

Comprehensive Education as a Core Element of the Life Project

An Ethical and Reflective Perspective

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Abstract

The empirical findings reveal a dynamic ecosystem structured around a five-pillar framework, driven by the tension between a baseline dimension of fear or insecurity (triggered by institutional exclusion and academic performance pressures) and the activation of resilient mechanisms (recreation, spirituality, and family support networks). Crucially, the data demonstrate that these coping strategies are structurally organized by an emergent ethical framework centred on honesty and personal integrity. Collectively, these dimensions converge into a nuclear category of [Ethically Grounded Resilience] amid uncertainty, illustrating that the link between self-knowledge and self-determination is fundamentally relational and dependent on comprehensive care environments.

Finally, these results are discussed in light of the Aristotelian tradition, Kenenich's pedagogy, and Frankl's logotherapy, contrasting an integrated, meaning-driven life project against the fragmented existence characteristic of postmodernity. The study concludes with actionable implications for school-family partnerships and care-based pedagogies aimed at fostering youth autonomy and human flourishing.

Keywords: Comprehensive education, Life project, Resilient mechanisms, Ethical framework, Flourishing.

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1 INTRODUCTION

From the early twentieth century onwards, scholars and thinkers have explored not only themes of self-knowledge and future projection—encouraging individuals to identify life goals and reflect on the meaning of existence—but also, from a pedagogical perspective, how education can support individuals in the pursuit and definition of their life mission. As Strada¹ asserts, “individuals have the capacity to design their life project and transform their environment. They may succeed in this endeavour, but they may also fail.”

To develop this capacity, guidance or orientation is essential, and education can provide it. Therefore, educators—teachers, parents, family members, and educators in general—must be aware of their own assumptions when practicing pedagogical methods and when grounding those methods in explicit epistemological foundations.

In this paper, the authors focus on two other thinkers, Kentenich and Frankl, together with their disciples, whose reflections emphasize the need for self-projection and the steps required to achieve it. Arnold (1903-2002), in particular, reconciles scientific psychology with Thomistic personalism, offering a solid anthropological foundation for understanding human flourishing through the integration of the personality.

Arnold's² approach is fundamental to any study of emotions and flourishing, as it provides a non-reductionist view of the human being, centred on the psychophysical unity of the person as understood in the broader personalist tradition associated with Kentenich and Frankl. Her approach is structured around three pillars:

a) The integration of personality and the ‘ideal self’: personality is understood as the totality of human faculties and habits organised through the active pursuit of an ideal self. Flourishing—or integration—is achieved when the ideal the person conceives for themselves converges with what ‘ought to be’ according to their rational and ethical nature. If these ideals diverge, defensive mechanisms and disintegration may arise.

b) Emotions as dynamic factors: emotion is defined as a ‘felt tendency’ towards an object evaluated as appropriate or inappropriate. Emotions are not treated as mere biological impulses. Instead, they can and should be organised by reason in order to contribute to the perfection of the personality and to the achievement of rational ends. Emotional maturity lies in choosing higher

¹A. STRADA, *La imagen del hombre según José Kentenich*, Patris, Córdoba 2013, p. 89.

²J. GARCÍA-ALANDETE, *Magda Arnold's Understanding of the Human Person: Thomistic Personalism, Psychophysical Unity of the Person, Integration of Personality, and Transcendence*, «History of Psychology», 27 (2023), pp. 159-177, <https://doi.org/10.1037/hop0000247>.

goals that give meaning to life, allowing emotions to operate as drivers of self-realisation.

c) Self-determination and transcendence: in contrast to mechanistic determinism, Arnold defends freedom of choice as an essential causal factor in human behaviour. She further proposes that the integral development of the person is intrinsically linked to the spiritual dimension and to transcendence, placing God as the origin and ultimate end of existence, and Christ as the model of human perfection or the 'ideal self' par excellence.

According to this synthesis, Frankl locates the motive for living in the search for meaning, including amid suffering, thereby linking resilience to purpose. Kentenich emphasises the person as a unity of body, soul, and spirit, whose growth unfolds within relationships and through a vocational mission that calls forth responsibility and love. Arnold's flourishing model adds the cognitive-emotional dimension: adaptive appraisal and regulated emotions enable individuals to align inner experiences with the good, the true, and the beautiful. Together, these strands imply that true flourishing arises when individuals discover meaningful ends, live in authentic relational communities, and cultivate emotional balance consistent with the personalist ideal of the person as a moral agent oriented toward the common good.

In this approach, character education³ can be understood as supporting more than the transmission of moral dispositions. It contributes to reflective self-awareness and personal self-determination. Integrating cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions enables individuals to recognise their motivations and values, become aware of their inner world, and perceive themselves as agents of their own actions. Consequently, comprehensive education should empower individuals to take ownership of freedom consciously and responsibly, articulating their life project with transcendent meaning⁴. It is precisely through this internalization that character education corresponds to the exercise of self-determination developed within personalist perspectives.

1.1 *Self-Knowledge and Self-Determination*

Wojtyła's⁵ concept of self-determination is deeply rooted in reflective self-knowledge. In acting, an individual not only discovers what they do but

³K. KRISTJÁNSSON, T. HARRISON, A. PETERSON, *Reconsidering the 'Ten Myths' about Character Education*, «British Journal of Educational Studies», 73/1 (2025), pp. 49-72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2024.2378059>.

⁴E. LUGO, *Bioética clínica personalista: el aporte del padre José Kentenich*, «Vida y Ética», 12/2 (2011), pp. 59-84.

⁵K. WOJTYŁA, *The Acting Person*, in *Analecta Husserliana – The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research*, ed. by A. T. Tymieniecka, vol. x, D.Reidel Publ., Boston 1979.

also who they are internally (the ‘acting self’), thus establishing themselves as a moral subject who governs oneself through action. Consequently, self-knowledge⁶ is more than introspection; it evolves into the active experience of being the cause of one’s own decisions. Ultimately, self-determination arises from active self-knowledge: it is the reflective acknowledgment of one’s freedom in action that transforms an individual into the author of their own life. Since ancient times, the concern for self, articulated in the Delphic maxim, has included self-knowledge as fundamental for leading a fulfilling life that fosters self-acceptance and, from there, facilitates the necessary self-projection⁷.

Arnold’s contribution perfectly complements Wojtyła’s ideas of reflective self-knowledge in enabling individual to take responsibility for their own life and decisions. Her notion of the ideal self, reinforces the proposal that the Life Project must be aligned with the person’s inner life and dignity in order to avoid a mechanical existence mentioned by Kentenich⁸.

1.2 Pursuit of Meaning

According to Wong,⁹ the pursuit of meaning is likely the most promising path to a fulfilling life. He contends that people find meaning when they: (a) pursue a core life objective or value that transcends their own existence, (b) build trust-based, mutually caring relationships with others, and (c) hold faith in a higher power or a transcendent reality. In his view life has intrinsic value and is worth living regardless of the circumstances, enabling them to shape a meaningful and resilient life project.¹⁰ This perspective resonates with Arnold’s emphasis¹¹ on the alignment between the person and self-ideal as it ought to be as a key factor of personality integration. It also aligns with the claim that meaning is sustained through transcendent goals, mutual care, and faith in a higher reality. Reker¹² operationalizes the variables of the life-attitude construct based on Frankl’s sense of life.

⁶*Ibidem*.

⁷C. BARNI, *El sentido de la educación integral. Proyecto de Vida*, Centro Pedagógico José Kentenich, Buenos Aires 2021.

⁸J. KENTENICH. *Documentos de Schoenstatt*, Patris, Córdoba 2007.

⁹P. WONG, *Existential Positive Psychology and Integrative Meaning Therapy*, «International Review of Psychiatry», 32/7-8 (2020), pp. 565-578, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540261.2020.1814703>.

¹⁰IDEM, *Made for Resilience and Happiness: Effective Coping With the COVID-19 According to Viktor E. Frankl and Paul T. P. Wong*, INPM Press 2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343723014_Made-for-Resilience-and-Happiness-Effective-Coping-with-Covid-19-According-to-Viktor-E-Frankl-and-Paul-T-P-Wong.

¹¹J. GARCÍA-ALANDETE, *Magda Arnold’s Understanding of the Human Person*, cit.

¹²G. REKER, *Manual LAP-R. Life Attitude Profile-Revised*, Trent University Press, Peterborough 2007⁵.

Contemporary empirical research on adolescence and emerging adulthood converges with this theoretical framework. Studies on purpose in life¹³ show that adolescents who articulate a clear sense of purpose display greater psychological wellbeing and future orientation. Research on the need for belonging¹⁴ confirms that meaningful social connection is a fundamental human motivation, and that exclusion functions as a primary threat to identity development during this period. Research on academic self-efficacy¹⁵ demonstrates that perceived competence in learning contexts is a strong predictor of persistence and long-term goal commitment. Together, these empirical lines support the view that relational security, purposeful goals, and personal agency are the core conditions for the construction of a coherent life project—a claim that the present study seeks to examine qualitatively.

1.3 Comprehensive Education

In this regard, it is proposed that from a very early age, comprehensive education should be provided for new generations. In this proposal, the educable dimensions of a person include (a) cognitive, (b) biological, (c) affective, (d) social, and (e) spiritual. It is essential to develop all these dimensions so that individuals can grow harmoniously, recognize and promote intellectual freedom for the development of reflective thinking, establish their own values, and regulate their emotions effectively¹⁶. This approach aligns with Arnold's proposal that the spiritual dimension is integral to human development. In turn, placing Character Education at the core of this vital project, it is ensured that the students are equipped not only with knowledge, but also with the moral framework to navigate their personal missions and contributions to society.

Both Frankl and Kantenich coincide in asserting that: “the more alive the feeling of responsibility in a man, the more strongly he is immunized against collective neurosis, mass neurosis, existential vacuum.”¹⁷ Therefore, freedom must be understood as a responsible freedom: being a person is, to be deeply and finally responsible. This also means that it is more than merely free: in responsibility

¹³W. DAMON, J. MENON, K. COTTON BRONK, *The Development of Purpose During Adolescence*, «Applied Developmental Science», 7/3 (2003), pp. 119-128, https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0703_2; K. C. BRONK, *Purpose in life. A Critical Component of Optimal Youth Development*, Springer, Dordrecht 2014.

¹⁴R. F. BAUMEISTER, M. R. LEARY, *The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation*, «Psychological Bulletin», 117/3 (1995), pp. 497-529, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>.

¹⁵A. BANDURA, *Self-Efficacy. The Exercise of Control*, Worth Publishers, New York 1997.

¹⁶C. BARNI, *El sentido de la educación integral*, cit.

¹⁷V. FRANKL, *La voluntad de sentido. Conferencias escogidas sobre logoterapia*, Herder, Barcelona 2002, p. 33.

is included the purpose of human freedom—what for which the human being is free—for or against what one decides.¹⁸ Being a person ultimately entails accepting oneself as a subject responsible for one's own existence.¹⁹

Viewed from this perspective, the formation of responsible freedom requires specific pedagogical approaches. In this regard, Kentenich²⁰ maintains that the setting of boundaries—alongside the education of the will and responsibility—constitutes a fundamental tool for the development of free individuals. Such boundaries should be few in numbers but firmly enforced, so that they do not inhibit autonomy but rather guide and strengthen it. This approach is in line with the observations of Pope Francis, who notes that, in the educational process, it is necessary to observe young people's behaviour broadly, but to intervene selectively, correcting only what is truly significant.²¹

In summary, the theoretical framework developed above supports the view that human flourishing, is an integrated process that brings together self-knowledge, self-determination, the search for meaning, and the cultivation of character. These elements form a dynamic framework in which responsible freedom emerges as the structuring axis of personal development in which education plays a decisive role by providing the necessary support.

1.4 *Research Questions and Aim of the Study*

This research addressed the following research question: (a) how adolescents and young people account for experiences of self-knowledge, self-acceptance, and self-projection during the one-session workshop intervention. Specifically, it explored participants' reflections as these themes emerged while engaging with the workshop '*Working on one's own life project as a passport to my freedom*' and examined whether participants' accounts align with insights reported in the state of the art. More specifically, the study asked: how do adolescents and emerging adults articulate the dimensions of their life project—including their emotional challenges, coping resources, and ethical orientations—when engaged in a structured reflective experience? It used a qualitative design and prioritised participants lived meanings, narrative expressions, and reflective assessments, consistent with the workshop's explicit focus on supporting learners in preparing for their future life projects. Data were analysed through thematic coding using

¹⁸*Ibidem*, p. 103.

¹⁹C. BARNI, *El Autoconocimiento Verdadero como Fundamento del Despliegue del Proyecto Vital*, in *Más allá de la Modernidad: Expectativas, Peligros y Retos*, XXVI Congreso Internacional Ciencia y Vida (Banco Central del Paraguay, 24-26 julio 2025), Asunción, pp. 1-30.

²⁰J. KENTENICH, *Documentos de Schoenstatt*, cit.

²¹C. BARNI, *El Autoconocimiento Verdadero como Fundamento del Despliegue del Proyecto Vital*, cit.

ATLAS.ti with an AI-supported workflow, in combination with researcher interpretation, as detailed in the methodology section.

2 METHODOLOGY

The study followed established principles of qualitative inquiry. Data were analysed through an iterative process combining systematic organisation of responses, the development of a structured coding strategy, and ongoing refinement of codes. The analytic approach was guided by Grounded Theory principles,²² supporting conceptual development from participants' accounts through cycles of coding and interpretation. Data handling complied with ethical safeguards, including de-identification of participants' information and secure storage of data.

2.1 Workshop Design (*Intervention*)

A workshop was developed to support the younger generation in preparing for future self-projection, using interactive educational dynamics that promote: (a) integration of prior and new knowledge, (b) collaborative learning, (c) active listening, (d) guided reflection.

Importantly, the workshop's structure and content were designed on the basis of the theoretical framework presented in this paper.²³ The objectives were to: (a) enable participants to recognise the importance of developing socio-emotional, cognitive, and spiritual skills for the unfolding of their life project; and (b) identify perceived strengths and weaknesses as part of character development, supporting both skill acquisition and the relinquishing of traits participants considered areas for improvement in line with the authors discussed in the introduction.

Under the slogan based on the workshop's name, the workshops were delivered in different community settings. After the design phase, sessions took place in various locations across Argentina.

2.2 Design and Data Collection Approach

A qualitative design was used to analyse participants' written responses. Based on a previous interview stage with 22 young people, we developed a sentence-completion questionnaire to elicit open-ended, reflective accounts aligned with the study's themes; one participant pre-tested the instrument to ensure clarity. For reporting purposes, the Spanish items were translated into English. To ensure

²² A. STRAUSS, J. CORBIN, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, SAGE, New York 2002².

²³ C. BARNI, *El sentido de la educación integral*, cit.

quality, two experts (PhDs in Sociology and Educational Psychology) reviewed the items, confirming their internal consistency and alignment with the study constructs.

The questionnaire comprised eleven items:

Item 1: *I feel sad when...*

Item 2: *I feel hopeful when...*

Item 3: *I enjoy...*

Item 4: *I feel afraid when...*

Item 5: *I get angry when...*

Item 6: *I feel unloved when...*

Item 7: *If I were [choose one person you think made wrong decisions (name that person)], I would...*

Item 8: *I feel joyful when...*

Item 9: *I know I am loved when...*

Item 10: *It annoys me when...*

Item 11: *I disapprove of...*

During the workshop sessions, after the presentation of informed consent, participants completed the questionnaire following clear instructions. Confidentiality was ensured throughout the data collection process.

2.3 Sample

Participants (n = 105) were recruited from urban settings. The sample was predominantly composed of students in the final two years of secondary education (ages 16-18), with a smaller portion belonging to emerging adulthood (ages 18-28). They were drawn from a (a) secondary school, (b) parish, and (c) a non-profit organization, participating voluntarily and providing informed consent. Gender data were not collected, as the instrument focused exclusively on reflective and emotional content rather than demographic profiling. Regarding ethical safeguards: written informed consent for the minor students was obtained from the institution as part of the standard protocol for educational activities during school hours. In the parish and nonprofit contexts, participants were invited by the institutions and engaged voluntarily. Data were de-identified before analysis and stored securely.

2.4 Analytical Procedure

The study used a thematic coding approach to analyse participants' responses. All responses were organised into a structured dataset. Based on the existing literature and the theoretical framework guiding the workshop, the researchers

developed a preliminary coding framework. This was followed by iterative refinement through an approach consistent with qualitative coding-to-interpretation processes.

AI-assisted workflow and CAQDAS followed a sequential workflow integrating Artificial Intelligence with specialized software under strict human oversight. First, de-identified textual data were imported into NotebookLM to generate initial thematic summaries and propose preliminary conceptual links. Researchers conducted a rigorous human-in-the-loop review to validate these outputs, cross-checking summaries against participants' exact wording and revising code assignments to prevent semantic drift. This ensured AI served strictly as an analytical support, not a replacement for interpretive judgment.

Second, the validated data and preliminary codes were exported into ATLAS.ti. In this CAQDAS environment, researchers executed formal open and axial coding, mapped conceptual networks, and managed the consolidated codebook. This structure maintained full researcher responsibility for meaning-making, interpretive consistency, and ethical analysis.

Data Saturation: Coding proceeded iteratively until no new properties, dimensions, or themes emerged, signalling thematic saturation. The final output yielded a coded hermeneutic unit, an analytical report of the conceptual framework, and a curated selection of meaning-bearing extracts for final interpretation.

2.5 Reporting of Evidence and Use of Translated Excerpts

For interpretative presentation, meaning-bearing segments of participants' responses were translated into English and are provided in italics and enclosed in single quotation marks. Translations were intended to preserve the participants' meaning and voice, while facilitating accessibility for an English-language readership.

3 RESULTS OF THE 'LIFE PROJECT' WORKSHOP (ADOLESCENTS AND EMERGING ADULTS)

To strengthen the transparency between the empirical basis and the interpretative claims reported in the Results, the study includes an evidence-grounding indicator based on meaningfully supported passages identified and validated during the analytic process in ATLAS.ti. Across the full corpus, the overarching integrative claims are supported by many meaningfully supported passages. For the three inductively derived dimensions, each dimension is supported by more than 50 meaningfully supported passages. These passages were systematically reviewed and then used to select a smaller subset of the most representative

verbatim excerpts included, ensuring that reported claims are traceable to empirically grounded meaning patterns recurring across the dataset. Quotations are presented in italics within quotation marks, categories are indicated in small caps, and dimensions [or codes] are enclosed in square brackets and small caps and the figures are presented with codes and quotations in Spanish, reflecting the language of the original research

One of the activities was to complete an incomplete-sentence questionnaire. Afterwards the responses were analysed, and they revealed a dual emotional profile among adolescents and young adults.

The analysed corpus is interpreted through a life-project lens. This perspective treats the life project as a coherent set of goals, values, identities, and actions that guide decision-making across domains such as relationships, education, work, and spirituality. The study aims to understand how the self-knowledge process is interweaved by relational dynamics, academic pressures and existential concerns that intersect with the development of a purposeful, autonomous decision-making process. This framing emphasis on life project is central to understanding youth development.

Results can be divided into three major dimensions: sources of stress and conflicts [FEAR OR INSECURITY], coping strategies to deal with difficult situations or the process of growing [RESILIENT MECHANISMS] and (c) ethical guidance and social discernment [ETHICAL FRAMEWORK].

Regarding the [FEAR OR INSECURITY] dimension, three interrelated categories emerge as central threats to a coherent life project: FEAR OF ABANDONMENT, INSECURITY DUE TO EXTERNAL FACTORS and INSECURITY DUE TO ONE'S OWN MISTAKES. Relationships and exclusion dominate emotional life, with loneliness and a persistent sense of not being valued acting as principal impediments to a viable life trajectory "*A person I love is indifferent towards me;*" "*I feel lonely, with nothing to do and no one to be with.*" Indifference, deceit, and the exclusion of social plans intensify these feelings, and participants link a sense of heaviness or not fitting in to perceived peer rejection "*I feel like I'm in the wrong place or that my presence doesn't matter;*" "*They treat me badly or ignore me;*" "*In an argument, they talk to me as if I had no feelings;*" undermining future social capital essential for a sustained life project. Academic demands exert substantial pressure, in challenging subjects, such as "*mathematics;*" "*I fail, and they tell me to study harder next time;*" "*I'm not doing well in a test.*"

The ongoing cycle of assignments, evaluations, and grades fosters anxiety and fear of not meeting both personal and external expectations, which can derail long-term educational and career plans "*I have difficulty understanding physics, or I am unable to pass mathematics.*" Finally, influences participants' perspectives, with fears about achieving goals and a sense of time passing without meaningful progress. These fears are intensified by factors beyond personal control, such

as illness within the family, situating individual trajectories within broader life contexts and responsibilities: *“My loved ones are ill and I might lose them if it’s something serious;” “Fear of being abandoned and much more;” “Something goes wrong for me;” “I feel threatened;” “They want to abandon me;” “When I think I will not be able to study at all”* (Figure 1).

On the other hand, and despite these pressures, participants identify robust, [RESILIENT MECHANISMS] that support the continuation and refinement of their life projects. They value their friendship and family life: *“Outings and walks with friends and peers”* or *“I love being around people who treat me well and love me.”* AFFECTIVE VALIDATION and belonging emerge as central pillars: feeling loved through physical contact (hugging), attentive listening, and genuine care, together with being remembered or invited to participate in activities, restore emotional security and reinforce commitment to future plans.

SELF-EFFICACY and achievement constitute another core buffer; the capacity to understand difficult topics and to receive recognition for competencies strengthens a positive self-identity and sustains optimistic progress toward life goals *“I see that my goals were not as far away as I believed;” “When I am given another opportunity to pass or to show that I have improved;” “When people tell me I’m good at what I do.”*

CHANNELS OF ENJOYMENT and regulation—especially engagement in music, sports, the arts and cooking (it should be noted that cooking is among the most frequently mentioned activities when participants discuss what they enjoy doing or what helps them recover from difficulties)—provide essential mental rest and grounding in the present moment, which in turn stabilizes ongoing life-planning efforts. SPIRITUALITY and transcendence play a pivotal role as well: faith, prayer and participation in religious practices offer a broader perspective and help individuals relinquish an illusion of total control during crises, contributing to inner peace and renewed purpose within their life projects (Figure 2.)

[ETHICAL FRAMEWORK] explicit that it shapes participants’ responses and imagined pathways within their life projects. It could be understood as *“The Moral Compass for Youth.”* The value system observed is rigorous and ambitious as there is strong disapproval of LYING, hypocrisy, disrespect, and VIOLENCE. When considering hypothetical scenarios involving parents, friends or public figures who have made poor decisions, participants emphasize apologizing, demonstrating understanding, and prioritizing future-oriented considerations over impulsive actions they even say *“if I were a well-known figure (one mentions a famous footballer and another one a famous singer), I wouldn’t try drugs;” “I do not like the lack of rigor.”* This ethical stance appears to guide self-regulation and social judgment in service of a coherent, morally informed life project. To better illustrate these findings, the results of the analysis are presented in Figure 3.

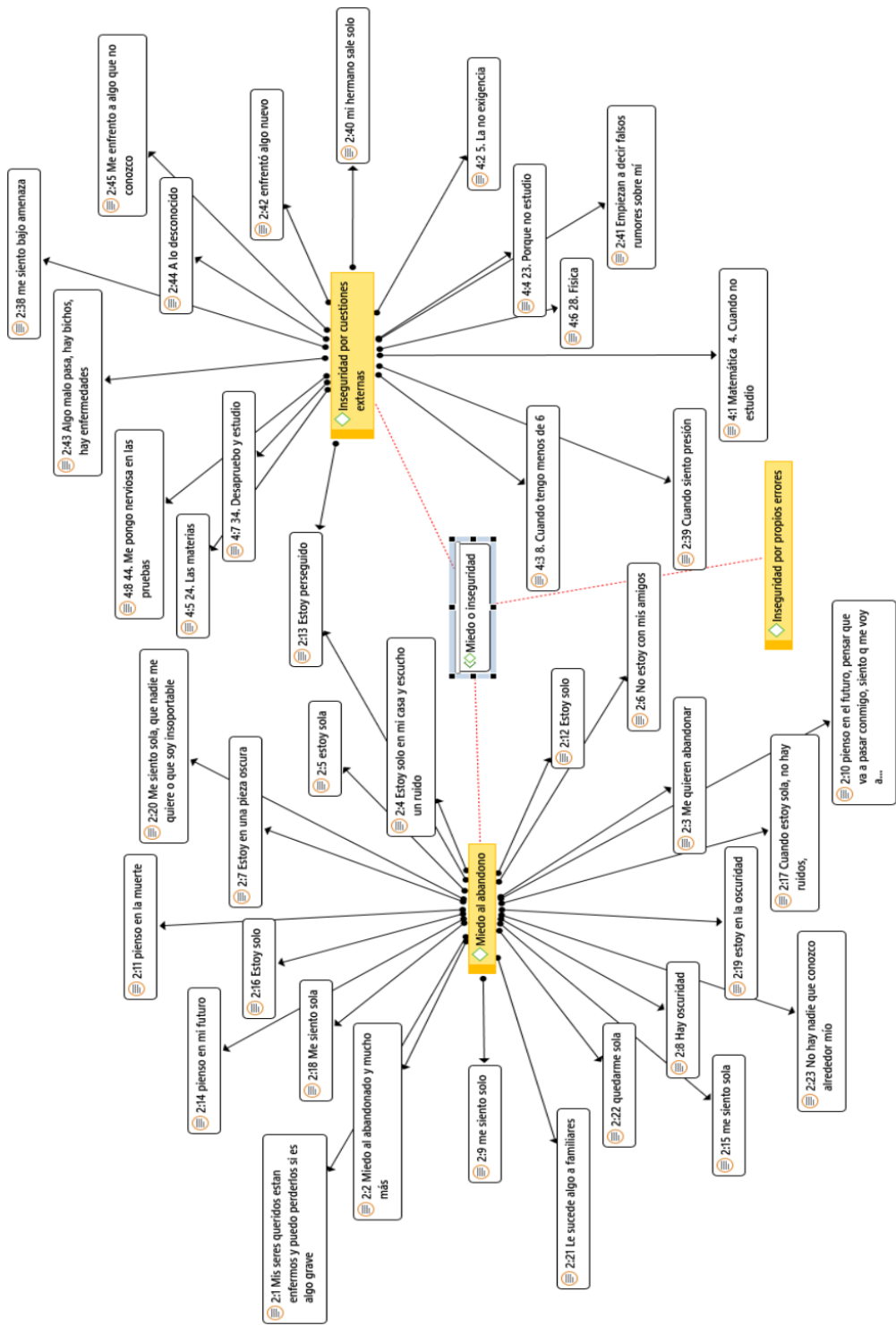


Figure 1 – Sources of Stress and Conflict.
Note: Developed from the analysis findings using ATLAS.ti. Quotations of one code are not included for understanding purposes.

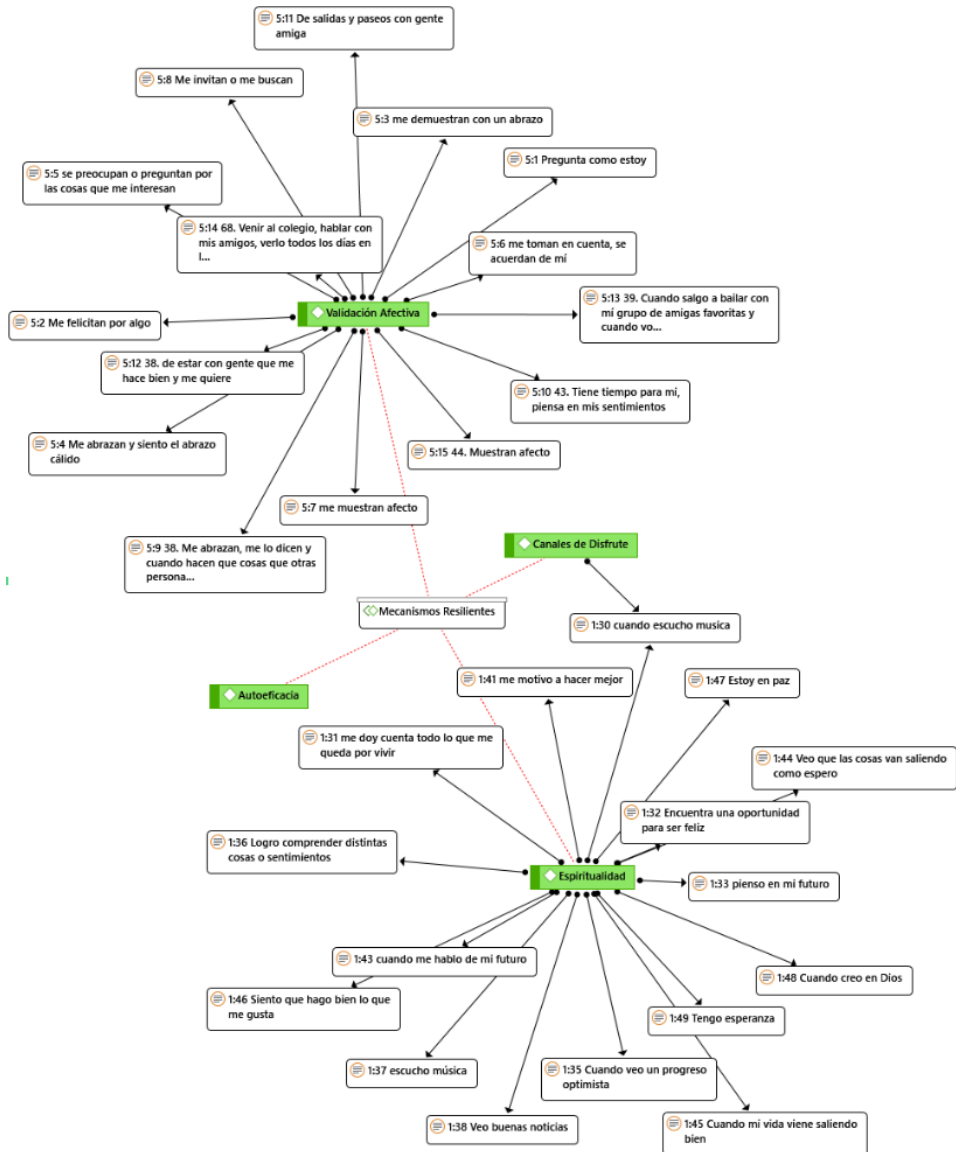


Figure 2 – Resilience mechanisms: what supports us.

Note: Developed from the analysis findings using ATLAS.ti. Quotations of two codes are not included for understanding purposes.

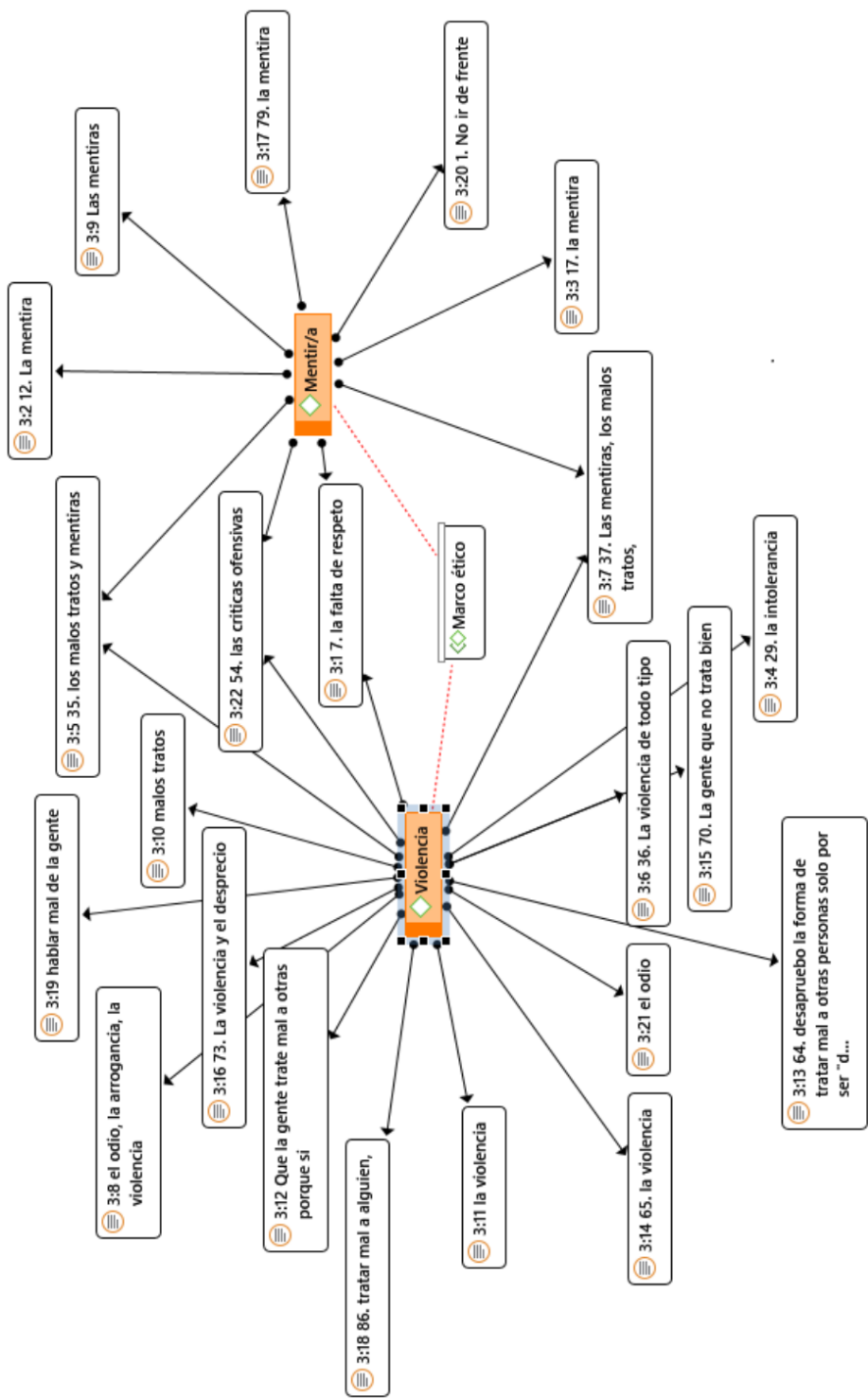


Figure 3 – Coding structure for Violence and Lying with Key Empirical.
Note: Developed from the analysis findings using ATLAS.ti.

When taken together, the data illustrate a dual emotional landscape in which well-being hinges on balancing autonomy within educational pursuits with meaningful social validation. Within this landscape, FEAR OR INSECURITY—manifested as exclusion and future-related uncertainty—stands out as the most salient challenge threatening trajectory coherence. Conversely, explicit affection, personal achievement, and spirituality constitute the primary resilient mechanisms sustaining long-term goals.²⁴ This supports integrated intervention frameworks that address social belonging, academic confidence and meaning-making through personal values, all oriented toward strengthening the continuity and integrity of youths' life projects.

Dimension	Categories	Illustrative excerpt	Theoretical link
[Fear or insecurity]	Fear of abandonment; insecurity due to external factors; insecurity due to own mistakes.	"I feel lonely, with nothing to do and no one to be with;" "When I think I will not be able to study at all."	Belonging as fundamental need ²⁵ ; Frankl: existential anxiety as meaning-seeking.
[Resilient mechanisms]	Affective validation; self-efficacy and achievement; recreation; spirituality; family network.	"I see that my goals were not as far away as I believed;" "I love being around people who treat me well and love me."	Academic self-efficacy ²⁶ ; Kantenich: relational belonging; transcendent meaning. ²⁷
[Ethical framework]	Rejection of lying and hypocrisy; capacity for repair and apology; rejection of violence and substance use.	"If I were [a public figure], I wouldn't try drugs;" "I do not like the lack of rigor."	Arnold: emotional integration and ideal self; Kantenich: responsible freedom; Wojtyła: self-determination as moral agency.

Table 1 – Thematic Structure of Results: Dimensions, Categories, Definitions and Theoretical Links

From an educational perspective interventions should prioritize peer belonging through structured, inclusive activities that align with youths' life-project goals. Enhancing academic self-efficacy can be achieved via targeted tutoring and mentorship that validates progress. Furthermore, programs should promote regulation friendly activities—such as music, sports, arts, and cooking—as protective buffers. Incorporating spirituality or value-based components facilitates meaning-making and coping within the life project, while reinforcing ethical reasoning reduces impulsivity and promotes long-term planning.²⁸ Collectively,

²⁴C. BARNI, *El sentido de la educación integral*, cit.; G. CARMONA, *Hacia la integración de la personalidad. Un aporte para la autoeducación*, Patris, Córdoba 2004³.

²⁵R. F. BAUMEISTER, M. R. LEARY, *The need to belong*, cit.

²⁶A. BANDURA, *Self-Efficacy*, cit.

²⁷P. WONG, *Made for Resilience and Happiness*, cit.

²⁸C. BARNI, F. T. DAURA, *Pienso, siento y me proyecto. La educación emocional en las aulas y el desarrollo de un proyecto vital*, in *Las neurociencias y su impacto en la Educación*, dir. J. C. Durand, F. T. Daura, C. Sánchez Agostini, TeseoPress, Buenos Aires 2018.

these results advocate for comprehensive, multisector strategies that integrate social, educational and existential supports to foster resilient life projects²⁹ and integrate the Ideal Self.³⁰

Summarising the empirical analysis, framed through a life-project lens, offers a multifaceted portrait of the transition to adulthood as a process of refining a coherent life plan. Addressing FEAR OR INSECURITY while reinforcing RESILIENT MECHANISMS and an ETHICAL FRAMEWORK substantially strengthens future orientation, providing actionable directions for program design and policy development.

3.1 *The Five-Pillar Framework of the Youth Ecosystem*

The comprehensive analysis reveals that the adolescents and emerging adults revolves around a fundamental a five-pillar framework. This structure articulates three empirical derived dimensions and two theoretically driven pillars, which collectively converge into the nuclear category [ETHICALLY GROUNDED RESILIENCE].

a) The centrality of social connectedness and fear of exclusion (FEAR OR INSECURITY): for the workshop's participants, well-being is intrinsically linked to belonging. They feel loved through physical affection, active listening, and genuine concern. By contrast, indifference, deceit, and exclusion trigger sadness and unworthiness. The fear of abandonment and social judgment (rumours, criticisms) evidences the fragility of identity development under the watchful eyes of others.

b) The weight of performance and the pressure for success: a direct correlation exists between performance and emotional stability. Failure in academic domains (especially Mathematics and Physics) or sports generates feelings of inadequacy and self-disappointment. Conversely, hope and enjoyment are activated upon achieving goals, optimistic progress, and external recognition of capabilities.

c) Mechanisms of regulation and resilience (RESILIENT MECHANISMS): in the face of the anxiety generated by future uncertainty and the loss of loved ones, participants rely on three protective buffers:

- *Recreation*: music, sport (soccer, hockey, basketball), and creative activities (cooking, dancing) serve as essential channels of enjoyment and detachment.
- *Spirituality*: connection with God, prayer, and faith provide a “supernatural outlook” that grants strength and peace in the face of the uncontrollable.

²⁹C. BARNI, *Los vínculos: ¿el ancla en tiempos inestables incrementados por la COVID-19?*, «Didáctica Sin Fronteras», 6 (2021), pp. 38-43.

³⁰J. GARCÍA-ALANDETE, *Magda Arnold's Understanding of the Human Person*, cit.

- *Family network*: the family, and specifically the maternal figure, appears as a primary refuge of security and gratitude.

d) *Ethics and repair in adolescents and emerging adulthood (ETHICAL FRAMEWORK)*: the analysis of moral judgments reveals a strong rejection of hypocrisy, lying, violence and substance use. When evaluating misguided decisions, participants demonstrate notable maturity by prioritizing the ability to apologize, show understanding, and reflect before acting impulsively or selfishly.

e) *Uncertainty and control*: Youth express a latent fear of losing control over their lives and responsibilities. The feeling of ‘losing themselves’ or not fulfilling their potential is a recurring concern that marks the transition toward autonomy.

Ultimately, participants exhibit high interpersonal sensitivity where emotional security depends on being seen, heard, and validated. Their resilience is built through personal discipline, emotional support networks, and a value framework centred on honesty and continual self-improvement.

Far from operating in isolation, these five dimensions form a dynamic system. The need for belonging and social validation influences the self-esteem and performance; in turn, experiences of achievement or failure affect the coping resources. Within this framework, *RESILIENT MECHANISMS*—such as recreation, spirituality and family support—cushion the tensions arising from academic pressure and the core experience of *FEAR OR INSECURITY*. Concurrently, the *ETHICAL FRAMEWORK* guides the interpretation of experiences and decision-making, acting as an organising principle for behaviour. Finally, the experience of uncertainty and the search for control cut across all dimensions, driving the transition toward autonomous forms of self-regulation and enabling youth to construct, sustain and redefine their life projects.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that the development of a life project during adolescence and emerging adulthood is a deeply relational process driven by the management of systemic tensions. The empirical evidence captures a vivid emotional landscape where youths continuously navigate the tension between baseline *FEAR OR INSECURITY*—induced by academic performance pressures and institutional exclusion, *FEAR OF ABANDONMENT*—and the activation of distinct *RESILIENT MECHANISMS*. The qualitative data confirm that these protective buffers (recreation, spirituality, and family support) do not operate in isolation; they are structurally regulated by an emergent *ETHICAL FRAMEWORK* centred on honesty, mutual respect, and the capacity for repair. It is precisely this empirical triad that operationalizes human flourishing, showing that a coherent life plan is sustained when adolescents feel simultaneously loved, validated, and capable of exercising autonomy.

The qualitative findings break the false dichotomy between individual agency and contextual determination. The participants' clear rejection of hypocrisy and their mature prioritization of reflective decision-making over impulsivity reveal that the link between self-knowledge and self-determination is fundamentally relational. Young people seek control over their futures within an ecosystem where emotional security depends on being explicitly seen and heard by significant others. Consequently, the study concludes that character education cannot be reduced to a mechanical classroom curriculum; it relies on an interdependent framework of comprehensive care where the family network—particularly maternal figures—and educational institutions must act as synchronized spaces of validation.

From a practical and policy perspective, these data-driven insights underscore the necessity of moving beyond fragmented educational interventions. Because youth resilience is proven to be an emergent property of relational care, programs must prioritize structured school-family partnerships that address existential, social, and emotional dimensions alongside cognitive goals. Cultivating environments where youths can navigate uncertainty requires the implementation of care-based pedagogies for educators, targeted mentorship to enhance academic self-efficacy, and the institutional integration of regulation-friendly, expressive activities (such as arts and sports) as formal protective buffers.

The scope of these conclusions should be considered alongside certain methodological limitations. First, the study relied on a convenience sample of 105 participants who voluntarily attended the workshops. Because participation was restricted to individuals already engaged in these specific spaces, the sample may lack full representativeness. Second, these youths were drawn from institutional contexts that implicitly incorporate vocational guidance and value-based approaches. This specific background may indicate a pre-existing inclination toward self-reflection, prosocial orientations, and future planning, potentially introducing a positive bias into their qualitative responses. Finally, the cohort was predominantly composed of persons active within educational institutions, thereby omitting the perspectives of disconnected youth who are currently excluded from employment or education. A third limitation concerns the single-session design of the workshop: the data capture a cross-sectional snapshot of reflective experience and cannot account for change over time or for the longer-term impact of the intervention on participants' life-project development. Additionally, demographic data on gender were not collected, which restricts the possibility of examining differential patterns across gender identities. Transferability and epistemological positioning. While the findings are grounded in the specific institutional settings where the workshops were delivered, they do not target statistical generalization. The analytic framework—relating relational care to the development of a

coherent life project—may be transferable to other educational contexts if key intervention features are preserved and culturally adapted. Regarding spirituality, it was approached as a lived meaning resource within participants' narratives, analysed as part of coping and existential reorientation rather than as a normative claim. Future studies should incorporate these concepts to enable a more complete and representative analysis.

To expand upon these insights, future research should implement longitudinal designs across diverse socioeconomic strata and varied cultural contexts. This will refine how integrated care frameworks operate across heterogeneous populations and optimize the design of pedagogical and psychological interventions aimed at supporting youth life projects under diverse environmental pressures.

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