

## ARTICLE

WHAT POST-PANDEMIC SCHOOL?<sup>1</sup>**MÁRCIO RIMET NOBRE<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT:** The transition to remote learning imposed by social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic affected the lives of students, educators, and families, impacting the teaching-learning process. Besides the psychological effects, the replacement of in-person teaching with remote learning heightened the disinterest of young people in school, which was already losing its political significance, making the lower engagement in distance learning evident. The limited economic conditions of a large part of the population were exacerbated, which increased difficulties in accessing the internet and the media necessary for this adaptation. Our research aimed to listen to young people about their feelings and experiences in the context of the pandemic, as well as the meanings they attributed to school. Qualitative in nature, our research posed a central question about what kind of school they would like to help build in the projection of a post-pandemic context. In the methodology, a hybrid format was employed resulting from the experience of the interdisciplinary groups involved in the investigation, based on focus groups and psychoanalytic conversation, as well as two literature workshops; all techniques always prioritized the circulation of speech among the adolescents. In response to the central question “what post-pandemic school?” effects related to the presence of family during remote classes, the relative lack of the school environment with various consequences, and the deleterious effects of digital exclusion in the pandemic context were observed, which particularly contributed to the increase in school dropout rates.

**Keywords:** adolescence, remote learning, in-person learning, post-pandemic school, digital technology.

## QUE ESCOLA PÓS-PANDEMIA?

**RESUMO:** A transição para o ensino remoto imposta pelo distanciamento social durante a pandemia de covid-19 afetou a vida de estudantes, educadores e familiares, incidindo sobre o processo de ensino-aprendizagem. Além dos efeitos psíquicos, a substituição do ensino presencial pelo ensino remoto acentuou o desinteresse dos jovens pela escola, que já vinha perdendo sentidos políticos, tornando patente o menor engajamento pelo ensino à distância. As reduzidas condições econômicas de grande parte da população foram aprofundadas, o que acentuou dificuldades de acesso à internet e às mídias necessárias para essa adaptação. Nossa pesquisa buscou escutar os jovens sobre seus sentimentos e vivências no contexto da pandemia, bem como os sentidos atribuídos à escola. De caráter qualitativo, nossa pesquisa trouxe uma questão central sobre que escola eles gostariam de ajudar a construir na projeção de um contexto pós-pandêmico. Na metodologia, foi empregado um formato híbrido resultante da experiência dos grupos interdisciplinares envolvidos na investigação, tendo como base o grupo focal e a conversação psicanalítica, além de duas oficinas de literatura; todas as técnicas sempre privilegiaram a circulação da palavra entre os adolescentes. Como resposta à questão central “que escola pós-pandemia?” foram constatados efeitos referentes à presença da família durante as aulas remotas, à carência relativa ao ambiente escolar com várias consequências, e aos efeitos deletérios da exclusão digital no contexto pandêmico, o que contribuiu especialmente para o incremento da evasão escolar.

**Palavras-chave:** adolescência, ensino remoto, ensino presencial, escola pós-pandemia, tecnologia digital.

## ¿QUÉ ESCUELA POST-PANDEMIA?

**RESUMEN:** La transición a la enseñanza remota impuesta por el distanciamiento durante la pandemia del covid-19 social ha afectado la vida de estudiantes, educadores y familiares, impactando el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje. Además de los efectos psíquicos, la sustitución de la enseñanza presencial acentuó el desinterés de los jóvenes por la escuela, que ya perdía significados políticos, evidenciando la menor apuesta por la enseñanza a distancia. Se profundizaron las reducidas condiciones económicas de gran parte de la población, acentuándose las dificultades de acceso a internet y a los medios necesarios para esta adaptación. Nuestra investigación buscó escuchar a los jóvenes sobre sus sentimientos y vivencias en el contexto de la pandemia, así como los significados atribuidos a la escuela. De carácter cualitativo, la investigación planteó una pregunta central sobre qué escuela les gustaría ayudar a construir en la proyección de un contexto pospandemia. En la metodología se utilizó un formato híbrido resultado de la experiencia de los grupos interdisciplinarios involucrados en la investigación, basado en el grupo focal y la conversación psicoanalítica, además de dos talleres de literatura, todas ellas técnicas favoreciendo siempre la circulación de la palabra entre los adolescentes. Como resultado de la pregunta central “¿cuál escuela pospandemia?” se encontraron efectos relacionados con la presencia de la familia durante las clases a distancia, la falta relativa del ambiente escolar con graves consecuencias, y los efectos deletéreos de la exclusión digital en el contexto de la pandemia, especialmente en el aumento de la evasión escolar.

**Palabras clave:** adolescencia, enseñanza a distancia, enseñanza presencial, escuela pospandemia, tecnología digital.

## INTRODUCTION

"Before the pandemic, I didn't like school. After the pandemic, I value school, I miss school, and I want to wake up early to go to school." [Testimony of a student]

The replacement of in-person learning with remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic led to a growing disinterest among young people in school learning, with its effects on transmission being evident (Lisita, Berni, Nobre *et al.*, 2021). It is notable how remote learning has fewer chances of generating student engagement, especially among families with limited access to the internet and digital technological devices.

Additionally, the suffering of young people in this context has been a source of concern for psychology and mental health professionals. Due to the necessity of physical distancing, adolescents began expressing their distress on social media. Increasingly, psychological issues related to contamination and social distancing<sup>2</sup> that impacts parents, children, and consequently reflects on school learning, a process that has become even more dependent on the family-school bond, which is often

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<sup>2</sup> Physical distancing was globally advocated by health institutions as the primary safety measure to prevent the spread of the virus, although it was not implemented effectively in poorer classes due to precarious social and working conditions, among other factors.

fragile. However, these expressions of distress do not always find a recipient willing to accommodate them.

This research<sup>3</sup> emerged from an interest in listening to young people's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, aiming to understand the meanings they attribute to school and to investigate their expectations regarding the post-pandemic educational landscape. The starting point was a meeting between researchers from the fields of communication, psychology, and medicine, who, driven by a mutual interest in a transdisciplinary approach, identified another common focus in their research: adolescence and the educational process.

From the outset, this common theme was evident for the two groups from the Federal University of Minas Gerais that collaborated on this project: Educação Transmídia, from the Communication Laboratory, with extensive international experience in youth communication, and Brotal Juventude, Educação e Cultura, an extension program focused on the relationship between young people and the cultural-educational process, bringing together researchers from various fields.

Such a meeting proved to be an opportunity for proposing this research, especially due to its coincidence with the transition phase. In other words, the moment when the peaks of the pandemic's social harms had already passed. With some stability in lower levels of these effects, institutions were already organizing themselves to resume in-person life. In the case of schools, we found initial support within the Municipal Department of Education of Belo Horizonte, which, amid the turbulence of this return transition, viewed the research favorably.<sup>4</sup> The resumption of in-person learning in the post-pandemic transition period, after almost two years of remote learning, proved to be more than an opportunity but rather a necessity to raise questions about what the parameters of school life would be from then on.

With this perspective in mind, we believed that adolescents, drawing from their experiential knowledge, would be in a position to provide not just clues but also appropriate and legitimate suggestions so that educational institutions could invest more assertively in inventing new formats for schooling. Thus, we understood that adolescents, as the main stakeholders in this process, would themselves be actively involved in this urgent invention. Hence, we adopted a question as direct as a trigger for the research: What kind of school do adolescents want post-pandemic?

## **THE METHODOLOGY ARISING FROM AN ENCOUNTER**

With the focus on a question directed towards students, two phases were planned in the project development, both with the participation of adolescents as the central point. The first phase, conducted online, involved meetings with two distinct groups of students. Following each meeting, a language workshop was held where they engaged with an alternative methodology, employing poetry and prose to stimulate the exploration of the main theme. The analysis presented in this paper encompasses the results of the information gathered in this phase, which has already been completed. In the second phase, which is still ongoing, the planned meetings will take place in person, within the school environment.

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<sup>3</sup> The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committees of the coordinating institution (CAAE: 58264321.6.0000.5149/Office of Research - UFMG). Adolescents who agreed to participate in the study had the Informed Consent Form signed by parents or legal guardians.

<sup>4</sup> The project is supported by the Institute of Advanced Transdisciplinary Studies at UFMG.

Since our primary interest is to primarily gather impressions and experiences of adolescents regarding the pandemic, the research has an essentially qualitative nature. In this regard, some considerations about this format are pertinent, which affects the method of recruiting and mobilizing participants.

To configure the corpus of the qualitative research, a procedure "that typifies unknown attributes" (Bauer & Aarts, 2002, p. 41), we initiated a partnership with the Municipal Department of Education (SMED) of Belo Horizonte. Two virtual meetings were conducted, inviting representatives from municipal schools across all nine regions of Belo Horizonte. In addition to presenting the project, the objective of these meetings was to explicitly state that the schools themselves would nominate students to participate in the research. This nomination would be made after teachers or principals approached the students to present the project and invite those interested in participating in the research.

The data collection process took place during the return to in-person classes in the second semester of 2021, which, within the scope of this article, we consider as the "transition" period. It is important to highlight that this designation on our part does not coincide with any official nomenclature from government bodies; it simply serves as a reference to the resumption of in-person classes, albeit still within the period understood as an international public health emergency. Regarding this, the end of such a public health emergency was declared by the World Health Organization only on May 5, 2023. Thus, it is worth adding that what we refer to here as the "post-pandemic" period is a projection that, at that time, sought to consider what students might expect for when the global health emergency officially ended.

As for the data analysis, this phase took place throughout the second semester of 2022. In our interpretation of the data, we justify maintaining the oral marks of the students in the transcriptions out of respect for the linguistic variations inherent to their individualities.

Therefore, having received the green light to contact the teenagers or their parents, we proceeded to invite them directly through an instant messaging application. For this purpose, we used two short videos, one for each meeting, created by the research interns. In order to be appealing to the youth, the videos employed simple elements, such as a cat next to a block of post-its where the hands of the research interns, also young people, were seen passing the sheets with the invitation containing information such as date, time, link to the meeting, etc. We believed that a more "laid-back" and homemade language would give a more youthful, everyday tone, and therefore, more attractive.

As the invitations were sent only to the young people previously contacted by the schools, the sample size was smaller than expected because, in the initial scope of the project, we would have had a quantity of groups proportional to the number of administrative regions in Belo Horizonte. However, since we relied on the young people's adherence via the schools - which at that time were in a period of active resumption of in-person activities - we were able to conduct the two groups already mentioned.

However, this change did not prove to be inhibitive for the work, as it is a qualitative research, which does not operate with numerical or statistical data. Qualitative methodology does not aim to propose generalizations from observations, but rather to provide a deep understanding of a certain issue. Thus, qualitative research "asks how events relate to the people who experience them" (Bauer, Gaskell, Allum, 2002, p. 18). In this sense, we seek to favor the expression of the individuals involved, that is, the selected adolescents for the research.

### **Between the focus group and psychoanalytic conversation: a methodological fusion**

As soon as contact began between the two groups proposing this investigation, the proximity of their working methods became clear. Besides both privileging the circulation of speech among young people, the use of other resources, especially those employing artistic expressions - such as poetry, literature, visual arts, and music - also emerged as a common point. In this sense, the possibility of considering a hybrid methodology seemed evident. On one hand, the communication laboratory brought the experience of working with focus groups; on the other hand, the Brota experience (Grillo & Lima, 2020) employed psychoanalytic-oriented conversation. Both utilized art as an additional resource in their approaches.

In this section, we will briefly address these two methodological frameworks that served as a guide for the hybrid approach we adopted between the focus group and psychoanalytic conversation. Since at this stage the two groups of students only met online, we opted for the language workshop as a stimulus for approaching the theme in the subsequent activity. Next, we will explain each of these methodological modalities, listing the reasons for choosing a hybrid format.

### **The focus group as the primary methodology of intervention**

No scope of qualitative methodology, focus groups constitute a technique to obtain detailed information about how participants perceive the investigated situation, based on the analysis of the circumstances of the responses (Mella, 2000). Thus, we conducted two online focus groups throughout the investigation, each followed by an online language workshop.

The idea was for the focus group technique to be adopted in this research as the initial procedure for the subsequent elaboration of methodological guidelines in the broader universe of the investigation, namely: students in the final year of basic education in municipal schools in Belo Horizonte. In the initial proposal, approximately eighteen students in the final year of elementary school would be selected to participate in the focus group, based on criteria such as regional representativeness, ethnic, social, and gender diversity. Access to the internet would be an essential criterion for participating in the focus group, considering that it would be conducted remotely due to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on the analysis of the results obtained from the focus group, an action methodology would be constructed together with the students. This methodological step involved discussions with representatives from the Municipal Department of Education (SMED) to define strategies for approaching the target audience, according to behavioral aspects, interests, suggestions, values, and demands identified in the focus group.

Subsequently, voluntary testimonials would be collected from approximately fifty students from municipal schools in Belo Horizonte enrolled in the final year of elementary school, through a participation call mediated by SMED on social media platforms. The research scenario would thus be provided by SMED, based on the mapping of schools, territories, and collectives, also considering adolescents in Roma camps, restricted freedom (socio-educational measures), and social shelters.

The invitation to participate in the second methodological stage would be broad and mediated by schools, teachers, and community leaders. The aim was to achieve greater representativeness rather than a quantity of responses. Absences of responses and eventual silences would be considered in the overall tally. Participating students, on a voluntary basis, should respond to the guiding question

of the study, regarding what they expected from school in the post-pandemic context. Responses would be allowed in multi-textual perspectives (written records, videographic, photographic, and drawings) and multimodal (combination of semiotic-discursive modalities) and multimedia (social media platforms).

However, from the first focus group conducted, there was difficulty in engaging students not only with the research proposal but with the broader context of the school in a pandemic scenario. It was unanimous among the young people heard that the collaborative development of student responses through multimodal means about the school they would like to experience in the post-pandemic context would not be feasible. It was for this reason that we decided to conduct two online language workshops, each related to one of the two focus groups conducted. The workshops were used to facilitate student engagement, although they did not significantly affect the content of their responses. In a way, this change in the scope of the project led us to opt for an even freer format than that of the focus group, bringing us closer to the format of conversation.

Thus, this stage of the research was carried out with two different groups of adolescents, with the first formed based on school recommendations and the second by young people recommended by participants of the first group. Each group had a meeting with the team, conducted through a digital platform, moderated by a researcher from the fields of psychoanalysis and communication, accompanied by undergraduate students as interns. Following each group, a literary workshop was conducted, with two different professionals in this area<sup>5</sup>. This stage, therefore, consisted of four meetings with two different groups of adolescents, with each meeting lasting approximately fifty minutes to one hour.

### **The circulation of speech in conversation**

From a preliminary approach in which we explained who we are and our goals with the project - that is, to better understand the future of school and to know what young people expect from it in this post-pandemic future - the short film "Alike" (2015) was shown<sup>6</sup>, with the aim of sparking discussion around the theme of school life, after the screening, the facilitator posed our central question in the form of a set of open-ended inquiries: "What would you like to see in school that often doesn't have space? Or what do you already like, used to like, and would like to see more of now? So we're here to listen to you...".

Subsequently, the students began to speak freely about their expectations regarding the return to in-person classes and also about what they noticed during the period of social distancing, such as significant differences in relation to school, the distance from teachers and peers, highlighting the impact of all this on their families' lives.

Psychoanalytic conversation is based on the premise that providing space for speech itself is conducive to a listening guided by the unconscious. This listening is interested not only in what takes center stage in what is being said but, above all, is vigilant in the unsaid, what arises in stumbles, in inflections of doubt, and in the subject's suspicion regarding what he himself says, often even laughing at himself. Thus, mistakes, forgetfulness, involuntary word exchanges, or sudden jokes are valued.

Throughout the listening process, researchers intervened as minimally as possible. In a few brief moments, the adolescents kept their cameras closed, without being questioned about it, precisely

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<sup>5</sup> They are the writer Leo Cunha and Professor Maralice Neves, PhD, from the Faculty of Letters at UFMG.

<sup>6</sup> Animation in 3D by Daniel Martínez Lara and Rafa Cano Méndez..

to avoid causing embarrassment and to maintain the spontaneity of participation. In this perspective, moderation occurred very punctually, only with the intention of briefly encouraging any participant who might be more shy in front of those who were more talkative.

Psychoanalytic listening is based on two basic principles established by Sigmund Freud (1996b), namely, the invitation to free association of ideas by the speaking subject and the listener's floating attention. These conditions, fundamental to all analysis, are sufficient for the subject to find their own way to engage in the invitation addressed to them. In conversation, the space is open to this same associative logic, but it is expected to occur collectively. In this sense, it is the role of the conversation facilitator to ensure that each subject's words find their place in the group, being heard by all, who can reflect on what each one says. Thus, speech must circulate so that everyone expresses themselves and contributes to the topic at hand - a topic that is always fluid, changing, and follows the free nature of this collective association. The facilitator is also responsible for paying attention to those who are more timid or simply quieter, occasionally inviting them to contribute, moderating the conversation in relation to those who are more talkative.

Regarding possible differences between the two groups, nothing significant was observed. We believe this may have occurred because, even in the case of the group formed by students recommended by the school, the students' adherence to the team's invitation was voluntary. After each of the meetings, the young people were again invited to participate in a language workshop, with the aim of revisiting, from the perspective of literature, the themes that emerged in the group conversations. These workshops were conducted by professionals with experience in working with dynamics and workshops in the field of writing.

## **RESULTS: WHAT POST-PANDEMIC SCHOOL?**

For the analysis of the collected data, we proceeded with a literal transcription of the recordings.<sup>7</sup> of both meetings. In the reading phase, we were guided by the most recurring signifiers, which allowed us to highlight the themes that persisted in the youths' speeches. Thus, we could categorize not based on the questions posed to them, as it was a conversation where topics arose spontaneously, therefore broader than what is understood by an open interview. Indeed, it is from the chaining of dialogues, following the thread of knowledge unfolding there, that the themes change according to the interests of the group participants, and only on a few occasions does the facilitator intervene to deepen a point, encouraging resumption through some inquiry.

Already in our first meeting, it was clear how eager those adolescents were to talk about their pandemic experience. This need to talk persisted in the following meeting, with a second group of adolescents, as well as in the subsequent activities involving literature.

Overall, the themes revolved mainly around the fact that they couldn't go to school and had to do activities at home, with the presence of family, often juggling multiple roles. In addition, the inherent difficulties of family presence should also be highlighted, as the youths had to handle school activities in a different context from school, with a different dynamic and other interferences.

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<sup>7</sup> The students were informed that the meetings would be recorded so that later the team could proceed with the data analysis. Therefore, their consent was requested.



There were also many complaints from adolescents about the difficulty of having to manage school activities without the presence of the teacher and classmates.<sup>8</sup> This factor highlights a lack of socialization moments with all members of the school community, namely the face-to-face contact that occurs in the hallways, between classes, during recess, and in physical activities in general. In this case, adolescents expressed missing the school atmosphere itself, which materializes in terms of movement, coming and going that implies body contact.

However, the point deserving greater emphasis, which certainly permeates all others, lies in the fact that, unlike what happened in private schools, the public school system did not undertake a remote learning modality that effectively worked. This realization, as we will see, brings reflections on various aspects, although its causes can be situated in an essentially political-economic perspective.

Taking this observation as the axis, we will now seek to present the data analysis, guided by a categorization of the youths' responses based on these four main points to be highlighted: 1) the implications of family presence, considering their limitations of different orders in the assistance that adolescents need in such activities; 2) the reflections of the absence of the school environment with everything it entails in terms of socialization with peers, teachers, and the community in general; 3) the deleterious effects of digital exclusion on teaching and learning outside the school context, especially in the pandemic context; 4) this axis is structured around what was discussed in the other three, condensing, around the question "what school post-pandemic?", the results of the research. In this sense, this axis will be distributed in the subsequent items, considering data on school dropout in general and bringing, in the final considerations, a signal to the reality of digital exclusion. This reality is pointed out as a factor that made it difficult for the interviewed adolescents to bring meaningful suggestions for the projection provoked by our central question.

### **The presence of school in the family context**

In recent years, a bill was under consideration in the National Congress aiming to establish homeschooling, nicknamed "homeschooling," as an alternative to traditional schooling conducted in school settings. The PL 1,388/2022, authored by lawmakers from the ultraconservative Brazilian wing, was approved in the Chamber of Deputies<sup>9</sup> and it is currently under discussion in the Senate Education Committee.

Although the central argument in favor of the project, on one hand, is an alleged right of families to choose to directly assume the education of their children, it is widely known that its origin has religious motivation, being a turning point for conservative sectors. The approved text includes among its criteria the requirement that one of the parents have proven higher education or technological education. Additionally, the young person must be regularly enrolled in an educational institution, which will be responsible for monitoring the progress of learning. On the other hand, critics emphasize the

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<sup>8</sup> In the entire municipal network, including the schools of the students who participated in the research, the Department of Education conducted an active search for 5% of the students to prevent dropout. To achieve this, actions ranged from phone calls, sending registered letters, and communication via WhatsApp to home visits, involving a team of mediators from the Municipal Department of Education. Available at: <https://prefeitura.pbh.gov.br/noticias/busca-ativa-de-estudantes-reduz-os-riscos-de-abandono-e-evasao-na-pandemia>. Access on: 03 Aug. 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Approval took place on May 19, 2022, as PL 3,179/2012. The approved text was proposed by Deputy Luiza Canziani (PSD-PR) in substitution for Lincoln Portela's (PL-MG). Available at: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/noticias/materias/2022/05/26/projeto-que-autoriza-educacao-domiciliar-comeca-a-ser-discutido-no-senado>. Access on: 06 Aug. 2022.

fragmentation of education and the tendency towards increasing inequality in the educational process because such a change, besides not contributing to the education debate, would constitute a way to attack the country's public education system with the intention of gradually dismantling it. Critics point out the seriousness of diverting resources from education, where the state exempts itself from its most basic responsibilities towards the sector, and its consequences, such as the reduction of systemic social inequality in the country.

Despite being undesirable due to the extent of its harms, the pandemic provided an opportunity to test the contradictions of an experience of this nature. Faced with the information gathered from the reports of adolescents in our research, it is easy to see the immense difficulties inherent in homeschooling in a reality like Brazil's, making it difficult not to evoke the fallacious risks of such a proposal. In this sense, several aspects could be extracted from the students' speeches that highlight the various difficulties families face in following their children's school trajectory and directly supporting it.

Among such risks, we can cite as central the fact that there was, at least, a mixing of routines between the two institutions – family and school education – which, although not subject to a rigid separation, have their own dynamics and specific demands: "Home turned into an office, school, a place of fights, it turned into everything" (girl 1)<sup>10</sup>; "The whole routine changed" (girl 2).

In another sense, adolescents complained about the constant summons of family members to household routines, mainly in household chores, but also highlighting the help in taking care of younger siblings: "We need to do household chores, assist our siblings, teach our siblings" (girl 3). In this regard, for many, the school routine was sorely missed: "Throughout the pandemic, I didn't study online" (boy 1).

Another highly detrimental aspect concerns the constant and unavoidable interference of behavioral and emotional family issues and their surroundings in the youths' school activities: noises from appliances and the like, neighbors, involvement in family fights, etc. Common in any family, such interferences take on greater contours when one is forced to share small spaces with many people, without privacy or comfort for the necessary concentration. This issue mainly impacts the lack of a particular study space where the adolescent could remain restricted, focused solely on their activities: "It was very difficult not to have a specific place to study at home, not to have the teacher's assistance" (girl 4).

Finally, the low education level of parents is also an important factor to consider based on the adolescents' statements. At many times, it was clear that parents cannot help their children because they did not complete their own studies: "They don't know how to teach." In this sense, the need for the teacher was further emphasized: "Contact with the teacher is needed to learn." Added to this aspect is the fact that most of these parents, when in formal jobs, work all day, leaving little time to dedicate to their children's supervision.

Overall, therefore, regarding homeschooling, adolescents made it clear that "Those who weren't doing well in school, got worse."

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<sup>10</sup> We chose not to use any student names. Only in some cases, when we deemed it necessary, we identified only the gender.

## The Socialization in School and Its Role in Transmission<sup>11</sup>

Another important aspect to consider concerns the losses experienced by young people regarding socialization and its effects on transmission. This includes not only the relationship with their peers but also with the entire school apparatus, starting with the bond established with the figure of the teacher: "What I missed about school is having the opportunity to learn from the teachers because online it's kind of hard to learn and it's kind of boring too. And learning there in person is better."

The teachers' attention to the issues brought by the students also stood out: "Teachers care about you, whether you're learning or not, unlike many who don't care at all." Similarly, regarding physical presence: "During the pandemic, I missed the warmth of the teachers teaching in the classroom. Because it's very different when the teacher teaches in the classroom, right there in front of you, than behind a computer or cell phone screen."

Overall, the teenagers pointed out that the period they had to stay at home was quite difficult, describing various unpleasant effects of the pandemic: "The pandemic affected students a lot." Some reported cases in the school community that they refer to as "mental illness," anxiety, depression: "It affected the students' minds." Many others mentioned the anguish they themselves felt: "I was very anxious to stay at home, I was eager to go out." All the reports highlight the clarity of the young people regarding the need to socialize with their peers: "Talking, hugging, spending more time at school."

Here, it becomes inevitable again to evoke the risks of a project like homeschooling. According to Carlota Boto (2022), this proposal builds a wall between the family and the social world. The researcher emphasizes the role of the school in preparing young people for social interaction because socialization consists of "learning about friendships, living with others." Additionally, she also draws attention to the risks of favoring domestic violence, pointing out the role of mutual regulation between family and school:

The school notices when the child comes injured, traumatized. If the family controls what happens at school, the school also, to a certain extent, controls what happens in the family. These are two institutions that should continue to complement and self-regulate each other. (BOTO, 2022, s.p.)

It is necessary to return to Freud (1996a) to highlight the central role of school life in the sense of the necessary distancing of adolescents from the family, reaching the broader social group. This movement is pointed out by him as fundamental for intellectual development and, ultimately, for the advancement of society. In this sense, Freud (1996a) emphasizes the value of the teacher as a substitute for the decline of parental authority. Viola, Lisita, and Berni (*et al.*, 2017) emphasize that Freud

[...] accentuates the fascination with the personalities of the teachers, alluding to the immeasurable emotional load present in the transmission and apprehension of knowledge at this stage of life, and highlighting that the adolescent's relationship with knowledge is primarily through the transference. Thus, in the vacuum left by parental reference, the entry of other references linked to the ideal to guide the paths through which knowledge will pass becomes necessary.. (p. 157)

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<sup>11</sup> For psychoanalysis, the question of transmitting knowledge always involves the dimension of not-knowing, the unconscious, unlike communication, which occurs consciously between two subjects.

The authors highlight the importance of considering the mutations undergone by the social bond in contemporary times, especially in terms of a paradigm shift that has satisfaction at any cost as an imperative, underlying a rarefaction of symbolic ideals (VIOLA; LISITA; BERNI *et al.*; 2017). Therefore, even if virtualized by teaching, the presence of the teacher certainly brings benefits in terms of ensuring better preparation of students for a more qualified social insertion that takes into account the relationship with alterity.

Another effect of social distancing during the pandemic was the intensification of changes that were already being made in the social bond due to its digitalization through internet social networks. Sanitary restrictions created a global situation that required social, family, and work relationships to occur exclusively in this format. Linked to the economic factor, this situation revealed a state of digital exclusion for a significant portion of the population, especially those who are users of the public education network. Such exclusion is also reflected in public schools, which are almost completely on the sidelines of this process. The intersection of this fact proves crucial for understanding the deficiencies of public schools in fulfilling their role during the social distancing caused by the pandemic.

### **The pandemic and digital exclusion in schools**

Finally, the pandemic laid bare a structural issue in our country: the digital exclusion of young people and the public education system itself. If until the beginning of the pandemic remote learning was almost exclusively restricted to higher education through different forms of distance education (DE), during the period of social distancing, it became a condition for school operation, as well as for almost every professional realm<sup>12</sup>.

In Brazil, the federal government's denialism<sup>13</sup> – and its state and municipal allies regarding the occurrence of the pandemic resulted in the complete absence of guidance from the Ministry of Education. Even when the fact became indisputable due to the thousands of deaths caused by the disease, the lack of direction that could minimally guide the field of education in the face of the chaos was a blatant display of the ideological bias of those in power.

In the school environment, not only did difficulties arise in using technologies and limitations for online teaching become evident, but also the different effects of such measures on public and private school systems. In this sense, the measures taken were quite distinct between the two sectors, with differences also observed within the public sector among federal, state, and municipal levels.

In the scope of this research, we worked with elementary level students, mostly adolescents from peripheral regions, predominantly Black or Brown, from lower-middle-class or working-class backgrounds. The first and perhaps most relevant point raised by this research concerns the fact that, due to socio-economic limitations, a significant portion of these students were left out of the remote teaching adopted during the distancing measures.

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<sup>12</sup> Unlike the distance learning system (EaD), which was already implemented in Brazil in a planned manner, especially at the middle and higher levels, remote teaching came to generically name the temporary experience of teaching practiced during the pandemic, resulting from the adaptation required by physical distancing. In this sense, remote teaching can be understood as a temporary adaptation of face-to-face teaching, while EaD is strategically designed to be online.

<sup>13</sup> Available at: <https://brasil.elpais.com/opiniao/2020-08-08/negacionismo-de-bolsonaro-diante-da-pandemia-tem-metodo-e-pode-garantir-sua-sobrevivencia-politica.html>. Access on: 30 Jul. 2023.

In general, the young participants reported little or no opportunity for socialization due to lack of access to the internet or absence of technological means such as cell phones, tablets, and computers. Additionally, most of the young participants in the research demonstrated limited use of social networks, perhaps due to difficulties in access.

Another fundamental point concerns the format of remote teaching that the public school system made available to the students. According to the adolescents' accounts, the system worked with physical workbooks, periodically provided at schools, containing the content to be studied and later assessed. However, there were no regular online classes or videos, but only channels of contact between students and teachers created through an instant messaging application, where they could ask questions about the content. Varying in many directions, in summary, the students' complaints demonstrate that not only was the format insufficient to meet their demands but it also failed to even stimulate them. In general, the students did not feel encouraged to seek this assistance in a completely unusual format in education, except perhaps as a complement to the teacher-student relationship.

The young people point out the fragility of this format, which was related to the students' lack of commitment regarding their autonomy to comply or not with their tasks:

"It was really horrible... we didn't know how to learn properly. Many people didn't do it the way they were supposed to. Some people used Google to get the answers. I usually didn't do anything. I thought I shouldn't submit it because they asked for things I didn't know. They thought we could guess." (boy 2)

The students were quite critical of the fact that, although there was a plan, for example, with 20 workbooks covering the content for the year, many stopped at the beginning or midway through this process, knowing they would still be promoted, which indeed happened: "Out of the 20 workbooks, I only read up to the eighth. Then I stopped reading. I was going to pass anyway"; "Many people didn't read anything and still got promoted..."; "I slept through class every day. Eventually, I stopped going. I wasn't learning anything anyway."

Overall, when asked about their expectations for school, however, the young people know very well how to point out what they desire, and in a quite balanced manner, they can say what is good about the school process without dismissing everything: "That it goes back to how it was before," "[...] but change some things."

Regarding methodological processes, the excerpts that range from criticism to suggestions that blend, for example, the use of technology and social media with the content to be studied stand out: "The school needs to create new ways of teaching." As suggestions, some quite contemporary practices used to motivate students, promote autonomy, and improve their performance emerge. These suggestions indicate knowledge of interdisciplinary pedagogical practices, as well as the application of active methodologies through the use of technological resources (PAIVA, *et al.*, 2016; BACICH, MORAN, 2018). They also suggest the use of "gamified" practices, which consist of the "use of game design elements in non-game contexts" (DISSUADIR *et al.*, 2011, s. p.). Therefore, they suggest "mixing subjects, working on a theme across several subjects, like social equality" (girl 5). One student gives an example of a fun activity that combines math and arts. Another talks about a video on the TikTok app

where an English teacher works from series, movies. Additionally, they also suggest the use of games in classes<sup>14</sup>.

The economic situation not only directly affects the possibility of learning but is rather defining of what can be expected as a result in the intersection of these factors. Thus, the dual question that remains to be formulated here is: what are the impacts of the economic situation on the remote learning of adolescent students from the public school system and what are the contributions of this to school dropout?

### **School Dropout in Adolescence: A Harm to be Avoided**

School dropout among adolescents and young people is a concerning phenomenon in Brazil. According to research conducted by IBGE<sup>15</sup> in 2019, out of the 50 million people aged 14 to 29 in the country, 20.2% (or 10.1 million) did not complete any stage of basic education, either because they dropped out of school or because they never attended it. Of this total, 71.7% were Black or mixed-race. The results also showed that the transition from elementary to high school accentuates school dropout, since at age 15, the percentage of young people almost doubles compared to the previous age group, rising from 8.1% at age 14 to 14.1% at age 15. The highest percentages, however, occurred from age 16 onwards, reaching 18.0% at age 19 or older. Among the main reasons for school dropout, the most cited were the need to work (39.1%) and lack of interest (29.2%). Among women, pregnancy (23.8%) and household chores (11.5%) are also highlighted. In all regions of Brazil, the two main factors related to school dropout are the need to work and lack of interest in school subjects, which affected about 70% of adolescents and young people, indicating the need for measures to encourage young people to stay in school.

The abrupt implementation of remote learning, in addition to internet access difficulties, seems to have contributed to an increase in school dropout at all educational levels, with higher chances among adolescents who are in the final years of Elementary School or have already entered High School.

Regarding the initial period of the pandemic, data demonstrate a significant increase in the dropout rate. A survey conducted by the NGO Todos Pela Educação reveals that school dropout among children and adolescents by the second quarter of 2021 reached a 171% increase compared to 2019, representing approximately 244 thousand students out of school during this period<sup>16</sup>. For Gabriel Corrêa, leader of educational policies at this NGO, "Many of these children had very little access to any education during school closures. So, it is natural, expected, let's say, that there would be this distancing."<sup>17</sup>

Another aspect identified as a deterrent was the low connectivity of students to the internet, a prerequisite for attending remote classes. According to data from the report released in July 2021 by

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<sup>14</sup> The issue of gamification should be viewed with caution, as it is still relatively recent, with few studies on this topic regarding its effects on content retention. According to Pillar and Dorneles (2020), 'gamification needs to be seen above all as a subject of constant criticism.' (p. 362).

<sup>15</sup> The IBGE classification traditionally considers the following age groups: youth, individuals from 0 to 19 years old; adults, between 20 and 59 years old; and elderly individuals aged 60 and above. The WHO defines adolescence as the second decade of life, from 10 to 19 years old, and considers youth as the period between 15 and 24 years old." Available at: <https://www.ibge.gov.br/estatisticas/sociais/populacao.html> ; <https://www.who.int/pt> . Access on: 03 Aug. 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Data from the Continuous National Household Sample Survey (PNAD Contínua) covering the effects of the pandemic. Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/educacao/noticia/2021/12/02/evasao-escolar-de-criancas-e-adolescente-aumenta-171percent-na-pandemia-diz-estudo.ghtml>. Access on: 30 Jul. 2023.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. note 17.

the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in the state of São Paulo alone, more than 667,000 students were out of school that year, representing a significant increase compared to previous years.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to requiring adequate infrastructure and a good internet connection, remote teaching also relies on printed materials in 98.2% of cases and guidance provided through messaging apps, a method adopted by 97.5% of educators during the pandemic. These items end up creating new barriers between students and the content being taught.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, other factors can be pointed out as elements contributing to school dropout. According to Olavo Nogueira Filho, director of Todos Pela Educação, the breaking of ties with education and school, along with poor academic performance and consequent lack of motivation, should be taken into account. A third aspect highlighted concerns the increased need to seek income to supplement the family budget.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, as we observed in our research, all these factors prove to be determinants in affecting students' relationship with school, contributing to increased dropout rates and evasion during adolescence. It's notable how economic pressure affecting families can coerce young people to enter the workforce earlier. This diminishes students' engagement with the learning process, factors that were already present in the Brazilian context and certainly exacerbated by the current crisis.

If school dropout occurs especially among adolescents, investigating the role of school at this stage of life becomes fundamental. Adolescence, as a social representation, is commonly associated with a time of crisis, resulting from the transition from childhood to adulthood. It is during this period of life that the individual is expected to make the transition from the family environment to the broader social bond. According to psychoanalysis, the eruptive drive inherent in puberty is traumatic and arouses anxiety in young people. There is an impossibility for adolescents to give universal meaning to what happens to them in their bodies. Words are lacking to name this violent eruption of sensations, affects, desires, and fantasies. Hence the difficulty in symbolizing and the tendency to act are so typical of this phase of life (LACADÉE, 2011). Therefore, adolescence can be taken as a logical time for elaborating an individual response to the reality of puberty. Alexandre Stevens (2004) even defines the period of adolescence as a symptom of puberty, marking the former as an effect of the bodily transformations caused by the latter.

For many young people, the passage through adolescence is even more delicate due to the association of a series of social, economic, family, and subjective factors that mark the condition of vulnerability in which they find themselves. Such factors may corroborate disinterest in school learning, contribute to the emergence of conflicts and violence, and ultimately, lead to school dropout.

The suffering of adolescents in the context of the pandemic is perceptible due to widespread insecurity, social distancing, and all the losses that such a catastrophe has been causing. The assumed formats of remote education, whether synchronous or hybrid, hinder the learning process for all layers of society, in addition to affecting social interaction among children and adolescents, who see school not only as a space to acquire theoretical knowledge but also for socialization. Furthermore, the World Health

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<sup>18</sup> Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/sp/sao-paulo/noticia/2021/07/23/evasao-escolar-dispara-durante-a-pandemia-e-cerca-de-670-mil-alunos-ficam-sem-estudar-em-sp-aponta-relatorio.ghtml>. Access on: 30 Aug. 2023.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. note 19.

Organization (WHO) has pointed out an increase in domestic violence against children and adolescents during the period of social distancing.

In a study conducted by Lima (2020) on adolescents' experiences with remote learning during the pandemic, most of the interviewees considered that this format and face-to-face learning are two distinct forms of learning, with a loss in the quality of education when transitioning from face-to-face to virtual classes. The anguish of adolescents was especially evident through the uncertainty about the return to face-to-face school activities. Adolescents emphasized the importance of face-to-face contact with the teacher in the learning process and highlighted the school's role in socialization, which is consistent with the results extracted from the present research. The adolescents interviewed in our research did not even experience such loss, as there was no access to remote learning. Lima's research (2020) also pointed out the importance of listening to students for the construction of a political-pedagogical project appropriate to new subjectivities.

Educating in the context of digital culture (NOBRE, 2021) requires considering the possibilities and current forms of students' thinking. In times of globalization, knowledge cannot be expropriated but must, more than ever, be appropriated to be shared. The right to education can always be expanded with digital technologies. The concept of citizenship also needs to be revised, as: "[...] it is about a different citizenship, which includes feelings of belonging and fluid, transitional identity modalities, housed in the feeling of multiplicity" (BLOJ, 2011, p. 48).

It is necessary to consider the use of technologies associated with social networks, such as communicators and networks of interpersonal relationships, to enhance the effects of learning in the classroom, since both are widely used by students. In the book "A escola navega na web: que onda é essa?" (Lima *et al.*, 2019), the role of school in the lives of young people is highlighted, especially in the construction of a sense of life itself. However, it is noted that for the school to be up to its time, it needs to open up to the social and cultural transformations arising from the insertion of digital devices into contemporary life, analyzing their effects and impasses, and discovering, together with young people, their educational possibilities. In this social context deeply transformed by the use of digital technologies, the role of the teacher becomes even more important. As the authors emphasize:

[...] In an era where young people inhabit the network, this noisy and fast-paced virtual space, schools could create small respites, gaps, intervals for critical reflection, including differences between information and knowledge, and the relationships between words and affection in the virtual environment.(LIMA; BERNI; DIAS, 2019, p. 254)

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which definitively altered all social flows in Brazil and worldwide, understanding what young people expect from schools post-pandemic becomes fundamental so that educational institutions can prepare and meet the required changes. It is only from this perspective that we can believe in the resumption, construction, and/or preservation of school-aged youths' bonds with the education system.

Recent literature already points to the need for a reformulation of the educational model after the pandemic. According to Gatti (2020), considering the differences generated by this period regarding students' biopsychosocial development and study opportunities will require flexibility in learning time and space to accommodate them without causing feelings of frustration, failure, and selectivity. The author also points out that even before the pandemic, schools were already losing political



and existential significance for young people, so this would be an opportunity to review the immediate, competitive, and content-focused model that was being practiced. Therefore, there is an urgent need to include all stakeholders involved in education, orchestrating management based on democratic participation and ensuring that conditions are not imposed on children and adolescents by adults.

Experiences in this regard have been reported, as done by Almeida and Dalben (2020) about a school in Paraná where they work. By betting on joint work and distancing from excessive administrative bureaucracy, it was possible to adapt the state's remote learning public policy to the local reality. Along with the psychosocial support for teachers, the educational team claims to have succeeded in this approach as early as 2020 when the WHO declared the start of the pandemic. Although this study did not report the students' concrete perception, it is interesting to note that almost half of the classes had less than 30% remote participation at the beginning of the school year; with the progress of the year, no class had less than 60% of students in this situation.

Thus, although the contexts of Brazilian schools and youths are extremely heterogeneous, it has become evident that the beneficial post-pandemic return must be permeated by listening to the actors involved in the educational process. Considering that the focus of these interventions is the student, the main target of this process, it is essential that this listening be directed to adolescents firsthand.

One possible alternative would be to activate conceptual and empirical aspects of transmedia education in the post-pandemic school context, considering the learning forcibly generated between students and teachers for the use of media environments for educational purposes during the pandemic. The notion of transmedia education concerns the uses and meanings attributed to media environments in the school context, with the specific purpose of generating learning, engagement, and critical conception about the media. The perspective of transmedia education can, for example, favor the integration between media narratives, literary narratives, and life story narratives, through the integrated use of language resources and social participation. In a way, this is what we tried to do in a punctual way with the writing workshops that followed the conversations.

Based on communicational strategies that emphasize students' experiences with media environments, the transmedia education approach stimulates the collective construction of geolocated narratives, with an impact inside and outside the school. It should be noted that the term "transmedia" describes how media narratives propagate at the intersection of media, preserving the semiotic autonomy of each media environment and expanding the social reach of collectively produced narratives.

This perspective, which was already being increasingly used before the COVID-19 pandemic, proves to be particularly fruitful in the post-pandemic school context, given the acquired capacity to articulate the uses and meanings of media platforms to build and expand collective narratives that demarcate students' experiences and interests in the classroom.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In light of these findings, we understand that the answer to our initial question – about what adolescents want from school in the post-pandemic period – is largely compromised, at least when expecting something more direct from the youth, based on knowledge derived from experience. However, such an answer can be extracted from the complexity presented to us in the narratives they undertook. With the information collected from there, we understand that this complexity presents two main dimensions: one of a structural aspect and another, current.

In the structural aspect, the problems generated by the immense socioeconomic inequality in Brazil, which has been present since the origins of our society and persists among us, are found. This inequality produces effects from individual family members to the level of large institutions, such as the services offered in the fields of health, security, and education, for example. In the latter, the lack of education-focused policies directly affects school life, which ranges from its most basic resources to investment in methodological and technical innovations. In the succession of governments, the structural problems of education are addressed only in their basic aspects and always partially. There has not yet been a policy aimed at innovation that could effectively prepare schools for integration into the digital technology sphere, although this is a common theme in the ultra-liberal discourse dominant in Brazilian society. Furthermore, it should be considered that, as the pandemic laid bare the economic and social inequalities of young people and their families, it made even more evident the risk that the homeschooling project may be officially implemented in the future. In this context of uncertainties and little effort to develop a political project for basic education at a national level, young people are the main victims.

The second aspect concerns the current context, namely the pandemic's repercussions, which required large-scale social adaptations in a very short time. In this sense, it became clear once again how the poorest populations were the hardest hit by the pandemic. In fact, this aspect stems from the first and is nothing more than an exacerbation of the difficulties already experienced by the poorest populations.

In this sense, it became evident that the precarious social context of this segment of the population prevented young people from having a more proactive participation in the research, in terms of indicating what worked and what should not be adopted in remote learning based on the pandemic experience. With the exception of those who had references from better-organized schools with better resources, the repertoire of the majority of the interviewed youths proved to be insufficient precisely due to the lack of a full experience of remote learning.

Despite this finding, another point caught our attention, this time in a more positive and also quite revealing manner in this research: teacher support was identified as crucial for the resumption of school life.

In general, the importance of the "school-teacher" duo in the lives of young people was reinforced by practically all participants in the research. However, there is no idealization of the school they currently attend, which they describe as a space of joy, but also tedious: "The problem is not the school... there are interesting classes and bad classes."

Regarding the teacher, on the one hand, students show clarity regarding their role in transmission. They are always pointed out for their importance in learning: "The way they teach, if they are interested in the student, how they treat the student"; "The teacher has to show the way." On the other hand, some elements to be critically considered are also pointed out: "The student is not a robot, some teachers don't care about the students." At no time, however, was the teacher-student relationship seen as something from the past, without greater relevance in the investigated context. On the contrary, adolescents showed a certain nostalgia for their teachers, although there was also a clear desire for greater autonomy in school life, which was related to a question of trust on the part of the school and, especially, the teachers. The hygiene measures due to the return to face-to-face life, for example, were invariably seen as an opportunity for teachers to show this trust in the students, enabling greater autonomy for them.

Regarding academic activities, young people also showed a desire to reveal their research conditions through the use of the internet at home or in the school environment. If the use of cell phones was once restricted or even prohibited in schools, today it has become an ally of education, being required in the remote model. The question that arises is to what extent, from now on, after the return to face-to-face activities, cell phones, tablets, and, properly, the internet will have their places guaranteed in school life.

Traditionally, education has been cautious and sometimes even resistant to changes brought about by the insertion of digital language into social life. For Lisita, Berni, Nobre (*et al.* 2021), there are two aspects to consider regarding this attitude of a certain slowness of the educational institution to absorb technological changes. On the one hand, this slowness has been appropriate to the size of the school's social function in terms of the temporal caution required by education, which caused it to "not submit itself to the rush of digitization, which made education one of the last points of resistance, perhaps necessary, in the face of the greatness of its mission." (LISITA, BERNI, NOBRE *et al.*, 2021). On the other hand, according to the authors, this attitude has roots in structural technical difficulties resulting from the sheer magnitude of what this field needs to undertake, which prevented the incorporation of new tools over the decades in which the digital has been inserted into other social sectors.

Certainly, regarding this latter point, we could raise quite contradictory aspects if we consider how the implementation of digital technologies has favored the advancement of various social sectors over the years, which, sooner or later, should also occur with education.

What the research made clear, however, is that the digital exclusion of students from public schools in Belo Horizonte is the result of a lack of public policies aimed at addressing this deficiency, and this does not go unnoticed by young people. What the covid-19 pandemic made clear is that the process of social inclusion now passes through digital inclusion and that, so far, the school is on the sidelines of this. In fact, it is no longer a refusal of the school, but rather a lack of political will and economic investment in educational issues, whether methodological and technical or human, including the technical training of teachers and others involved in the teaching-learning process.

Finally, it is worth noting that, when it comes to human formation, the importance of finding the correct tuning for technological use in an activity as essential as educational formation must be considered. For this, the tuning fork needs to be that of maintaining an ethical and human commitment, which can understand this process beyond mere knowledge acquisition inherent in the dominant technicist logic, often reinforced by the digitalization process of culture. In this sense, it is essential that there is a valorization of the knowledge dimension of each participant in the educational process – especially that of the student, who can contribute greatly with their knowledge to this implementation – understanding by "knowledge" the point that goes beyond the limits of the universal and allows the singular to express itself, giving rise to new inventions.

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