

Sousa, Maria do Carmo; Moreira, Maria Ignez Costa. Low-income youth and long-term school permanence: the senses built up by Prouni scholarship holders in Belo Horizonte (MG)

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## **Juventude pobre e longevidade escolar: sentidos construídos por bolsistas do Prouni em Belo Horizonte (MG)**

## **Juventud pobre y longevidad escolar: sentidos construidos por becarios del Prouni en Belo Horizonte (MG)**

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### **Abstract**

This article is derived from a doctoral research carried out in Belo Horizonte (MG), aiming at learning and understanding the senses low-income youths, who are Prouni (University for All Program) scholarship holders, set up concerning long-term school permanence. The qualitative study is anchored in the theoretical-methodological principles of Socio-Historical Psychology, which emphasizes the constitution of the subject in the socio-historical context, in addition to the subjects' activity as potential changers of their own context. In order to understand low-income youths' unique experience of long-term school permanence, we present the notion of youth as a plural category, as well as the Prounischolarship holders' life contexts, and the senses they develop based on their own experience as university students, which we collected using semi-structured interviews.

**Keywords:** Prouni; Low-income youth; School permanence; Higher education; Socio-Historical Psychology.

### **Resumo**

O presente artigo é derivado de pesquisa de doutoramento realizada em Belo Horizonte (MG), cujo objetivo foi apreender e compreender os sentidos que os jovens pobres, bolsistas do Programa Universidade para Todos (Prouni) constroem para a longevidade escolar. O estudo qualitativo foi ancorado nos princípios teórico-metodológicos da Psicologia Sócio-Histórica, que enfatiza a constituição do sujeito no contexto sócio-histórico, bem como a atividade do sujeito como potencialmente transformadora do próprio contexto. Para a compreensão da vivência singular da longevidade escolar dos jovens pobres, apresentamos a noção de juventude como uma categoria

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Sousa, Maria do Carmo; Moreira, Maria Ignez Costa. Low-income youth and long-term school permanence: the senses built up by Prouni scholarship holders in Belo Horizonte (MG)

plural, os contextos de vida dos jovens bolsistas do Prouni e os sentidos que eles constroem para a própria experiência de estudantes universitários, que buscamos apreender por meio da realização de entrevistas semiestruturadas.

**Palavras-chave:** Prouni; Jovens pobres; Longevidade escolar; Ensino Superior; Psicologia Sócio-Histórica.

### **Resumen**

El presente artículo se deriva de la investigación de doctorado realizada en Belo Horizonte (MG), cuyo objetivo fue aprehender y comprender los sentidos que los jóvenes pobres, becarios del Programa Universidad para Todos (Prouni) construyen para la longevidad escolar. El estudio cualitativo fue anclado en los principios teórico-metodológicos de la Psicología Socio-Histórica, que enfatiza la constitución del sujeto en el contexto socio-histórico, así como la actividad del sujeto como potencialmente transformadora del propio contexto. Para la comprensión de la vivencia singular de la longevidad escolar de los jóvenes pobres, presentamos la noción de juventud como una categoría plural, los contextos de vida de los jóvenes becarios del Prouni y los sentidos que ellos construyen para la propia experiencia de estudiantes universitarios, que buscamos aprehender por medio de la realización de entrevistas semiestruturadas.

**Palabras clave:** Prouni; Jóvenes pobres; Longevidad escolar; Enseñanza superior; Psicología Socio-Histórica.

Sousa, Maria do Carmo; Moreira, Maria Inez Costa. Low-income youth and long-term school permanence: the senses built up by Prouni scholarship holders in Belo Horizonte (MG)

## Introduction

We present in this study the youth as the subject of the Prouni – University for All Program – because we emphasize their condition as a subject and not as a Prouni’s protected object. In this sense, we understand these young university students as active subjects who incorporate in their daily lives, multiple concepts concerning either the youth or the university education, that is, they become young university students in their life context changing dialectically both, themselves and their context.

The University for All Program–Prouni – was established by the Law 11,096 on January 13th 2005, aiming at expanding and democratizing the accessibility of low-income youths to university level education by means of scholarships at private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The term “low-income youths” “used in the research, refers to young people coming from low-income families deprived of the accessibility to material and symbolic assets, due to the deep socio-economic inequalities that mark the Brazilian society.

Prouni is granted to young students who comply with eight criteria, of which we shall highlight three: students must prove a monthly gross family income (*per capita*) not higher than one and a half Brazilian minimum wage to apply for a full scholarships or up to three Brazilian minimum wages for a 25% or 50% partial scholarship; applicants must have done the whole second grade (high school) at a school

belonging to the Public System<sup>3</sup> or at a private school under the benefits of a full scholarship and the student must have taken the Second Grade National Examination (*Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* - ENEM), in which they must have obtained the minimum mark of 450 points, and any grade different from zero in the writing exam.

Such criteria point out the youth’s socioeconomic profile. That is, a youth who comes from a low-income social class, whose families and personal background, in most of the cases, present a history of struggle to reach material and symbolic assets, and who, mostly, are former students from schools integrating the School Public System.

## The Uniqueness of Young Prouni Scholarship holder within the Youth Plurality

The concept of youth based on which we guided our research is understood according to the principles in Socio-Historical Psychology, conceived by Vygotsky (1993) based on the Dialectical Method. In this approach, the subject is historical, cultural and dialectically both, what is constructed and the constructor of their context and life course. In this sense, the subjects carry out their lives in a concrete context. Therefore, the young subjects approached in this study are in continuous process of construction, mutually affecting and transforming both, the reality of the context and themselves.

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<sup>3</sup> Translator’s Note: Brazilian schools pertaining to the Public System are entirely built, funded and supported by the city, state or national government.

Sousa, Maria do Carmo; Moreira, Maria Inez Costa. Low-income youth and long-term school permanence: the senses built up by Prouni scholarship holders in Belo Horizonte (MG)

The youths of our research live in the city of Belo Horizonte, state of Minas Gerais (MG), in Brazil, and are included in the category of urban youth. In this way each youth is a subject and at the same time singular and collective; as Vygotsky (2000) states, the subject is “a set of social relationships incarnated in the individual.” (p.33).

The youth is not a singular and monolithic category, but instead a category that bears diversity and plurality. And, within this plurality, we come across the youths, subjects of this study: poor Belo Horizonte young women and men, holders of a Prouni scholarship, who tread towards the attempt to reach school permanence, understood as the admission, permanence and successful completion of a higher education course.

It is a youth living in the midst of structural inequalities, deprived of tangible assets, facing employment instability, schooling interruption and struggling for housing - it is noticeable that an expressive number of residences are settled in regions of Belo Horizonte where the Human Development Index (HDI) is drastically low.

Therefore, it is in this context that the subjects we have described here are challenged to build up their life plans, struggle to reach higher education levels while having to exercise autonomy facing all the confrontations inherent of this personal and collective scenario.

Youths' right to Higher Education is undeniable, as the access to such symbolic assets is a human being's inalienable right and fruit of humanity's historical and social construction process. Although, we cannot link the completion of a higher education course to a better condition to be inserted into the world of

work, we cannot fail to recognize that the society is experiencing a moment in which scientific knowledge has become more and more necessary. A moment in which volatility, transitoriness, advanced technology and the new capital format are trademarks of the historical time in which we live and in such way, requiring more and more creativity, comprehensive formation, and preparation to deal with the demands arising from this context (Sousa, 2011).

The Socio-historical approach allows us to understand men and women as subjects that build themselves socially and in the relation with the others. In this sense, in the singularity we find the collective and in the collective dimension the singular; therefore, all human relations are mediated socially and semiotically (Molon, 2008).

Public policies aiming at low-income youths have been based on the assumptions, since the promulgation of the Child and Adolescent Statute (1990) and the Youth Statute (2013) – that these are subjects of rights; nevertheless, it is also necessary to recognize them as political subjects capable of expressing their own demands and exercise active and critical social participation.

Public policies, specifically public policies aimed at education, must provide conditions to exercise citizenship in the present youth time and at the same time they must enable them to build conditions required for a subjective formation and the formation of a citizen in the adulthood. In this sense, Sposito (2007) ponders:

When they are allowed to express and when they are heard, young people demand changes in the world that are related to the possibility of building another future where

Sousa, Maria do Carmo; Moreira, Maria Inez Costa. Low-income youth and long-term school permanence: the senses built up by Prouni scholarship holders in Belo Horizonte (MG)

school and work are important dimensions of this project. Besides these concerns, they are willing to intensively experience current time in the sphere of leisure, enjoyment and access to cultural possessions as long as minimum urban life conditions are reassured. (p. 35)

Youth as already pointed out in this article cannot be considered as universal and non-historical, since it is plural, diverse and it is inserted in a society of classes and inequalities. Understanding youth as a transitory stage of life towards adulthood and a time of disengaged experiences is not the reality of all youths and in this sense Dayrell (2012) states:

In Brazil, youth cannot be characterized by work moratorium, as it is common in European countries. On the contrary, for large numbers of young people, conditions are only experienced because they work, reassuring the minimum conditions to enjoy leisure, dating or consumption. Work experience may commonly start during adolescence, through the most varied "odd jobs", in an instability that tends to persist throughout the youth. We cannot forget the transitions that have been changing the way young people enter the job market. There has been an increase in unemployment, with reduction of wages and the generation of precarious labor conditions that hit, mainly, youths from low-income social classes, limiting the realm of their experiences and their span of possibilities. (p. 313)

According to Dayrell (2012), we emphasize the importance of Prouni as a program aimed to assist the low-income youth. This youth that does not deal with any kind of moratorium, because real time urgencies emerge out and they have to be faced. Low-income youths live in a

state of tension between the immediacy to overcome the daily difficulties and dreams of the future to be achieved through a higher school level and the inclusion into professions and skilled jobs, conditions taken as required for the social mobility.

For low-income youths, working and studying are not opposing activities as they have been coexisting in their universe since adolescence. The effort to reconcile work and study forced many of these youths to postpone the dream of accomplishing a university course. These youths' paths or lack of paths picture a track within an educational system that leads them to both, inclusion and exclusion, with the prophecy that children and youths from lower-income social classes will have difficulties learning and are seen as fated to school failure and high dropout rates.

The issue of university students from lower social classes has been the subject of researches in recent years. These studies state that school permanence, which includes university education, demand from low-income young people and their families' strategies that not only enable them to be admitted into higher education courses, but also guarantee a successful conclusion. The graduation in university courses is a victory at the same time individual and collective. The completion of a university grade breaks off the prophecy of failure in education as being a natural pre-determined destination for these young people, and opens up chances for other youths in the family, and, based on them, for future generations. (Mariz, Fernandes and Batista, 1999; Portes, 1993; Zago, 2006; 2007; Viana, 2007).

Sousa, Maria do Carmo; Moreira, Maria Inez Costa. Low-income youth and long-term school permanence: the senses built up by Prouni scholarship holders in Belo Horizonte (MG)

### **Meeting young Prouni scholarship holders in Belo Horizonte**

We first searched on the Ministry of Education and Culture (Ministério da Educação e Cultura - MEC) website to find out the list of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Belo Horizonte which are Prouni's partners, and the mapping of these institutions within the administrative regions of Belo Horizonte. The effort to determine the distribution of Prouni's partner through the nine administrative regions turned out to be justified due to the fact that each region holds particularities regarding the population profile, urban conditions of access to material and symbolic assets, greater or lesser presence of public premises, mobility, among others.

The courses selected in each HEIs were those with higher social prestige, such as Medicine, Engineering, Law, Architecture, Administration, Psychology, Physiotherapy and Accounting Sciences, in the morning, afternoon, evening and/or in full-time courses.

In order to construct the youths' inclusion criterion required for this study, the difficulties inherent in these courses were also taken into consideration, such as: level of competition in the university admission tests, the effort required to comply with the study demands and the complexity of the disciplines, as the youths' socioeconomic and symbolic context was considered as an aspect that could increase the degree of these difficulties, such as requiring new strategies to overcome adverse conditions.

The experiences narrated by young university students, Prouni

scholarship holders, unveiled that in addition to the difficulties inherent in the courses they had chosen, commuting between their home and the university entails a financial burden of public transport, with consequences for the families' budgets. Throughout the university courses, lots of scholarship holders had to find ways to earn incomes, from a part time or a paid-up training program, often jeopardizing the time required to study or enjoy leisure and cultural activities, which are not only important but also beneficial for the formation of the youth.

In each of the HEIs, we chose university students from two different levels: one group of students regularly enrolled in initial terms and others from the last years of the courses, regardless the gender. The course coordinators mediated the contact with the students. Twenty (20) semi-structured interviews were conducted with the young scholars. The objectives of these interviews aimed to understand the paths they took, as well as the development made through their experiences in higher education, within the context of Prouni. The senses concerning school permanence, through Prouni, built by low-income youths of Belo Horizonte were analyzed in their dialectical process, trying to break the dichotomies between the individual and collective dimensions.

According to Vygotsky (1996), it is through the senses that the subject may come out of the shadows and show consciousness, the expression of his/her subjectivity. We will only be certain that the thought is being communicated effectively, if we understand the sense of the word.

Sousa, Maria do Carmo; Moreira, Maria Inez Costa. Low-income youth and long-term school permanence: the senses built up by Prouni scholarship holders in Belo Horizonte (MG)

By reflecting the reality and giving support to generalizing thinking, a word has its meaning altered according to the way social reality is carried out. Considering the meaning of the word a generalization and a verbal act of the thought, and the meaning of the word being a non-transferable part of itself, it leads to the understanding that the meaning of the word is a phenomenon of both thought and language. (Molon, 2008, p. 61)

Young scholars reported emotionally their family and school stories, these reports being permeated by the memories from their former schools, the ways and deviations taken before being admitted to a Higher Education School through Prouni. Aguiar (2001) state that “the speech will always be moving, that is, it will have as part of its constitution the emotional dimension, expressing a subject’s evaluation of the subject, that is, the subjective sense that certain facts and or events had for him/her” (p. 106).

The interviews transcribed, read and read again were analyzed in such a way that we could find the nuclei of the meaning. The relationship between significance and sense is dialectical, over the established meaning, the subjects produce senses loaded with institutional forces, which are also shared and guide the route and the experiences of the young university Prouni scholars. Five signification nuclei were organized which will be presented ahead.

### **Exclusionary schooling process**

The young scholars highlighted their own struggle, emphasizing that elementary, junior and senior high schools were accomplished without interruption and with great success. They

were considered unique students in their contexts and this evaluation of their school performance was considered close to the pattern accomplished by students from elite schools. School success is associated with personal and family efforts, which reinforces the discourse of meritocracy. And this successful trajectory encouraged them to take the ENEM<sup>2</sup> examination and seek for higher education throughout the Prouni. The dedication and effort they had made in the education process up to the secondary grade (Senior high school) was kept on after beginning a HEI.

However, in spite of being considered students who had high standard performance in public schools, this standard proved to be a fake, as in their attempt to study in a State University considered of high rank of performance. They find out that their “effort” was not enough, as they will always “*be one or two or a fraction of grades too short*” as stated by one of the interviewees from the Administration School. In order to be admitted to the Federal University of Minas Gerais State (UFMG), the interviewee adds: “*it would have been required to study more at private preparatory independent courses, although being a good student, the public elementary, junior and senior high schools are too weak, and the financial burden weighs heavily.*”

Another student, from the Architecture school, also highlights the precarious condition of the available elementary basic education, and in a certain way, the development of public higher education, as designed for the youths coming from elite classes: “[...] *I started working and a colleague was doing a preparatory course and he told to*

Sousa, Maria do Carmo; Moreira, Maria Inez Costa. Low-income youth and long-term school permanence: the senses built up by Prouni scholarship holders in Belo Horizonte (MG)

*me about Prouni and those possibilities, because anyone willing to get into UFMG has to study hard, get quite high grades. And you know, isn't it true? Most people studying at the payment-free federal school did not need to study without having to pay."*

An Engineering student, who was interviewed, reinforces the exclusionary character of education that withdraws from poor youths the possibility of studying at a Public Governmental university from low-income young students: [...] "...say that a student who went to public elementary and high school can compete equally with one from a private elementary, high school, this is a lie. I needed 3 years in the preparatory course just to raise myself up to the level of the others, to learn what they already knew" ... [...] "public school is good, but something is missing. If you go to the military school, you can compete because it is a better school. In public school, you cannot".

However, we noted that the interviewees' analyses vary between the evaluation of the quality of public school education and the logic of merit, resulting from personal and family efforts, as factors that hinder competition for a place in the governmental state university against the youths from elite social classes.

The interviewees reported that when faced with the reality of not being able to compete with the other young students from private schools, they took the decision to invest in private preparatory courses, often precarious, but an alternative of paramount importance to enable them to reach a scholarship from Prouni at a HEI and choose the course they wanted to study.

It is important to note that, in general, these young people have always wanted to study in the university, sometimes even a specific course, but it was the Prouni that enabled them to make their dream come true, reassuring the school permanence. Therefore, we have a specific route in the low-income young student's life who seeks for school permanence: the frustration to realize that having being a good student in their original public school does not provide them with a chance to be admitted into the public state university, generally considered as a benchmark of excellence. They need to change this reality by looking for a preparatory course, which enables them to reduce this educational gap fitting, at the same time, into their financial conditions. They search for a course that makes them able to be inserted into the work market, a school that may offer courses of good quality besides being at a location easily reachable through the means of transportation available.

Therefore, unlike young people from other social classes, low-income students go through a process of reflection and planning inherent to their social insertion which is prior to their admittance to the university: a process that involves, in a certain way, the family group who, in addition to the emotional support has to organize itself financially so as to make feasible the youths' admission and permanence in the university life.

After the graduation course starts, the youths gradually take hold of the space and the HEI's cultural universe as a whole and new senses are built. They remain dedicated students, report above-average grades and receive praise from

Sousa, Maria do Carmo; Moreira, Maria Inez Costa. Low-income youth and long-term school permanence: the senses built up by Prouni scholarship holders in Belo Horizonte (MG)

teachers. To be seen as good students in college release them the invisibility and fulfillment of the prophecy that they could not advance in their studies, due to the reality of their original backgrounds.

The students who were interviewed know the rules of Prouni, which require good academic performance to maintain the scholarship. But they disclosed that this fear vanished shortly, they demonstrated to be confident that they will achieve the targeted academic results, as they are accustomed to personal efforts; and they attribute the good results to such efforts. They pointed out the need to adapt themselves to the academic space, learn how to deal with the language register and the ways within this new Higher Education realm.

### **Family: Struggling is encouraging**

In all cases, the family's presence is remarkable. The family turns out to be the guideline for the youths and the mother, especially, is the foremost encouraging figure. In addition to the mother, a network of family members and friends were mentioned in the interviews as the people who helped in the search for a scholarship and those who provided the information regarding the HEI's selection processes and about Prouni itself.

For the families of low-income youths, encouraging the children to go to school is a way to struggle for a better life and for a certain type of social ascension, which they understand to be linked to better job opportunities that can be achieved through university education: *"Wow! My mother was crazy about studying. Due to financial reasons, she only studied after she was married, but she always wanted us to study. She*

*always says to me and to my brother: You have to study. Go after your dreams"*, narrates an Accounting Sciences student.

The encouragement to achieve school permanence strikes young people in a variety of ways, and they turn what comes to them into an aimed reality, treading the paths to achieve their dreams. Their subjectivities are constantly affected by the voice of the family, who, in daily routine, presents encouragement as mediation. Despite their difficulties to provide financial help, the families present components that corroborate the construction of positive senses towards school permanence. Two law students refer to the family support: "[my Mother said:] *Do the application. Don't miss the deadline*"; about a father it was said: *"even though unable to provide any financial help, he [the father] would say: "study my daughter, because life without studying is very difficult"*.

We also noticed that the scholars' younger brothers and sisters are benefited by their long-term permanence at school, building a sense of incorporated possibility, which makes them see the school life trajectory extended to Higher Education. A young physiotherapy student's words illustrate it well: *"The New generation wants to study. They think it is normal to do so"*.

### **Class prejudice: everyone equal ... or is everyone equal here?**

The youths revealed the experience of prejudice because they have entered the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) supported by a governmental program and due to their social class origin. Their words express the suffering of those who need to build new strategies

Sousa, Maria do Carmo; Moreira, Maria Inez Costa. Low-income youth and long-term school permanence: the senses built up by Prouni scholarship holders in Belo Horizonte (MG)

to deal with a new world: a world to which they did not belong until now and which does not provide special attention to these debutant young scholarship holders, carrying the burden to deal in the best possible way with this new space, which ends up reinforcing the meritocratic discourse. Success or failure is seen as the exclusive result from the student's personal commitment.

We understand that this discourse is reinforced in the absence of debates approaching public policies and structural inequalities that could somehow be stirred at HEIs. In the absence of this discussion, we believe there is a false inclusion in the opinion that they are all the same because what equates the low-income youth in the HEI's world is their personal effort, individualized, as if they had a stamped pass saying: *"They deserve it"*.

However, when stating that "here everyone is equal", they are pointing out that youth children of bricklayers, day laborers, cooks and factory workers arrived at Higher Education, but the identity of their family origins disappears and the logic of the individual and family effort is reinforced. The underlying text could be condensed as follows: *"they managed to succeed because they wanted and they had the strength of will; those who don't succeed, it is because they don't want."*

They are youths who generally work to afford their personal expenses, and help pay for the family's expenses, but who broke a prophecy by accessing Higher Education in courses considered to have social prestigious and, as previously mentioned, more commonly attended by Brazilian social elites. A physiotherapy student's words states the

prejudice by denying it: *"Here there is no difference between FIES<sup>4</sup>, Prouni or regular students. We are all the same. The regular student at a private HEI is the one who pays his monthly course fees using his/her own resources or his/her family's, and in many cases, belongs to the middle and upper-middle social classes"*.

Other statements refer not only to the economic differences, but also to the HEI's *"Modus operandi"*, as emphasized by an Administration student: *"Nothing wrong in being a scholarship holder [prejudice]... neither between students nor between teachers. The difficult thing is to adapt to the reality, the demands, and the way of being. It's all very different"*.

Some youths point to class prejudice as a subtle thing, but present in daily life. The statement of a Psychology student exemplifies well: *"Look, people do not know who is or is not a scholarship holder ... but I do know, it's very different. Quite often I was not invited to parties or to travel because people assume that you will not be able to pay."*

The interviewees believe that most explicit prejudiced attitudes take place at the HEIs attended by middle and upper-middle social class students. This perception is associated with the growth of the number of higher education institutions in Brazil over the last 20 years, which has produced a hierarchy of values among the various institutions available in the market. They are split subtly between those aligned to the

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<sup>4</sup> Translator's note: FIES = Financiamento Estudantil = Governmental Loan Program to finance education costs for low-income students.

Sousa, Maria do Carmo; Moreira, Maria Inez Costa. Low-income youth and long-term school permanence: the senses built up by Prouni scholarship holders in Belo Horizonte (MG)

profile of students who were most successful at ENEM and the Prouni's competitors, those schools who serve students of higher income, who usually live in noble areas of the city. In these places, scholars would feel a greater difference of lifestyle in relation to their classmates, because the fact of belonging to a social class is always and somehow inscribed in the subject's body, in class-like habits that a scholar brings to a HEIs and the skill he/she has to acquire in order to come and go within this new world.

There are also private HEIs that are located on the outskirts of the city, in more distant and less affluent neighborhoods that receive a clientele of lower purchasing power and/or with a lower rating in ENEM. In these schools the scholarship Architecture holders feel more confident.

Among the interviewees, only one student declared herself as being black and is aware that in addition to class there is also racial prejudice, although both are show in a subtle way: *"Look, there is prejudice. Besides having to deal with the financial question, which is never easy, there is the daily bias. You feel it. It is veiled, but it is there"*.

### **Access to Higher Education and Work: a pragmatic relationship**

Prouni scholarship holders and their families associate the school permanence to the possibility of reaching a rated job, which could favor some social mobility. However, these youths do not wait for their graduation to start their work experience, it is noticeable that the relationship with work has been in these youths' lives since very early.

Many of these students took part of the "Programa Jovem Aprendiz = Youth Apprentice Program" when still at high school, and after beginning the graduation course they look for paid internship programs in their areas of study or have part-time jobs during the day and attend classes in the evening. Those who do not work in a formal way, do some kinds of paid-up activities. A Physiotherapy student's experience goes into this direction: *"I worked when I was underage and I quitted now because I have been granted a 100% scholarship. The money I received at the work I saved to do the English course I have been doing. My mother pays for my snack meals outside and transport."*

The young scholarship holders' history reveals that working is a family value and the youths' longed school permanence is a quest not to repeat the parents' life experience. Most of the interviewed youths' parents did not attend university. Nine fathers and nine mothers finished the Elementary School; eight fathers and seven mothers finished different types of high school such as EJA<sup>5</sup>, and Technical Courses; one father and two mothers completed undergraduate courses, and one father and one mother, at the time the youths were being interviewed, were doing university courses.

Scholars' parents went through interruptions of their school education which was resumed in adulthood motivated by work activities or to comply with employers' requirements, which led some of them to look for EJA, High

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<sup>5</sup>Translator's note = EJA = Educação de Jovens e Adultos = Youth and Adult Education.

Sousa, Maria do Carmo; Moreira, Maria Inez Costa. Low-income youth and long-term school permanence: the senses built up by Prouni scholarship holders in Belo Horizonte (MG)

schools or even university courses. Parents' experience reveals the established interrelation between the highest level of schooling and the insertion into the best jobs also for the young people.

Youths' choices of university courses happen in a pragmatic way, that is, they ponder some practical elements. To make their choices they consider the proximity of the HEI related to both their homes and their workplaces taking into account the best transportation conditions, and consequently, lower transport costs. The option for a course is also guided by the expectation to enter the work market taking up qualified positions, or when they have already been inserted in the work market, they aim at the training that may lead to advancement in their career, as stated by an Administration student: *"I'm already a civil servant right? ... I chose administration because my experience at the 'young apprenticeship program' and the course of administrative procedures I did at SENAI helped me to realize how good the area really was ... so when I graduate I can improve my career in public service"*

The option of doing a technical course shortly after high school is not looked on as postponing the dream of a university course, but rather as a strategy to make it feasible, since the technical training is seen as an immediate chance of employment.

This was the path of a student of Accounting Sciences: *"I took a technical course on environment as soon as I finished high school and at that time I started working in an office. I really wanted to do Environmental Engineering, but here in BH the market is not good, so*

*I decided for Accounting Sciences. I really made up my mind towards the possibilities to get a job"*.

We realize that the relationship between low-income youths and school permanence is different from the relationship established by other youths, as it is a relationship determined by the urgency to fulfill material necessities. Therefore, it is a pragmatic relationship: their choices are made within the possibilities pictured by the world of work. Taking this into account, they turn out to become objective and capable of assessing, despite their young age, the pros and cons of their choices.

### **A right with under conditions: Prouni sets a new paradigm for inclusion**

Higher Education in our society is seen as the destination for youths, nevertheless in a society marked by enormous economic and social inequalities, low-income youths have historically been excluded from this final purpose. The Prouni as a policy of social inclusion opened up the chances for a meaningful number of young people from the low-income social classes to reach higher education.

The interviewees subjects of this research dreamed, wished and struggled for their inclusion into the university world; and beside facing adverse conditions, they had to rebuild the senses attributed to university education and reinforce their families' and their own beliefs that they could make their personal dreams come true based on the objective conditions guaranteed by Prouni. The Administration student's statements second this reflection: *"Studying made me change my family a*

Sousa, Maria do Carmo; Moreira, Maria Inez Costa. Low-income youth and long-term school permanence: the senses built up by Prouni scholarship holders in Belo Horizonte (MG)

*little. I tell them that not everybody is a Doctor, no; a Doctor is the one who completed a doctorate degree... You think, what is the point being a pediatrician and turn to the patient to tell a diagnosis with such a crossed face that makes the patient feel bad? You ought to be wise, too."*

In this narrative, this student states that not everyone who completes or does a university course is a "Doctor". He brings up an element to dismantle the image idealized for higher education, in the sense that it is something impossible and distant from his own social class. Then he adds that it is also necessary to "be wise"; in this remark he recalls that wisdom is built within social and family relationships through daily life.

The construction of senses, therefore, is not something linear or the reproduction of what already exists. The senses are personal constructions within a historical context, a personal organization that uses all the subject's experiences for a personal reading of the social and historical moments that he goes through. An internal mobilization that will depend on the objective conditions the subject has faced. This mobilization will imply cognitive and affective aspects, as every sense is fluidal and not steady.

Therefore, the new can arise from a sense that is defined as a surmounting, but at the same time keeps the old experiences. Thus, we will have, in these newly constructed senses, the expression of this person's subjectivity itself, its dialectical and historical synthesis (Aguiar, Bock e Ozella, 2001).

The interviewed subjects pointed out that one of the difficulties concerning the construction of school permanence is a lack of information about Prouni at high

school. We can ask ourselves if the weak disclosure of information about Prouni at the public high schools would not be related to the preconception that those students would not be able to break through higher education. An interviewed Law student reported: *"In my school they did not mention anything about Prouni and I think it's necessary to talk, you know?"* Explaining the procedures for a Degree, he said: *"In my case it was a colleague who was also a scholarship holder who encouraged me to file the ENEM grade..., apply for. Nothing was informed at school, nothing at all."*

Young scholarship holders reported a change in the HEIs: since their inclusion they noticed a change in the established relations in the university realm and at the same time their subjectivities were also modified and new meanings were constructed. A student of the Architecture course reports: *"I thought arriving at college was the highest point, it was not. I got lost in the middle of so much information and requests. It is a very different world, new, full of situations in which you have to decide, go for it... Nothing is handed to you on a silver platter"*.

In the narrative of the young scholarship holders we found out that in the construction of subjective senses concerning the experience of inclusion into higher education through Prouni's support, there are a lot of contradictions and tensions between inclusion and exclusion. Prouni, in the talks, appears either as "a government aid", or "as a right" driven towards a specific group, as a strategy to reduce inequality. Sometimes, it is seen as an opportunity, fruit of many generations' collective struggle for the right to education, not an

Sousa, Maria do Carmo; Moreira, Maria Inez Costa. Low-income youth and long-term school permanence: the senses built up by Prouni scholarship holders in Belo Horizonte (MG)

easily granted opportunity, but admission to higher education is still understood as an individual's merit and effort.

### Final considerations

Prouni: studying is possible. It is possible in daylight shifts and in courses never thought before. Low-income youths, ordinary workers' children can reach graduation degrees and go on through long-lasting education.

Such a possibility is already part of their subjectivities and let us hope that our political contexts allow them to advance further and set new goals and that society can share their progresses and the building of a more egalitarian society for future generations.

Socio-historical psychology teaches us that human is constituted as such, converging the social into individual, synthesizing in itself the advances of culture by the mediation of social relations. It turns out that the Prouni's young scholarship holders, when entering Higher Education, go into a world with meanings that are transformed by the feelings produced and shared. The Prouni daily routine is the element that allows and promotes the interaction of youths, colleagues, teachers and family member, an interaction that makes the school permanence possible.

Prouni is a public policy that, through University education, aims at providing the inclusion of low-income youths, whose parents in most cases have low level schooling; young Prouni scholarship holders are often the first generation of their families to be able to attend to a university course.

The historical process of changes entails contradictions, and in this sense

the logic of the school system that favors the dominant culture and the legitimated one, does not change with the presence of the young scholarship holders, as meritocracy is still reinforced and those who come the closest to this ideology identified as the youths who "struggle and really want"; "the best youths". Nevertheless, we believe that the placement of these young students in diverse situations and in several HEI's courses contribute to the overcoming of the "Causation of the Probable", making possible other chances of school triumphs and the social transformation.

The advances made by Prouni are undeniable and young people know too well because they place it as an important factor in school permanence. It is paramount that basic education needs investment and political actions which may favor it, so that we can in some way reach an efficient public education for all and consequently a Public Higher Education, free of charge and for all, overcoming the historical link with the educational entrepreneurship.

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