

# Considerations about school failure according to the bioecological theory of human development

Vivência da reprovação escolar à luz da Teoria Bioecológica do Desenvolvimento Humano

Fracaso escolar a la luz de la teoría bioecológica del desarrollo humano

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## Highlights

The students blame themselves for the failure, believing that it was due to a lack of interest.

Failing at school had negative impacts that were re-signified through behavioral changes.

The teachers, although critical of failure, did not abandon this resource because they considered it fair.

## Abstract

The experience of grade retention among students at a public school was studied based on the Bioecological Theory of Human Development, through interviews with ten adolescents and seven teachers. The data were analyzed using content analysis, with the objective of understanding the impacts of grade retention on the development of high school students. The results showed that although teachers did not fully understand or agree with grade retention, they still upheld it, believing it to be a matter of fairness and an opportunity for students to mature. The students took responsibility for their retention, which led to negative consequences such as academic delays, separation from friends, and conflicts with parents, resulting in the establishment of Inverse Proximal Processes during the retention period. Furthermore, students attributed retention to personal characteristics categorized as Force and Resource, believing they had failed due to lack of interest or intellectual incapacity. Nevertheless, the students also expressed a reinterpretation of the experience, viewing grade retention as a second chance to learn and mature.

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## Keywords

School failure. Bioecological Theory of Human Development. School life.

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## **| Introduction**

The phenomenon of school failure can be understood as a manifestation of factors known in the literature as school failure, which involves events that lead to failure, age/grade distortion, and school evasion. Although it may seem individualizing, this process is not generated by the student alone; it is a scenario constructed and maintained by a school system immersed in the capitalist logic of production (Almeida et al., 2008; Asbahr & Lopes, 2006; Freitas & Santos, 2023).

The consequences of failing fall on the students, who have to deal with the stigma of the "student who wants nothing", "lazy", "inattentive", "hyperactive", among a long list of labels, classifications and diagnoses (Osti & Brenelli, 2013; Pacheco et al., 2020). The blame for failing comes from both the teachers and the students themselves, who consider themselves incapable and therefore deserving of failure. Parents, in turn, blame their children for failing at school, and teachers blame families for their children's poor performance, claiming that they should be more involved in school issues (Asbahr & Lopes, 2006; Gil, 2021; Lima & Souza, 2020).

A study of repeat students in the state of São Paulo found that 80% of the 20 students interviewed believed they were perceived as inattentive, uninterested, and incapable by their teachers, and that they would like to be valued more. Students rated themselves poorly for not being able to do the activities and for being criticized by their teachers (Osti & Brenelli, 2013). Silva (2020) analyzed the socioeconomic and cultural characteristics, as well as the report cards of students at the Escola de Aplicação/UFPA, and pointed out that the causes of school failure were largely due to a lack of cultural capital resulting from an unfavorable family background. In addition, pressures caused by government policies that sought results from schools, almost invariably numerical, had the effect of pressuring students to pass, regardless of how they actually learned (Pacheco et al., 2018).

Failure can have numerous detrimental effects on academic life, including dropping out and increasing public investment by encouraging students to stay in school longer. Even though we don't know the exact benefits, if there are any, it is still a resource that both parents and teachers defend as a legitimate tool in the educational process, and it can function as a mechanism that favors learning, but also coercion and justice (Almeida & Alves, 2021; Sá, 2018; Trezzi & Chagas, 2023).

The conceptions that teachers create of students are present in a wide range of discourses, which are often based on psychological theories that have either been superseded by more modern views or are misinterpreted. In any case, these theories remain in teachers' minds when they judge students, for example, as immature and therefore unable to learn certain subjects (Asbahr & Nascimento, 2013). Furthermore, according to Paulo Freire, educating requires knowing how to listen to students, because it is by listening that one learns to talk to them, and not positioning oneself as the holder of the truth, because by listening to the student,

the teacher can transform their discourse and establish effective dialogues (Freire, 2015).

In a study carried out by Sá (2018), which aimed to verify what high school students thought about failing at school, it was identified that students internalized the feeling of guilt for failing, producing impacts on the family environment and delaying plans and dreams. The family experienced the same frustration, and together they mourned the loss of a year. As a result, they reported feeling sad, discouraged, ashamed, afraid, disappointed, frustrated, and wanting to drop out of school. On the other hand, they also affirmed the gain in resilience and the possibility of maturing and overcoming.

The effects of failure on the development of young adolescents can be seen in the light of the Bioecological Theory of Human Development (BTHD). In this contextualist theory, human development is defined as a phenomenon of changes and continuities in the biopsychosocial characteristics of human beings throughout their lives, as well as those of generations before and after the developing individuals, through interactions referred to by Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) as Proximal Processes.

The BTHD is anchored in a model called PPCT, which stands for Proximal Process, Person, Context, and Time, pillars of development that are indispensable for its understanding and inseparable in its production. Proximal Processes refer to interactions at gradual and progressive levels with people, objects, and symbols in their immediate environment over an extended period, regularly (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

The Proximal Processes can produce effects of increased competence, which occurs when the developing subject is in a favorable environment, and is characterized by the acquisition of new knowledge and the development of skills. On the other hand, in unfavorable contexts, the Proximal Processes can produce dysfunctional effects related to various types of school problems and issues, such as school failure (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Proximal Processes can also be reversed, which can have negative effects on development. These inverse processes, when they occur in favorable environments, can result in reduced competence. In unfavorable environments, such as conflictual relationships, these Inverse Proximal Processes can produce higher levels of dysfunction (Merçon-Vargas et al., 2020).

Person characteristics are divided into Demand (age, gender, skin color and physical appearance) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), Resource (experiences, skills, etc.), which enable the person to engage in Proximal Processes, and Strength, which is the manifest ability of the person to establish or avoid Proximal Processes. Curiosity, interest, and responsiveness are favorable, while impulsiveness, apathy, and inattention are inhibitors of the Proximal Processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

The environment where development takes place immediately is called the Microsystem, which can be the home, the classroom at school, work, or any place where the developing subject invests a significant amount of their time. The conjunction of these Microsystems is called the Mesosystem. The Exosystem is the environment outside the individual, such as the parents' work, which, although it is not part of the individual's Mesosystem, indirectly influences their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Finally, the Macrosystem encompasses the integration of all environments, considering the political and social contexts in which people develop. Thus, social issues or the local or global economy are phenomena that influence development and should therefore be taken into account in analyses (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Time can be understood as Micro time (the moment in which the Proximal Processes are taking place, in small actions and their intervals). Meso time is the time needed for a Proximal Process to manifest itself in a developmental change (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Macro time, which covers long periods and even generations, gives a socio-historical understanding of events.

Some recent studies have been carried out using BTHD in school contexts, as well as a vast literature relating this theory to topics such as violence (Begui et al., 2025), sports (Brandão et al., 2025), social development (Santos et al., 2025), autism (Mello et al., 2023), among others. In this way, the importance of this contextualist theory for understanding human development in different contexts is evident.

The school experience takes up a lot of time in the lives of adolescents, who establish relationships at school according to their personal characteristics and context. Although school failure has a corrective role, aimed at giving students a new chance to learn, it often has even more damaging effects. In this way, this study aims to investigate the experience of failure according to failed students and their teachers, using the theoretical-methodological framework of BTHD in all its stages, seeking a better understanding of teachers' beliefs and students' perceptions of this event. From this perspective, the BTHD was fundamental to understanding how the social context and personal characteristics were relevant to the production of developmental characteristics through the establishment of Proximal Processes over Time.

## **| Method**

In this work, a longitudinal and qualitative study was carried out, considering BTHD in its most mature form. This study was conducted in a public high school situated in a middle-class neighborhood of the city of Vila Velha, which has consistently achieved high scores in the National High School Exam (ENEM) compared to other schools in the network. As recommended by Bronfenbrenner, the Discovery Mode was used to obtain data, whose characteristics of the Person, or aspects of development, were not given *a priori*, and only through interviews was it possible to know which aspects of development underwent changes with failure and the

experience of it (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Espírito Santo, through the Plataforma Brasil, a national and unified database for registering research involving human beings (CAAE 93460718.0.0000.5542 / Document Number: 2,899,480).

Ten students were interviewed, comprising six males and four females, aged between 17 and 19, who were enrolled in the 10th grade of high school and had repeated the year in 2019. Seven teachers were interviewed, comprising four females and three males, within the school microsystem. The failing students were interviewed twice, once at the start of the school year and again at the end of the year. The teachers were interviewed during the year: three math teachers who gave four lessons a week, a Portuguese teacher who also gave four lessons a week, a history teacher who gave two lessons, a chemistry teacher who gave two hours, and an English teacher who gave one hour a week. The interviews lasted an average of 50 minutes.

Teachers and students answered open-ended questions about failure, its importance, consequences, and the role of people connected to school life, such as friends, teachers, and family. They were also asked about the teacher-student relationship and its importance for the educational process. The developmental milestones analyzed were changes in attitudes toward classroom behavior (messing around, paying more attention to teachers, studying for tests, and attending classes more frequently throughout the year). We analyzed their assessment of themselves in their various behaviors inside and outside of school, their adaptation to the idea of failing, and the development of relationships with teachers and classmates.

The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed using content analysis to extract recording units of semantic value. Subsequently, these recording units were organized into categories that emerged from the responses without previously determining which categories would be considered, a procedure in line with the discovery mode (Bardin, 2011; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The answers obtained and analyzed were compared between the initial and final moments of failure by the students, and their answers were compared with those of the teachers. To preserve the participants' identities, we used fictitious names starting with the letter A for the students and P for the teachers, taking into account the gender of each participant for their transcribed speech.

## **| Results**

An analysis of the reasons why students failed reveals that, according to them, Person's characteristics were a fundamental cause of their failure. Characteristics of Strength, such as lack of interest, lack of attention, lack of effort, lack of focus, laziness, and lack of seriousness, as well as characteristics of Resource, such as difficulty in keeping up with the content and lack of skill to learn, were reported by the students as reasons for having failed.

The Inverse Proximal Processes established between students and parents also contributed to students' failing. It was reported that the relationship with the parents made school life difficult, since the home microsystem was marked by many fights and difficulties related to the parents' separation. In addition, the students complained about the lack of rapport with the teachers throughout the year, promoting Inverse Proximal Processes.

The students reported a context marked by difficulties relating to the home-school Mesosystem. Regarding their homes, they cited financial difficulties and conflicts with their parents as factors contributing to their poor academic performance. At school, they raised concerns about their relationships with teachers, feeling "left out." The issues mentioned at the beginning of the failure experience persisted throughout the year, as even at the end of the failure period, they continued to believe that it occurred mainly due to a lack of interest and the inability to learn and dedicate themselves to school.

The teachers' perception of their students' failure was that it was due to problems in the home Microsystem and because of the characteristics of Strengths and Resources that were unfavorable to learning. About the characteristics of Strength, they mentioned a lack of attention in class, poor reading habits, and inappropriate behavior. About the characteristics of the Resource, the students' lack of foundation, and the parents' lack of encouragement and pressure were mentioned. Teachers realized that the home-school Mesosystem hindered learning due to a lack of encouragement from parents and the fact that the school was very permissive, passing weak students, which caused them to arrive unprepared for more advanced grades. The students' and teachers' statements are highlighted in Chart 1.

**Chart 1**

Students and teachers talk about the reasons for failing.

<b>Students</b>	<b>Teachers</b>
"I couldn't learn" (Alessandro)	"They like to spend the night on social media." (Paula) Portuguese
"The subject was very fast and I couldn't keep up" (Alessandro)	"When they come to study in the morning, their brain wants to sleep. And then they truly sleep, put their head down and go to sleep" (Paula) Portuguese
"She used to teach things, and I understood nothing, nothing, nothing" (Amanda)	"Interpretation is a difficulty" (Pedro) History
"I didn't really try" (Amanda)	"Difficulty in making a social, political, economic, and religious analysis" (Pedro) History
"I went through summer school. I didn't study and I didn't succeed" (Amanda)	"Didn't study and in the future it's a snowball" (Priscila) Mathematics
"I just couldn't understand the subject" (Augusto)	"They think they're doing us a favor by learning the content" (Patrícia) Mathematics
"I didn't ask the teacher because he had to teach his subject and I had to understand it for myself." (Augusto)	
"Ah, bro, I'm stupid, it's weakness, I think it's more weakness really." (Arthur)	

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*"I'd study for it, but the exam comes and I can't do it" (Alice)*

*"Firstly, because they don't have the habit of reading" (Patrícia) Mathematics*

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Source: prepared by the authors.

## **| Proximal processes in teacher-student relationships**

Most students rated the quality of the teachers and their relationships with them positively. They emphasized the good characteristics of the Person, such as the Resource, saying that the teachers were well-trained and had extensive knowledge of the subject. They mentioned characteristics of Strength, such as the fact that they are demanding, friendly, patient, and accessible even when dealing with non-academic matters, as in the following statement: "Like, if you need something that isn't academic, they give you support" (Alfredo).

These personal characteristics could facilitate the establishment of Proximal Processes favorable to development and learning. However, when asked about their students, the teachers were very dissatisfied with their Strength and Resource characteristics. This discrepancy indicates that the interactions between teachers and students generated Inverse Proximal Processes that did not favor learning, despite the relationships being considered positive by both parties.

Regarding the characteristics of Strength, the teachers highlighted the students' poor performance, inappropriate behavior, poor reading habits, and lack of responsibility and commitment. Regarding characteristics of Resource, teachers believed that students lacked a foundation and a family environment conducive to adequate education, which justified their indifference to students' poor performance and low interest, and grades. On the other hand, although they viewed them in a negative light, they believed that the relationship established with them was positive. Many said they were close to the students, so that they could relate to them outside of school, going to the movies, giving advice, and allowing them to participate in their social media. On the other hand, some teachers were indifferent to the claim that they were at the school to explain the subject, and that the fact that the students liked them made no difference, as can be seen in the following statement: "If the student likes me, it will help him, it will help me, he will learn better for sure, but I don't really care" (Patrícia).

## **| Assessment of the experience of failure**

The experience of failing at school led to changes in the relationships established with classmates, as the students began to attend a new classroom with students who were strangers to them, and they lost contact with classmates who had advanced to the next grade. The loss of contact within this microsystem was reflected in others, as the students who failed lost contact with their friends and stopped going to the same places. Some students missed out on professional internships, ending their experience in the work microsystem.

Some of the characteristics of Person, relating to Strength, changed from the time they were told they had failed until the time of the first interview, such as increased perseverance and a more serious approach to dealing with problems. Although the students considered the failure to be a delay for plans and a source of regret, some reinterpreted the experience as an opportunity to correct their behavior and develop maturity, especially for future choices.

Regarding their interaction with teachers after failing, some students reported that it remained friendly and that they began to ask more questions when they had doubts, which they had not done the previous year. The teachers' perception of the relationship between the failing students and the other students in the class was that although they went through a phase in which they were stigmatized, they were very quickly accepted by the class. Jokes were made about the failure, but there was nothing to stop them from getting along.

The experience of failure and the establishment of Proximal Processes, mainly with teachers and peers during the Meso time, produced developmental characteristics observed in the second moment of the collection. The students had high expectations of passing the exam and stated that they were more dedicated and took their studies more seriously.

Most of the students continued to feel negatively about failing, and comments such as "it's never good to fail" and "it's a year of your life lost" appeared in several interviews, except for one student who said that failing was worth it. There was an attempt to re-signify the failure, with claims that it had been a learning experience, that they had made new friends, and that they had been able to rethink their plans for the future. For some students, it was a year of learning, and if they had passed, they would have arrived at the Senior year with many doubts and would have failed eventually. At the end of the year, the failing students still recognized that they had lost good friends, but they reported meeting new ones and that they had been able to make solid friendships.

Although the students told stories about the very negative effects of failing, the teachers showed that they knew little about them. They often minimized the problem by stating that the students cared little about the consequences of failing, and that they didn't notice any difference in their behavior. They said that it had little impact on the students' lives and that failure was a punishment for their lack of effort in studying, serving to mature them as students and as people. They still believed that failure was a way of "sifting the clientele" and that it should fulfill this role from literacy onwards. Other teachers said that failure should serve to make the student "get real", but that it wouldn't fulfill this role because it was a frustrating event, and that it should have the function of making the student improve and grow and see that they had to study. Still, they didn't believe it would actually work because, according to them, the majority didn't change with failure. They said that the students had plenty of chances, and that failure should exist as a threatening tool to let them know that if they didn't do what was prescribed, they could suffer the consequences. There was a belief that failure was a necessary evil, the result of the student's immaturity and lack of interest.

It was observed that teachers interpreted failure as a warning and a second chance for students who were unable to progress to the next grade. Another view of failure was that it had a numerical issue involved, and that it should have more subjective matters, and that currently what caused a student to fail was a lack of maturity, responsibility and commitment, and that in some cases it would have a positive effect for students to "wake up". It's worth noting that while they produced discourses containing positive points about failure, there was the idea that it didn't improve student performance. The students' assessment of the experience of failure and the teachers' view were summarized in their speeches, highlighted in Chart 2.

**Chart 2**

What students and teachers say about the experience of failing.

<b>Students</b>	<b>Teachers</b>
<i>"I'm studying more, because before I didn't study at all" (André )</i>	<i>"Those who failed always found students who were rowdy and had little interest in learning" (Pedro) History</i>
<i>"The guys in Senior year and I'm stuck with a bunch of brats in my classroom" (Arthur)</i>	<i>"In the past, being in a room with younger people used to make them feel ashamed, but nowadays that's not the case" (Paula).</i>
<i>"My grandmother hardly looked me in the face after I failed" (Andrea)</i>	<i>"There are students who seem to want to be anywhere else but here, there's no way, they fail" (Priscila) Mathematics</i>
<i>"Bro, I said: I'm going to recover, and I did" (Antônio)</i>	<i>"The school has become very permissive, and it's hard for a student to fail. Only those who don't want anything fail" (Paulo) Chemistry</i>
<i>"My friend, she encouraged me a lot to study, you know, and because of her, I don't want to stop at high school." (Amanda)</i>	<i>"And I let him fail, and the next year he was 60. It made no difference. And failure didn't work" (Pedro) History</i>

Source: prepared by the authors.

**| Gaining competence and reducing dysfunction during school failure**

Experiencing failure had different impacts on the biopsychosocial characteristics of the students, who reported new attitudes towards their studies, such as dedicating themselves more, trusting themselves more, paying more attention in class, and taking more responsibility. They said they saw failing as a challenge and a learning experience.

Also, as developmental gains, the students set themselves goals of not complaining about their subjects and striving for better performance, avoiding distractions and conversations during class, as in the following statement: "I'm going to study more. Instead of saying I don't like the subject, I'm going to try" (Andrea). At the second moment of data collection, some students reported that failing the exam had led to changes, such as increased study time, greater attentiveness, and improved class

organization. Even if the failure was pointless for some, there was a sense of maturity. Finally, the students spoke of their great regret at being late, as they could already be at university or getting a certificate, as can be illustrated in the following statement: "I could already be at university, doing an internship and I'm still at school watching my friends go by" (Alfredo).

Teachers perceived repeaters as people who didn't care about failing, who didn't think about the future or getting a diploma. They also said that student participation was minimal, although they noticed a few exceptions. They spoke of their indifference to failing, the lack of family, and not having dreams, and that because they weren't interested in learning, it would be difficult to help them, as Patrícia said: "They don't care, I don't know. I think it's a lack of family, a lack of dreams".

## **| Discussion**

This paper investigated the experience of school failure among 10th-grade high school students at a public school in the state of Espírito Santo, Brazil. The BTHD was used as descriptive support, taking into account the school microsystem in a macrosystem of low-class young people. In this study, it was possible to find out about the opinions and behavioral changes of adolescents experiencing school failure in 2019, as well as those of their teachers.

The reasons for failure, as pointed out by the students, were all due to personal difficulties, such as intellectual incapacity, irresponsibility, laziness, and lack of interest, which showed that the students took responsibility for the failure process, since teachers and parents transfer it to students, as shown in studies conducted with students who experienced failure and were held responsible for it (Asbahr & Lopes, 2006; Osti & Brenelli, 2013). The difficulties reported by the students in justifying their failure according to the BTHD were related to the personal characteristics of Strength and Resource, which deal with the ability to establish or avoid proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Although these characteristics, whose possible consequences are to avoid these processes, may in fact be part of the school context, an important question to raise is why they exist and who produced them, since the school context should favor other characteristics of Strength and not just accept them as a justification for school difficulties.

The school, understood in the BTHD as a Microsystem, views school difficulties as inherent to the student and ends up distancing itself from them, failing to provide the necessary help to address issues of Strength, such as motivation and interest. Furthermore, it seems to disregard other issues related to the student's context, such as problems faced at home, another microsystem, reported by students as being affected by financial problems and various family issues, as also stated by Almeida et al. (2008), who showed that although failure has several causes, students attributed it solely to lack of effort.

When asked about the reasons for failing, students presented various contextual situations such as unfavorable financial circumstances, drug use, and problematic

family relationships, in addition to issues related to personal characteristics of Strength, which culminated in difficulty establishing Proximal Processes, since the student identified little with the subject and had weak interaction with teachers. The conflicts established between students and their parents and teachers produced Inverse Proximal Processes that contributed to school failure, issues also identified by Merçon-Vargas et al. (2020) and Freire (2015).

When teachers analyzed the causes of failure, they typically used contextual justifications, considering that the home microsystem was inadequate, that the parents were poorly educated, and had limited involvement in the school process, elements also discussed by Vergas (2020). They didn't believe that students would improve by failing, even though they wouldn't give it up because they considered it a form of coercion and justice to the detriment of those who had studied and therefore couldn't be treated in the same way as those who hadn't dedicated themselves. A common justification given by teachers was a lack of grounding. They believed that because students did not fail due to a permissive school system, they would reach the final grades without the ability to interpret and contextualize information. What's more, there was a lack of content that was essential to understanding the subject and which could in no way be revived. As a result, a deficiency in Resources, one of the personal characteristics discussed in the theory, would be a factor in failure and the difficulty in establishing Proximal Processes that could result in learning. According to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998), effective Proximal Processes require the influence of both individuals involved and cannot come from just one person in the interaction. Financial difficulties in some households have created a gap between students. However, this problem was not considered a school issue, but rather something to be resolved by the student, who was unlikely to succeed in this process precisely because they did not have the necessary support at school, since the institution was focused not on students with difficulties, but on valuing those who performed better so that they would bring results to the school, as also mentioned by Pacheco et al. (2018). The teachers were apparently limited to reproducing the subjects in a content-based logic. They were always concerned with targets, complying with programs, competitions, and the capitalist logic of operating in education, which measures results based on the content taught and the results obtained in university entrance exams.

When asked about the consequences of failing, the students showed regret. They lamented the loss of friends who moved on to the next grade, the loss of their internship, difficulties with their family, punishments, and negative feelings. In this way, important changes in the biopsychosocial characteristics of failing students were seen through the BTHD. There has been a significant change in his Mesosystem, marked by distancing from friends at school and conflicts at home. Other microsystems have changed, such as the compulsory withdrawal from paid internships and the loss of freedom to go to places because of punishments imposed by parents. These factors have led to changes in personal characteristics, especially Strength (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), which can be negative, such as those already mentioned, but also positive, such as an increase in perseverance, dedication, seriousness, and assiduity.

According to the teachers, the school played the role of giving them several chances to pass, and they believed that they had fulfilled their role of teaching the subject, and that it would be the role of the students and their families to take care of their school obligations. The idea of blame was so strong that when we asked the students about the reasons for failing, they all attributed it to personal causes. They stated that they didn't dedicate themselves enough, paid insufficient attention, were absent too frequently, played around too much, and didn't understand the subject as they should, findings similar to those reported by Asbahr and Lopes (2006).

In the teachers' view, failing wouldn't have many consequences for the students, so they wouldn't mind failing. They believed that most of their students would not succeed academically and professionally, and that poor academic performance would translate into poor professional performance, resulting in poorly paid jobs or, as one teacher put it, "underemployment." This discrepancy between the students' report and the teachers' opinion showed that there was a major flaw in the dialog, which Paulo Freire sees as fundamental to the teacher's approach to the student, knowledge of their reality and a way of working on meaningful content that is part of their life context (Freire, 2015).

It's interesting to note that when the students were asked about their teachers, the vast majority emphasized their qualities, cited their good training, and generally expressed a positive opinion about their teachers. In the students' view, the teachers had favorable personal characteristics for establishing Proximal Processes, such as characteristics of Resourcefulness (good training and knowledge of the subject) and Strength (willingness to teach and answer questions). Curiously, when asked about the teachers' opinions of the students, they expressed dissatisfaction, stating that the students were immature, unprepared, and lacked a solid foundation. However, at the same time, they reported having a good relationship with them.

The discrepancy between the opinions that one group has of the other suggests that there must be great difficulty in establishing Proximal Processes, since the interactions have not become more complex and deeper over time, and are no more than insignificant relationships, regardless of how long they have been in place. Because there were not enough Proximal Processes, few developmental changes were noticed. Even though the teachers spent four 50-minute periods a week with the students, there didn't seem to be any significant rapprochement with them. Students who have developed Strength characteristics that have resulted in a decrease in the establishment of Proximal Processes are unlikely to show any other type of attitude without the school and teachers trying to help them, as also highlighted by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006).

The teacher, assuming that negative behaviors and attitudes (Strength characteristic) would be an impediment to learning, and considering that these characteristics depended exclusively on the student, without their participation being able to produce any change, ended up considering failure to be the best alternative. In many cases, the possibility of failing the student was seen as a trump card in the teacher's hand, as a threat mechanism (Almeida & Alves, 2021; Sá,

2018; Gil, 2021). The lack of belief in the student's ability to learn (on the part of the teachers) and in the teacher's ability to teach (on the part of the students) was certainly a factor that made it difficult for them to get closer.

The Time factor, one of the pillars of the PPCT model, was very important in the process of failing, since what the students reported having experienced when they found out they had failed was a more negative scenario, both in the way they faced it and in the way their families dealt with the news. Over time, first in the interview four months after the failure and then at the end of the year, the students reported that they were coping better with the failure, having a more positive relationship with their families, making new friends with their classmates and recognizing that the failure had helped them to retain content and mature. The period during which they experienced failure can be understood within the framework of BTHD as Meso time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), since Proximal Processes were established between peers and family members, making the impressions of having failed have a more positive charge at the end of the year. The developmental gains acquired through the establishment of Proximal Processes during Micro and Meso time were highlighted by the students, especially at the end of the experience of failure. They said they were studying more, dedicating themselves more, having more confidence in themselves, paying closer attention, engaging in less mischief, and speaking less in class.

One function emphasized by both students and teachers concerning failure was precisely something that requires greater care when analyzing the developmental gains of a failure, namely, the concept of maturation. For many of the teachers who took part in the research, one of the students' problems was a lack of maturity, and that retaking the school year could serve to bring about this maturity that is lacking so that the student can adapt to the reality of school and submit to the school's norms and rituals to pass. The students, similarly, ended up adopting the idea that they didn't learn because they were immature, and that repeating a year brought the maturity they needed to pass in the end. According to Asbarh and Nascimento (2013), there was a belief that when students couldn't learn certain content, it was because they weren't mature, and that all they had to do was wait until they were mature before they could finally learn. This idea was strongly refuted by the authors who stated that the student's development depended on teaching intervention, and not that we should just wait for the adolescent to mature, but that it was precisely the teacher's intervention that would promote this development interpreted by the teachers as maturity (Almeida et al., 2008; Asbahr & Orban, 2006; Lima & Souza, 2020).

## **| Conclusion**

In this work, it was possible to verify, in the light of the BTHD, that school failure proved to be a complex event that had a series of consequences for the student, although these consequences were not perceived in the same way by the teachers. In the opinion of the students, there were many reasons for their failure, but in general, it was largely due to their own fault. The school, in the opinion of the

teachers, and the teachers themselves shared the same view, assuming that they did what they could and that any failure was due exclusively to the often immature behavior of the students, indicating that their personal characteristics were not conducive to proper development, especially those of Strength and Resourcefulness, so that the context had little influence, in the teachers' view, on changing the immature behavior of the students.

The students viewed the experience of failing as very uncomfortable, as several contexts had changed, particularly the home-school mesosystem. They report the loss of friends, freedom, time, and delays in their life plans. The teachers believed that failure had little impact on the majority of students, which showed a distance between them that justified their lack of interest in rescuing dissenting students.

Although there was no clear understanding of the role of failure, the school community did not give up on this device, as teachers, parents, and even students were in favor of its existence. However, they differed widely on its impact on students' lives. The school administration, according to the teachers, came up with various ways to minimize failures and ended up in a dilemma: either approving the student who didn't learn, leaving the problem for future years, or failing him and incurring negative grades. Regardless of the decision made, the loser was the student, who, in one way or another, didn't receive special attention and didn't learn the content. One possible solution would be not to have failure as a tool, but to have teaching as a priority, and the continuous work of integrating students with difficulties into the learning environment rather than merely grading them. Future studies that delve deeper into the topic of failure, especially those supported by psychological and developmental theories, would be important for a better understanding of the issue, as well as bringing greater visibility to it, to the point of considering new ways of educating students throughout their academic lives. Further research into the consequences of failing would be beneficial in re-evaluating this type of procedure.

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## **| Resumo**

A reprovação vivenciada por alunos de uma escola pública foi estudada com base na Teoria Bioecológica do Desenvolvimento Humano mediante entrevistas com 10 adolescentes e sete professores avaliadas por meio da análise de conteúdo, objetivando conhecer os impactos da reprovação escolar no desenvolvimento de estudantes do Ensino Médio. Como resultados, observamos que os professores embora não compreendessem e concordassem com a reprovação, não abriam mão dela por acreditarem ser uma questão de justiça e oportunidade de amadurecimento. Os alunos assumiram a responsabilidade pela reprovação que trouxe prejuízos como atrasos, afastamento dos amigos e desentendimento com os pais, levando ao estabelecimento de Processos Proximais Inversos durante a reprovação. Ainda, atribuíram às características pessoais de Força e Recurso a reprovação, por acreditarem que ficaram reprovados por falta de interesse ou incapacidade intelectual. Os estudantes, contudo, enunciaram falas de ressignificação da reprovação como sendo uma segunda chance de aprender e de amadurecer.

**Palavras-chave:** Reprovação escolar. Teoria Bioecológica do Desenvolvimento Humano. Vida escolar.

## **| Resumen**

El fracaso escolar vivido por alumnos de una escuela pública fue estudiado a partir de la Teoría Bioecológica del Desarrollo Humano, por medio de entrevistas a 10 adolescentes y siete profesores, evaluadas con análisis de contenido, con el objetivo de comprender los impactos del fracaso escolar en el desarrollo de los alumnos de enseñanza media. Los resultados mostraron que, aunque los profesores no entendían ni estaban de acuerdo con el fracaso, no lo abandonaban porque creían que era una cuestión de justicia y una oportunidad para madurar. Los alumnos asumieron la responsabilidad del fracaso, que les había causado

daños como retrasos, distanciamiento de los amigos y desavenencias con los padres, lo que les llevó a establecer Procesos Próximos Inversos durante el fracaso. También atribuyeron el fracaso a las características personales de Fortaleza e Ingenio, creyendo que habían fracasado por falta de interés o incapacidad intelectual. Sin embargo, los alumnos resignificaron el fracaso como una segunda oportunidad para aprender y madurar.

**Palabras clave:** Fracaso escolar. Teoría Bioecológica del Desarrollo Humano. Vida escolar.

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