



# Dynamics between potential for strengthening and weakening in the lives of public-school youth: action research with emancipatory workshops

Dinâmica entre potenciais de fortalecimento e desgaste na vida de jovens da escola pública: pesquisa-ação com oficinas emancipatórias


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## Abstract

This action research analyzes the dynamics between the potentials for strengthening and weakening inherent in the social reproduction of young students. Based on the historical-dialectical materialism, particularly on the Theory of Social Determinants of Health, the analysis considered the universal, particular, and singular dimensions of social totality. The study was developed in 13 emancipatory workshops, during a five-month period, attended by 12 high school students from a public school in the city of São Paulo, Brazil. The conditions of social reproduction exposed the participants' family configurations, which suffer from precarious work and unemployment, the absence or inconsistency of paternal support, and a precarious process of resocialization and sociability. The teenagers discussed insecurities and difficulties faced by them in the territories where they live, family conflicts, the repercussions of social pressures to face the future, the place of school and family in their lives, and doubts regarding sexuality and drug use. The emancipatory action research allowed the participants to transcend appearance and demonstrated the essence of their reality, showing that emancipation is based on the understanding of the singular, particular, and universal dimensions of social relations.

**Keywords:** Youth; Collective Health; Social Reproduction; Action Research.

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## Resumo

O objetivo desta pesquisa é analisar a dinâmica entre os potenciais de fortalecimento e desgaste inerentes às condições de reprodução social de jovens escolares. Com base no Materialismo Histórico-Dialético, em particular, na Teoria da Determinação Social da Saúde, a análise considerou as dimensões universal, particular e singular da totalidade social. Trata-se de pesquisa-ação, desenvolvida em 13 oficinas emancipatórias, durante um período de cinco meses, com 12 alunos do ensino médio de uma escola pública da cidade de São Paulo, Brasil. As condições de reprodução social expuseram as configurações familiares dos participantes, que sofrem com a precarização do trabalho e o desemprego, a ausência ou inconsistência de apoio paterno e o precário processo de ressocialização e sociabilidade. Os jovens discutiram as inseguranças e dificuldades que enfrentam nos territórios onde vivem, os conflitos familiares, as repercussões das pressões sociais para enfrentar o futuro, o lugar da escola e da família em suas vidas, além de dúvidas sobre sexualidade e uso de drogas. A pesquisa-ação emancipatória permitiu aos participantes irem além da aparência, e revelou a essência da realidade dos jovens, mostrando que a perspectiva da emancipação está pautada no entendimento das dimensões singular, particular e universal das relações sociais.

**Palavras-chave:** Juventude; Saúde Coletiva; Reprodução Social; Pesquisa Ação.

## Introduction

Youth has been increasingly affected by social inequalities in neoliberal capitalism, facing intense social devaluation, difficulties in participating in socially-produced wealth, through insertion in the labor market, and, ultimately, in envisioning the future (Selau; Kovaleski; Paim, 2020).

Worldwide, among young people in 2018, 30% of women and 13% of men were without a job, education, or training for the world of work, and there is no prospect of improving this situation (ILO, 2019), as neoliberal policies encourage temporary, low-skilled, low-wage jobs, and thus exacerbate the cycle of inequalities (Selau; Kovaleski; Paim, 2020).

In Brazil, the unemployment rate of young people aged between 14 and 29 years has been growing, and educational goals have not been met, as almost 13% of young people aged between 15 and 17 years remain out of school (Falcão; Díaz, 2019). In the age group of 20-24 years old, 27% do not study, work, nor have qualifications (Costa; Rocha; Silva, 2018). Furthermore, young Brazilians are four times more likely to be unemployed than adults (S4YE, 2015).

Early mortality is part of the tragic reality of youth. A report of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO, 2018) shows that half of all deaths among young people are due to traffic accidents, suicides, and homicides.

The Brazilian homicide rate reached 69.9 per 100 thousand young people (Ipea, 2019), evidencing the drastic firearm violence that affects the young (Pinto et al., 2020). Young people from peripheral areas are the ones losing their lives violently, as a result of the dynamics between concentration of capital and social inequality, which is reproduced through strong hierarchy and racial segregation. Capital demands from the State processes that intervene in this large contingent of individuals who do not “contribute” to the reproduction of capital, which is accomplished by the overwhelming exercise of punitive power that falls on the youth of the periphery of large cities (Morais, 2018).

The implementation of policies and guidelines for the operationalization of actions to protect young people in Brazil remains precarious, even though the Youth Statute was enacted at the beginning

of this century (Ribeiro; Macedo, 2018), and there is strong evidence of the compensatory, focused, and fragmented nature of the provided protection (Pasquim; Campos; Soares, 2016).

The intensification of neoliberalism in the country brought further setback to youth policies (Selau; Kovaleski; Paim, 2020). After the 2018 elections, the articulation of conservative and neoliberal groups, which expanded their political representation in the Brazilian parliament, has increasingly been deleteriously interfering with the main social, cultural, and educational issues (Lima; Hypolito, 2019), a situation that is aggravated by the proposition of partnership between the military sector and the departments of education to exercise control over young people, through the reintroduction of disciplinary provisions (Martins, 2019).

In this study, it is assumed that in order to respond to the health needs of the young, it is necessary to consider the generational dimension in its relationship with social reproduction. The later is deemed, according to Latin American critical epidemiology, as the set of social life composed of the social classes' ways of producing/working and consuming/living, the relationships that these classes establish when producing social life, and the degree of organization achieved by them (Viana; Soares; Campos, 2013). From this theoretical-methodological perspective, Queiroz and Salum (1997) introduced the expression "potential for strengthening and weakening" to emphasize the dialectical relationship between processes that mediate the ways of producing and living and the health-disease process. In this study, which can be added to the research on youth of *Grupo de Pesquisa Fortalecimento e desgaste no trabalho e na vida: bases para a intervenção em Saúde Coletiva* [Research Group Strengthening and Weakening at Work and in Life: bases for Intervention in Collective Health], it is assumed that the generational experience of young people is established from the potential for strengthening and weakening inherent in the conditions of social reproduction of the social class to which their families belong (Santos; Soares, 2017).

Knowing the conditions of social reproduction of young students who attend public schools can

provide lines of action for the organization of working-class youth, as well as support health workers and other social areas in the initiatives to strengthen young people, in addition to the formulation of public policies. Thus, the research question is: what are and how is the relation of the potentials of strengthening and weakening inherent in the conditions of social reproduction of young working-class students who attend public schools in the largest and richest Brazilian capital?

This research aims to analyze the dynamics between the potential for strengthening and weakening inherent in the conditions of social reproduction of young people in a public high school in the capital of the state of São Paulo, Brazil.

## Methodology

This is a qualitative research, based on Historical-Dialectical Materialism, which was developed according to the guidelines of the Emancipatory Action Research (PAE), a methodology that requires the active participation of external (proponents) and internal researchers (who experience the reality under study) to problematize the selection of the object, first brought up in its appearance, to understand it as part of the social totality, seeking the essence from the connections with the other dimensions of social life (Soares et al., 2018).

The article followed the recommendations of the Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research (O'Brien et al., 2014).

## Study location

The research was carried out at Escola Estadual Fernão Dias (State School), located in the neighborhood of Pinheiros, in the city of São Paulo (state of São Paulo, Brazil), selected for being one of the symbols of the manifestations of high school students, in 2015 and 2016, indicative both of the reception of the project and the critical potential of the students.

## Ethical-legal procedures

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Nursing, University of

São Paulo (Opinion No. 1.969.846) and conducted in accordance with the ethical requirements of research involving human beings. The school administration of Fernão Dias State School authorized the research. All young students who agreed to participate in the workshops signed the Assent Form, and their guardians signed the Informed Consent Form.

This study was self-funded and originated from the doctoral dissertation of the first author.

## Research participants

The external researchers are health professionals with experience in the areas of Collective Health and Youth. The internal researchers are high school students. The invitation to participate in the research was made in the classrooms, for second-year students. At that moment, the objectives and methods of the research were presented; after invitation, 12 teenagers were motivated to participate in the study.

The high school students aged between 15 and 16 years and were from different classes. Despite the prime location in the city where the school is located, most teenagers did not live nearby and spent up to one hour and a half on the daily commute from home to school.

## Data production and organization

To understand the social reproduction of families, the students filled out a form with variables that compose the Social Reproduction Index (IRS) (Arruda et al., 2017).

The emancipatory workshops, which are strategically used in the PAE, are conducted to provide the full and radical participation of researchers, through the display of opinions and convictions in pedagogically planned spaces and, at the same time, to contribute to the understanding of reality by the vigorous instrumentalization of the participants in the educational process (Soares et al., 2018).

The workshops took place for five months, between April and September 2017, outside school hours. In the first 13 meetings, lasting approximately two hours each, the young people's living and

health conditions were constantly discussed. The 11 subsequent workshops were operational in nature, with the purpose of technically producing a mobile application and, therefore, are not part of this article. There was no preestablished script for the workshops. The workshops were conducted taking as reference the experience of external researchers and the theoretical-practical interests and needs of the group, assessed at each meeting.

## Data analysis

Data analysis was carried out during the research process, based on the dialectical method, which does not admit abstract fragmentation between the singular, particular, and universal dimensions, as these are dimensions of the same social totality. The Marxist dialectics assumes that reality is always richer than the knowledge individuals have about it, and one way to produce syntheses is to promote successive approximations that relate the dimensions of the phenomenon in the process of totalization that never reaches a definitive stage. *"It is from the view of the whole that we can assess the dimension of each element,"* as oriented by Konder (2017, p. 35, free translation), and the structural modification happens from the changes of the parts that compose the whole.

Thus, emancipatory workshops have the potential to analyze the relationship between the potentials for strengthening and weakening of families of young people (singular and particular dimensions) and the social organization determined by the capitalist mode of reproduction - which generates inequalities (universal dimension), partial, and mediating manifestations that compose the social totality. The emancipatory workshop is configured as an instrument of emancipatory educational processes whose purpose is to explain and encourage the reflection of social contradictions, aiming at making those involved aware of the object and purpose of the social practices in which they are involved, and free to make social criticism and propositions for the transformation of reality (Soares et al., 2018).

It was assumed that the PAE would enable to highlight this dynamic between the potential for strengthening and weakening in the working,

living, and health conditions of young people. Such conditions are distinct for the different social classes and result from the processes of social reproduction of the social groups to which the families belong (Breilh, 2015). Thus, the analysis of the dynamics between the potentials for strengthening and

weakening enables to make visible the contradictory essence of social organization and its marks on the living and health conditions of young people and their families.

Chart 1 presents the topics addressed and the strategies adopted in the workshops.

**Chart 1 – Topics and strategies adopted in workshops with young people**

Workshop	Topics	Strategies
1	Presentation of the proposal and participants	Conversation circle
2	Intra-family conflicts	Avatar creation
3	Needs and shortfalls of young people's families	Avatar creation
4	Social reproduction and health	Dialogued exposition
5	Work and labor market in the contemporaneity	Screening of the animated short film "El Empleo" and of the song "Marvin"
6	Education as a project for the future	Educational game about values <sup>1</sup>
7	Project for the future	Conversation circle
8	Social unprotection and gender issues	Educational game <i>Cidade Dorme: representações cotidianas sobre drogas</i> [City Sleeps: everyday representations about drugs] <sup>2</sup>
9	Family	Discussion about text on family economics <sup>3</sup>
10	Sexuality	Meme balloon
11	Social fears and pressures nowadays	Reading and discussion of press material on social networking and mental health <sup>4</sup>
12	Drug use	Conversation circle
13	Essential contents for health education with young people	List of contents to compose a mobile application on the topic of young people's health

## Results

### Social Reproduction Index of youth<sup>1234</sup>

The adolescents' families were classified into four social groups (GI, GII, GIII, and GIV) that present internal homogeneity as for ways of working and living. GI is the most stable group. Only one adolescent was classified in this group

(8.3%). In such group, the person responsible for the household has a qualified, formal job with benefits; the family owns a house and has access to water and electricity services. GII showed less stability in the ways of living and working than GI. Seven young people were in this group (58.3%). Overall, those responsible for the household had semi-skilled jobs and had a formal contract; most of them often lived in rented houses. GIII (16.6%) and GIV (16.6%) were

1 See: YONEKURA, T.; SOARES, C. B. The Educative Game as a Sensitization Strategy for the Collection of Data with Adolescents. *Revista Latino-Americana de Enfermagem*, Ribeirão Preto, v. 18, n. 5, p. 968-974, 2010.

2 See: SOARES, C. B. *Cidade Dorme - representações cotidianas sobre drogas*. *Universidade de São Paulo*, São Paulo, [20-]. Available from: <<https://bit.ly/3tMX1W>>.

3 See: BOWDOR, L. A economia da família. *Psicologia USP*, São Paulo, v. 26, n. 1, p. 15-26, 2015.

4 See: SALAS, J. Instagram é a pior rede para a saúde mental dos adolescentes. *El País*, [s.l.], 22 maio 2017. Available from: <<https://bit.ly/35ih4Nm>>.

the groups with the greatest instabilities. At the time of the research, the family members of these young students were unemployed and had sporadic jobs for their livelihood. It can be said that young people were part of working-class families with some instability of social reproduction, that is, they had ways of working and living susceptible to change, due to economic crises or other problems that may affect family members.

### **Analysis of the workshop process**

The presentation of the analysis follows the order of development of the workshops, highlighting the dynamics between the potential for strengthening and weakening exposed during the process.

In Workshop 1, the presentation of the research objectives and methods was resumed as well as the voluntary nature of participation in the research. It was stressed that participation would mean sharing responsibility with external researchers for the directions the investigation would take.

During the initial dialogue, the adolescents exposed the insecurities and difficulties faced by them in the territories where they live and study, and reflected on how this insecurity affects their lives and health.

In the very first workshops (2 and 3), the students addressed the difficulty of relationship with their parents, which they considered a common and current problem; they understood intra-family conflicts as an expression of a serious problem of inability to communicate and, at the same time, they recognized that the family played a fundamental role in maintaining their expectations of survival and future. In this sense, they argued that family members should unite through dialogue, which could be facilitated by communication techniques and/or games.

This issue was especially addressed from the strategy of collective creation of avatars. In this exercise, the avatar was a representation in the form of a figure, taking its image for creating the group's identity. To this end, the avatars should have unique characteristics (hair style, eye color, clothing style, sexual orientation, etc.) and gather elements of social reproduction, represented in the

details of context (housing, occupation, access or not to culture and education, etc.).

The strategy of creating avatars involved two meetings, which, in turn, ensured the free creation and in-depth discussion of the stories, based on the experience and imagination of the adolescents. This time allowed them to bring new considerations and delve deeper into the avatars' characteristics.

The discussion that followed connected personal characteristics to the social reproduction of families belonging to different social classes, which questioned the initial explanation that family conflicts primarily arise from a lack of communication skills.

The notion that families belong to a social class and that, depending on the particular conditions and repercussions, they suffer more or less deprivation was developed throughout the workshops, delimited by the theoretical instrumentation presented in Workshop 4. In this case, while discussing current issues, they reflected on their own experience and ability to face the adult world.

The family topic was resumed in Workshop 9 due to the need to understand the decomposition of the extended family. In this workshop, the students reported serious tensions and family conflicts, such as paternal abandonment and domestic violence, which they recognized as expressions of conflicts aggravated by difficulties and deprivations. The witnessed aggressions were not accompanied by reports of domestic violence, and most of the time the stories did not seem to evidence the recognition of a crime, but rather a moral disapproval of the violence against the mother figure. In this sense, the couple's separation was deemed as the only definitive solution.

The speeches of adolescents about the difficulties in maintaining families were often followed by reports about the absence of the State in the life of the family and the permanent presence of mothers, usually described as responsible for the household, as they were responsible for paying for "the stuff" (bills).

Workshop 5 introduced the discussion about work as a fundamental element to make the future feasible. The issue that most generated concerns and fears was related to the difficulty in accessing the labor market, a difficulty that remained despite

access to formal education and some public policies, considered insufficient.

The participants indicated that the cause of unemployment would be the lack of study or the individual unpreparedness of the worker; they stated that will and merit would be crucial for a good position, even if school education did not guarantee immediate insertion in the labor market. This belief produced more suffering among young people whose families presented greater instabilities in the ways of social reproduction.

The teenagers showed partial knowledge of student, popular, and trade union movements; however, they did not see themselves linked to them. The group itself mentioned neighborhood and student associations as an option to be protected and belong to a community. The adolescents knew that anyone could participate, but they, individually, did not participate in such movements; they pointed out, as a justification, the discredit of associations and traditional forms of social and political struggle, reporting that people who were in charge of these organizations did not care that much and/or provided little opportunity to collective management.

Apparently, young people showed little willingness to contribute with new experiences, even if they recognized that political organizations resisted structural contradictions, such as fragmentation and bureaucracy, and that these forums of participation would have the potential of all those involved in their construction.

The adolescents also stated that none of them had participated in the occupation of high school students, which took place in the second semester of 2016 at the school where they study, and in others, as they were very young at the time. Even without having participated, they recognized that struggle as a historic victory for the students, but deemed that such mobilization did not leave a legacy in the school, beyond the formal release of election of the Student Union. This assessment on the part of the students seems to reduce the importance of releasing the Student Union.

Other meetings (Workshops 6 and 7) proposed discussions that deepened the debate on the future envisioned by young people. Success was deconstructed as a direct result of merit.

Nevertheless, it was described as a “quite heavy burden,” related to the fear of failure. Accordingly, they listed several pressure situations, such as the college admission exam, entering the labor market, the promise and threat of adult life. The adolescents related these pressures to the demands that came from themselves, the school, their families, and society, and showed that they would be among the cause of the anxious and depressive symptoms of many teenagers.

Through the exchange of reports and catharsis, it was possible to expand the initial understanding of merit as a social competition. Based on this broadening of understanding, the group reported relief and recognized the urgency of mental health care and collective responses to problems generated by society.

The project for the future was addressed during the educational game with evaluative sentences (Workshop 6) and the conversation circle in Workshop 7. It is noteworthy the report that the workshops developed during the research were the only experience of consciously emancipatory education in which they participated.

Sexuality also proved to be a sensitive subject, being the topic of the educational game *Cidade Dorme* (Workshop 8) and deepened in the playful strategy of memes in balloons (Workshop 10).

Although important, the group stated that the topic is not discussed at school, home, or any other space in which they participate. During the development of the educational game, the group felt safe to give personal examples and demonstrate their doubts about their own sexual orientation.

In Workshop 10, memes were used as communication resources to convey a quick message, usually using humor. This strategy was developed in two moments.

At first, the external researcher selected some memes that addressed gender issues, Sexually Transmitted Infections (IST), and sexual and reproductive health. On that day, each adolescent tied a balloon to their foot and had to defend it from their peers. There was a meme inside each balloon. When a balloon burst, everyone sat down to read the meme and reflect on the matter at hand.

Subsequently, it was proposed that the group created memes about sexuality and gender issues.

They presented three memes on the subject: two about machismo and one about pregnancy. The discussions were stimulated by the memes, inciting new elements and enabling the group to reach new syntheses on the topics already discussed.

The reflections generated by the group debate helped to resolve doubts about contraceptive methods, demystify the meaning of fully experiencing sexuality, and bring the importance of freedom to the level of consciousness to make projects for life and the future, without oppression.

Some topics emerged as old taboos that had already been overcome (virginity and beauty standards) and were contextualized. Others generated intense discussions, as they mobilized conflicting convictions, such as identity issues about machismo, the exercise of female sexuality, and issues related to heteronormativity (a concept that describes situations that turn those who are not cisgender and heterosexual into deviants).

Another important issue discussed by the group was the role of social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram (Workshop 11). For young people, they serve both to pass the time and keep in touch with friends and to promote the consumption of a certain happiness, satisfaction of unattainable desires for most of the population. According to the adolescents, photos and comments on social media do not match the real lives of their peers.

Drugs were mentioned in different workshops, but were directly addressed only in Workshop 12. To address the topic, a presentation was held with the presence of an invited expert. During this presentation, the teenagers were instigated to participate.

Initially, they described drug experimentation as something negative, but also as a common practice linked to youthful curiosity. Reproducing common sense knowledge, they classified some drugs as heavy and others as light, based on what they considered to be the expected effects of each substance on the body. This classification, according to them, guided the experimentations. Conversely, chemical dependence was described by young people as a consequence of abuse, which, in turn, could generate other social problems, including social withdrawal and family violence. Some individuals recalled the controversy

over drug regulation, but overall, they pointed to abstinence as the only way to solve the problem.

In this first approach to the content, they mentioned the Educational Program for Resistance to Drugs and Violence (Proerd) as the only educational action they knew about the subject and described the program as an instructive strategy, but some of them pointed out the inefficiency of the program.

Based on these dialogues, the fact that drug use can have a recreational, therapeutic, work-related, in short, unproblematic character, was problematized, even if, nowadays, drug consumption takes on the alienated form of relief from social ill-being, thus predominating misconceptions concerning the phenomenon.

The invited expert addressed the topic based on the harm reduction movement, pointing out the prohibitionist war as part of the drug issue. She presented this problem as a historical construct closely linked to capitalist social metabolism.

Overall, the dialogue provoked by the expert allowed bringing to light elements of the reality experienced by all. From them, the adolescents reported the constant presence of drugs in everyday life and the ease of access. As an example, they mentioned the frequent cases of drunkenness of the father or stepfather, followed by psychological and/or physical aggressions. According to the students, fights were naturally repeated, justified by the consumption of alcohol.

During this workshop, young people were able to get to know and collectively discuss some emancipatory strategies of the harm reduction movement, which aims to strengthen people and social groups to respond to problems associated with drug consumption.

The adopted workshop strategies served to introduce and deepen several topics. All in all, they enabled to raise awareness, structure, and systematize collective ideas; they also made it possible to use specific knowledge that was required to increase the potential of formulating a more comprehensive picture of the discussed issue.

In Workshop 13, it was proposed that teenagers collectively list the essential contents to develop a mobile application aimed at the health education of



young people. Not all the contents that were initially proposed or discussed in the set of workshops proved to be relevant. Some, such as meritocracy and prohibitionism, were identified as ideologies, in the sense of distorting reality, and others, as important though secondary topics (communication skills and self-esteem).

The application developed by them was called *Fala Sério* ["Be serious"] and presented the following tabs, as chosen by the adolescents: family; social pressures; drugs; body; and sexuality.

## Discussion

The reflection generated in the workshops on the potential for weakening and strengthening of young people and their families was immediately related, as expected, to what young people concretely experience in their daily lives.

Thus, the family stood out, proving to be an essential institution in the lives of the adolescents of this research, and presenting itself as the main or underlying topic in several workshops. At first, the fetishized conception of family had repercussions on the speeches of young people, being identified, for example, when the strong role of the mother, domestic violence, and paternal abandonment were interpreted as personal attributes and/or moral deviations. With the analysis provided by the workshops and the consequent movement on the part of the adolescents to deepen the understanding of families in society, the founding structural place of the family in capitalism and the functions it performs in the social reproduction of its members came to light.

Supported by the social service debate (Mito; Dal Prá, 2015), it was possible to understand that, due to neoliberalism, the few existing social programs not only fail to support the difficulties of social reproduction of families, but also attribute to it the responsibility for the social protection of its members. From this perspective, collective health also contributes to the criticism of health practices, especially in the context of Primary Health Care, which consider families with problems as dysfunctional, maladjusted, or dysfunctional families (Campos et al., 2020).

The social demand for a great altruistic effort on the part of working-class families, as well as the resignation and need for sacrifices of its members, are ideological guidelines that justify the only policies adopted by the neoliberal State, those of a compensatory and focused nature.

Currently, most of the expenses of Brazilian families are concentrated on compensating for the absence of social rights, provided for in the Federal Constitution of 1988, but not supplied by the State. In this sense, the Consumer Expenditure Survey (POF), by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE, 2019), shows the commitment to spending and consumption of Brazilian families. Consistent with the historical trend, the main family expenses continue to be housing, food, transport, and health.

Considering the understanding of the group participating in the workshops, family is important; however, the discussion about the concrete reality of the families enabled to verify how much they are overstretched, and suffer deep and violent distresses, without being able to make social reproduction and the socialization of their members feasible. In this research, it was possible to recognize barriers to the strengthening of the family as well as to perceive the limits of the protective function of this institution and the merely ideological character of the discourse of individual efforts and family reorganizations.

In the workshops, the initial belief that the increase in the years of formal education could guarantee a good position in the labor market did not resist the elements of reality that were brought up by the participants. Hence, their fear of "not being able to cope" with the pressures to make a promising future feasible and to access the labor market was soon explained by the analysis of unemployment data and the most common occupations for students from Brazilian public schools. The current labor market requires specific technical training and, at the same time, the ability to be multifunctional, which disadvantages young people from public schools, even if they make an individual effort (ILO, 2019).

With the capitalist promise of qualification for work increasingly distant, due to the rearrangements of the accumulation regime, the school was reduced to a space for young people to pass the time, keeping

them away from the streets and/or from other dangers common to marginalized spaces (Mészáros, 2012). Quality education is far from the reach of most young people who attend public schools, with the few exceptions being used to disseminate ideological narratives about the individual effort of those who broke out the social filter.

With regard to youth work, given the globalized reality in which several countries are going through an economic crisis that has turned into a democratic crisis, young people are reduced to contributors through youth work and/or mere supporters of the demographic balance, especially in European countries. Thus, a tendency to use youth work for economic and political interests is identified instead of formulating a policy aimed at instrumentalizing young people, through work, to become critical citizens (Connolly, 2017).

The adolescents discussed the lack of belonging felt by them, which was exposed as disbelief in the known forms of participation and social struggle for rights. The literature attempts to explain that young people's participation is limited by their difficulties in social reproduction (Paula; Afonso, 2018).

This research made available some theoretical-practical tools for young people to recognize and intervene in reality, and provided the strengthening of the intra-group bond.

Based on Stotz's (2007) statement, according to which class consciousness enables to identify the perspective of human emancipation, without disregarding the transforming power of communication and dialogue and the transforming vocation of education as praxis, beyond school (Freire, 2019), understanding the current malaise as a result of the absence of a common social project, capable of assigning a broad meaning to human existence and echoing the "education beyond capital" (Mészáros, 2012), it is advocated, in this line of research, the development and adoption, by social institutions aimed at young people, of practices critical to the dominant ideology, which expose everyday obstacles beyond the individual dimension with clarity - which is potentially strengthening, as the alienation that produces conflicts and frustrations that disintegrate social relations in this dimension and exempt other social institutions from the search for radical solutions is denaturalized.

Other experiences of instrumentalization of young people, as demonstrated by Paixão et al. (2018) and David et al. (2018), followed the same path as this study and proved to be equally powerful in raising awareness among students on topics related to the social totality such as the organization of capitalist society, the production of inequalities and their relationship with health, the context of policies, and the social struggles for the defense of rights in Brazil. The experience of youth protagonism discussed by Tasca, Brandão and Branco (2020) illustrates the challenges of promoting the presence of young people in health services and its importance for the formation of more autonomous trajectories.

It is worth emphasizing that the workshops had the wide participation and attendance of the 12 young people who committed to fully participate in the process, contradicting false narratives that assume that young people are alienated and not interested in debating topics related to the particular and universal dimensions.

In this sense, emancipatory workshops prove to be a powerful tool to synthesize socially determined strengths and weaknesses, which can provide collective action to respond to the health needs of young people.

## Final considerations

The emancipatory action research process provided results beyond appearance, demonstrating the essence of the dynamics between the potential for weakening and strengthening inherent in the reality of young people, that is, it supported the process of understanding that this dynamic is not essentially altered in the singular dimension, through individual and family effort.

The adolescents, who attend public schools in São Paulo and whose families belong to social groups with unstable conditions of social reproduction, identified the consequences of the ways of working and living of their families, relating them to the social class and the means of production as a whole and, therefore, understood the importance of considering the particular and general dimension in the analysis of the reality in which they are inserted.

The result reflects the difficulties of other groups that live in similar conditions of social reproduction. The emancipatory process of criticism of the social production mode, based on the Theory of Social Determinants of Health, offers subsidies to guide the health work processes aimed at young people, notably, the processes of health education.

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## Authors' Contribution

Lachtim and Soares were responsible for the conception, writing, and critical review of the manuscript. Trapé and Pasquim were responsible for the writing and critical review of the manuscript.

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