

Inequality of Opportunities and Dropping Out of High School: Perspectives for Students from a Public School and a Private School in Brazil

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Abstract : The subject of youth and education has been on the agenda of both public policies and specific education policies. In this sense, this work aims to discuss, based on the conceptions of social capital and cultural capital, the possibilities of elaborating and putting into practice the life projects they build during secondary school. The critical view brought by the concepts of social capital and cultural capital considers that in the school environment, those who have social capital and cultural capital have more tools to continue their projects, while those who do not have such capital will consequently have fewer opportunities, a fact that directly contributes to the perpetuation of social and educational inequality. When the "Life Project" is discussed under the sole responsibility of the students, it is clear that it is the students who must "take their responsibilities and decisions", their success or failure. From this point of view, the success of the implementation of the Life Project is determined by how well the students have developed their "skills and competences" and their capacity for entrepreneurship, without promoting a critical reflection on the real economic difficulties of the majority of students at this level of education. This situation gives rise to feelings of self-blame and self-responsibility among young people, who are compelled to confront the reality that their expectations have not been fulfilled, that they have been unable to gain employment, and, in some instances, that they have been marginalized. In this regard, the research project aimed to gather data on the living conditions of students at a public school and a private school in Brazil through interviews. The research methodology were interviews with students from a public school and an elite private school. The main objective of the research was to analyze the students' cultural and social capital as a key element in their social and professional integration after completing this stage of education. The study showed that social and cultural capital has a significant influence on opportunities to continue studying or to find a satisfactory job. For young people from public schools, from lower economic classes, the need to enter the job market as soon as they finish or even before they finish high school is due to economic and survival issues. The hours of dedication to studies and the diversity of cultural activities such as trips, visits to museums or the cultivation of artistic activities available to poorer students in state schools has proved to be rarer. In conclusion, we found that the difference in social and cultural capital between the young people taking part in the research has been shown to play an important role in the social and professional integration of the students and contributes to the maintenance of school and social inequality. This highlights the importance of public policies and support networks for young people leaving secondary school.

Keywords : social capital, cultural capital, high school, life project, social insertion, professional insertion, youth

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