of Sociology's inclusion in the curriculum and the applied school model, help dispel such potential misunderstandings. Second, the disappearance of Sociology from the curriculum, as discussed here, is symptomatic of the directions that conflicts surrounding public education and schools may take.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that, despite the situation described, history has not reached its end. Schooling and curricula, in our view, remain spaces of conflict and contradiction (Apple, 1995). In light of the discussion presented

in this article, perhaps the most explicit example is the popular backlash against efforts, seen in the discussions around the new BNCC, to exclude subjects like Sociology from the curriculum. Even though affected by competency-based pedagogy, Sociology remains in the curriculum—demonstrating that social mobilizations undoubtedly still hold decisive influence in shaping public policies. Furthermore, they suggest that alternative proposals to market-driven educational models may well emerge from such collective mobilizations.

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