

## Public-private partnership and entrepreneurship: implications for educational management<sup>1</sup>

*Parceria público-privada empreendedorismo:  
implicações para a gestão educacional*

*Asociación público-privada y emprendimiento:  
implicaciones para la gestión educativa*

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**Abstract:** The text brings reflections on the different forms of partnerships between the public/ state and private / business and philanthropic sectors that allow the privatization of public education to occur implicitly and / or explicitly. Specifically, it seeks to present a synthesis of the research carried out by our research group that analyzes the dissemination of projects and policies for the different stages and modalities of public education, which occur through public-private partnerships, philanthropy and privatizations. It also analyzes the entrepreneurial proposal of the think tank Endeavor and delimits the political and ideological assumptions and the implications for public basic education. Based on the epistemological conception of historical-dialectical materialism, the article, of a qualitative nature, is developed from bibliographical research and documentary analysis. It concludes that think tanks, which operate in a neoliberal and / or neoconservative perspective, have been successful in spreading their ideas and influencing the content of educational policy and management

**Keywords:** Educational Policy; Educational management; Public-private; Partnership; Privatization; Think tanks; Entrepreneurship.

**Resumo:** O texto mapeia as interferências da relação público-privada nas políticas educacionais e no processo de democratização da educação pública. De forma específica, busca apresentar uma síntese dos trabalhos realizados por nosso grupo de pesquisa o qual analisa a disseminação de projetos e de políticas para as diferentes etapas e modalidades da educação pública, que ocorrem pela via das parcerias público-privadas, filantropia e privatizações. Analisa, ainda, a proposta de empreendedorismo do think tank Endeavor e delimita os pressupostos políticos e ideológicos e as implicações para a educação básica pública. Partindo da concepção epistemológica do materialismo histórico-dialético, o artigo, de cunho qualitativo, é desenvolvido a partir de pesquisa bibliográfica e análise documental. Conclui que os *think tanks*, que atuam numa perspectiva neoliberal e/ou

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neoconservadora, têm conseguido êxito no sentido de difundir suas ideias e influenciar no conteúdo da política e da gestão educacional.

**Palavras-chave:** Política Educacional; Gestão Educacional; Parceria público-privada; Privatização; *Think tanks*; Empreendedorismo.

**Resumen:** El texto trata de cartografiar la interferencia de la relación público-privada en las políticas educativas y en el proceso de democratización de la enseñanza pública. Específicamente, se busca presentar una síntesis de las investigaciones realizadas por nuestro grupo de investigación que analiza la difusión de proyectos y políticas para las diferentes etapas y modalidades de la educación pública, que se dan a través de alianzas público-privadas, filantropía y privatizaciones. También analiza la propuesta de emprendimiento del think tank Endeavor y define los supuestos e implicaciones políticas e ideológicas para la educación básica pública. A partir de la concepción epistemológica del materialismo histórico-dialéctico, el artículo, de carácter cualitativo, se desarrolla a partir de una investigación bibliográfica y un análisis documental. Concluye que los think tanks, que operan desde una perspectiva neoliberal y/o neoconservadora, han logrado difundir sus ideas e influir en el contenido de la política y la gestión educativa.

**Palabras clave:** Política Educativa; Gestión educativa; Asociación público-privada; Privatización; Grupos de expertos; Emprendimiento.

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## Introduction

Several private groups have shown an interest in public education. These groups spread ideas actions, and their expertise through partnerships with the public/state sector, which may lead to an intensification of privatization in this area. According to Ball and Youdell (2007), the privatization of public education takes different forms which, broadly speaking, can be classified into two main categories, each with many nuances. The first is “endogenous privatization”, which introduces private sector ideas and techniques into the public sector, making it resemble the way businesses operate. Examples include the sale or charging of fees for services and products, as well as the common aggressiveness of corporate/managerial management practices, with a focus on results, individualism, and meritocracy. These processes take place within public institutions without changing the ownership.

The second category is known by the concept of “exogenous privatization,” which refers to the direct opening of public education services to the private sector (Ball & Youdell, 2007, p. 09), allowing it to operate for profit, receiving payment for services rendered, and utilizing various forms of philanthropy aligned with the third sector (NGOs, foundations, and others)<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> An example of this is the U.S. legislation “*No Child Left Behind*”, which presupposes the transfer of the management of public schools that fail to meet standardized testing goals to private and/or philanthropic

In addition to these two forms, there is also the influence exerted by these corporate groups that disseminate their ideas and proposals for public education and have been successful in building consensus around the formulation of public education policies, also influencing the model of public management. These movements toward the privatization of the public occur globally across various public education systems.

In the specific case of Brazil, after the 1990s and the reform of the Brazilian State, the perspective of New Public Management began to spread, anchored in the theoretical assumptions of the Third Way (Giddens, 2001)<sup>5</sup>. This led to management reforms that expanded across various federal states, giving rise to new institutional arrangements between the public sector and private entities, which operated through partnerships, management contracts, agreements, consulting services, the purchase of standardized teaching materials, teacher training consultancies, policy formulation support and other similar forms.

It is important to highlight that, in our studies—just as Peroni (2015, p. 18) “we do not treat the public and private solely as property categories, but as societal projects in relation, permeated by social classes in a correlation of forces.” This means we do not overlook the intricacies and mediations of capitalist society, grounded in wage labor and private ownership of the means of production, which leads to the division of social classes (Ruiz, 2017, p. 12).

That said, in this text we will continue and deepen the studies that our research group has been mapping regarding the influence of public-private relations on educational policies and on the democratization process of public education. We start from the assumption that, following the redefinition and restriction of the role of the State<sup>6</sup>, intensified by Third Way neoliberalism, various forms of partnerships between the public sector (the State) and the private sector (corporate civil society and philanthropic institutions) have been developed and redeveloped. This dynamic alters how public education is organized, interferes with curricula, assessments, teacher training, and, above all, the policymaking process, which becomes mediated by the interests of corporate groups organized into political networks, such as the business movement “Todos pela Educação” (All for Education).

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organizations (Apple, 2005). In Brazil, a similar case occurred in the state of Goiás, although it has not yet succeeded. [Source: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/educacao/noticia/2016-01/goias-sera-primeiro-estado-a-ter-organizacoes-sociais-na-educacao-basica>].

<sup>5</sup> According to Giddens (2001), neoliberals advocate for the reduction of the size of the State, while social democracy maintains the understanding that it is necessary to expand it. The Third Way proposal moves in the direction of neither reducing nor expanding, but rather reforming the State. (Ruiz, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> We consider the State to be a product of class struggle and constituted through the dynamics of this struggle. It is an institution dominated by the bourgeoisie, which internally holds the tensions of the working class's interests. (Poulantzas, 1977).

We have observed that these experiences tend to guide the formulation of educational policies in the international context (Robertson, 2012), as well as in Brazil, with strong influence from multilateral organizations, more specifically the World Bank (WB). Thus, we affirm that, although educational policies are mostly developed and implemented within well-defined territorial or regional spaces, this does not mean that global and international influences are absent (Robertson & Dale, 2015), especially in light of the advancement of neoliberalism and neoconservatism<sup>7</sup> (Moll Neto, 2010) as hegemonic political projects that, in various ways, have become globalized agendas across different states and nations. This generates significant challenges for policy researchers, who must be aware that these policies are increasingly open to private market influence. However,

[...]in the educational field, more serious than the expansion of the private market is the control over the content, method, and form of public education under a commercialized conception. This presents a double and more severe challenge. In theoretical terms, it demands the effort to grasp, beyond appearances, the deeper meaning of the movement of reality. (Frigotto, 2015, p. 227).

The general objective of this text, within this line of argument, is to discuss the different forms of partnerships between the public/state sector and the private/business and/or philanthropic sector that make the privatization of public education possible—both implicitly and explicitly. More specifically, the text aims to: (i) present a synthesis of the research conducted by our research group, which analyzes the dissemination of projects and policies across the different stages and modalities of public education through public-private partnerships, philanthropy, and privatization processes; and (ii) analyze the entrepreneurship proposal promoted by the think tank Endeavor, outlining its political and ideological assumptions and its implications for public basic education.

We developed the study based on the epistemological assumptions of historical-dialectical materialism. From this perspective, it is up to public policy researchers to avoid reductionism and seek to observe policies in a broader and more comprehensive way. (Engels; Marx, 2007; Neto, 2003; Frigotto, 1997). According to Evangelista (2012), in order to

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<sup>7</sup> Broadly speaking, we understand that neoconservatism and neoliberalism share a common defense of the idea of a minimal State in social matters and a maximal State for capital, aiming to stabilize the crises of capitalism. However, neoconservatism does not relinquish control of the State and also relies on the moral question (a moralistic discourse), in the belief that allocating State resources to social policies and programs weakens the initiative of low-income populations to seek employment, and leads society into a state of conformist adaptation to poverty. The prevailing notion was — and still is — that people who rely on social programs are socially unfit, dependent, lazy, etc. (Mool Neto, 2010, p.78). In the field of education, neoconservatives aim to uphold cultural traditions and maintain control over the State. Thus, they attempt to establish stricter mechanisms to control knowledge, morality, and values within school curricula (Agudo; La Cruz, 2012).

critically understand education policies, it is necessary to investigate the logic, ideology, and rationality that underpin them. To this end, it is important to consider the historical, political, and economic context that shapes society at the time these policies are formulated. Based on this assumption, this qualitative study will employ bibliographic research as its main methodological procedure and will also make use of documentary research.

The text is structured into four subsections. In the first, we present a synthesis of the studies already developed within our research group, based on the issue of the democratization of education, considering the redefinition of the role of the State and public-private partnerships. In the second section, we present a discussion on Think Tanks, which are articulated within political networks (Ball, 2014), and we argue that they have been able to influence the content of public policies. The third subsection brings a discussion of a specific think tank that has focused on the diffusion of entrepreneurship in public education, starting from the early years of basic education, namely: the Endeavor Think Tank. We end the text with a critical analysis of what the diffusion of entrepreneurship might mean in a society divided by social classes, and we aim to outline the political and ideological assumptions that, in our analysis, are implicit in such a proposal.

### **Synthesis of the studies on the democratization of education and public-private partnerships**

In the last years studies have been developed that problematize the democratization of public basic education as a constitutional right. We defend that the expansion of this right must be financed by the State, through public resources. Democratizing education involves increasing enrollment opportunities and improving conditions for student retention in public schools, as well as reorganizing administrative and pedagogical work in ways that enhance the political participation of the community in decision-making processes.

The proposal to democratize education carries different intentions and meanings depending on the societal project being pursued, considering the division of social classes. Thus, this discourse aligns both with liberal-conservative proposals—linked to the development of the capitalist societal project and its forms of expropriating the surplus of human labor—as well as with the interests of the working class, which relies on public schools to access the knowledge necessary for human and social subsistence.

Based on this premise, in research conducted in 2013, we aimed to investigate the different forms of organization among workers who have historically fought for the democratization of public education. That study found that the struggles of teachers and education workers played a key role in the discussion and formulation of educational policies that contributed—at least formally—to the expansion of democratization in public education.

As a result, the 1988 Federal Constitution and the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDBEN 9394/96) established education as a right of all citizens and a duty of the State. We found in that study that the struggle of teachers and education workers played an important role in the process of discussing and formulating educational policies that contributed to expanding the democratization of public education—at least formally. As a result, the 1988 Federal Constitution and the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDBEN 9394/96) guaranteed education as a right of every citizen and a duty of the State. We also observed that, prior to the inclusion of democratic management in the legislation, there was broad mobilization by education workers during the 1980s and 1990s, organized in entities that debated educational issues. In this perspective, the National Forum in Defense of Public Schools (FNDEP) was a significant space in the national scenario. We noticed that education workers positioned themselves against bureaucracy and hierarchy within public institutions and aspired to more democratic participation and decentralization of power. In the study we also revealed that not only teachers fought—and continue to fight—for the right to public education, but also workers residing in poor and peripheral neighborhoods have historically advanced their own struggles for the democratization of public schools. These individuals contribute to expanding access to education by demanding the construction of schools near their homes, improvements in physical infrastructure, increased enrollment capacity, and expanded provision across the different stages of basic education, among other achievements (Ruiz, 2014).

Continuing this study, in partnership with other researchers in our research group, we began to examine the responses provided by the State to address the demands of workers' struggles for education. These responses usually take the form of policies that generate programs which, at their origin, claim to broaden the democratization of public schools—some of them directed specifically at the management of basic education. The research advanced to better understand some of the gaps in national policy proposals for the democratization of education, with particular attention to the consequences of public-private partnerships for public education and school management, as well as the influence of corporate groups in the formulation of educational policies in Brazil.

Within our research group, Marinheiro (2016) conducted a study on the *Direct Funding to Schools Program (Programa Dinheiro Direto na Escola – PDDE)*, established as a policy for transferring financial resources to public schools in 1995 by the federal government (under President FHC<sup>8</sup>). The study found that the Program aligned with

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<sup>8</sup> Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC), president of Brazil from January 1, 1995 to January 1, 2003.



the process of redefining the role of the State, since it enabled the decentralization of resources, making it mandatory for each school to establish an Executive Unit (*Unidade Executora – UEx*), represented by the Parents, Teachers, and Staff Association (*Associação de Pais, Mestres e Funcionários – APMF*), which would make possible receiving federal funds from the PDDE. This process also expanded the collection of financial resources from other (private) sources, aligning with the State's withdrawal from its role as provider, while maintaining its role in supervision and evaluation.

As part of the investigation into programs and projects that claim to promote the democratization of education, we studied the *Goal Plan: Commitment to Education for All* (*Plano de Metas Compromisso Todos pela Educação*). We observed that in Brazil, in 2008, the Ministry of Education launched the *Education Development Plan* (*Plano de Desenvolvimento da Educação – PDE*). According to Krawczyk (2008), this Plan included fifty-two actions focused on education, with the goal of improving the quality of education in the country. Although the plan introduced some new measures, most of its actions had already been developed under the previous federal administration (FHC). The PDE reinforced the partnership system with municipalities, focusing its actions on a collaborative regime among federative entities. It also emphasized partnerships between the State and civil society institutions, transforming public schools into quasi-market<sup>9</sup> spaces, where products and technologies are created and commercialized—with the State as the main client and purchaser of such products. Parallel to the PDE, the federal government enacted Decree No. 6.094/2007, which established the *Goal Plan: Commitment to Education for All*. This Plan was inspired by the Brazilian business movement, which includes groups such as Gerdau and the Ayrton Senna Institute, among others—revealing the federal government's strong alignment with these groups and their initiatives in the field of education (Saviani, 2007).

Rodrigues (2017), contributing to the discussions already underway in our research group, proposed to analyze the PDE-School program (*PDE-escola*), relaunched in 2007 as an extension of the federal PDE. The study examined the management models underlying the Program, which in theory aimed to strengthen democratic management. The research observed that the expansion of community participation in schools, one of the Program's stated goals, occurred in a very limited and questionable way. It was found that, in the

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<sup>9</sup> With the process of administrative reform of the Brazilian State, public services are no longer the exclusive responsibility of the State and can be exploited as quasi-market spaces—a movement that leads to forms of endogenous privatization, as previously discussed in this text. Thus, “an ideological construction takes place, one that conceals the expansion of capital into areas that are essentially public, such as health and education. This threatens the universalist character of these inalienable social rights (health and education), as well as the solidarity embedded in the State's social policies, and further provokes shifts in social values and, consequently, in the very conception of social justice.” (Ruiz & Marinheiro, 2015, p. 610)

operationalization of the Program, legitimized by empirical research, the community participation was restricted to suggesting which materials to acquire, and that the school experienced an increase in bureaucratic tasks (such as filling out tables, diagnostics, etc.), which ultimately stifled more democratic and participatory action. Thus, the Program further reinforced a managerial model of school management.

During the same period, we conducted a postdoctoral research project at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. The central idea of the study was that the Brazilian business class has been mobilizing and organizing itself in political networks in order to influence the definition of both the content and form of public schooling (Ruiz, 2017). To this end, it uses its influence and relationships to interfere in the formulation of educational policies and school management models. Within this scope, we analyzed the proposals of the Victor Civita Foundation (currently “Somos Educação”) for public education, which can be summarized in three key axes: The school principal as an entrepreneurial leader, organizational climate, and managerial management; The use of evaluations and performance indexes to guide management, accountability, and merit; and The encouragement of public-private partnerships within public schools.

Farias (2018) and Lima (2018) contributed to the expansion of the studies by addressing the redefinition of the role of the State and the implications that partnerships between the public and private sectors bring to the democratization of one stage of basic education, namely Early Childhood Education. Each author, in their specific way, observed that the practice of establishing agreements between municipal governments and private/philanthropic institutions from the third sector (Montaño, 2002) is widely used by Brazilian municipalities to meet educational demand. This practice was considered by the studies to represent a regression in service provision, and it also revealed the lack of quality in many of the affiliated/philanthropic Early Childhood Education Centers (CEIs). The research demonstrated that there is still much to be overcome in the pursuit of Early Childhood Education as a right, as outlined in educational legislation, which includes moving beyond provision through charitable social assistance entities in partnership with municipal education departments. While this shift has already been occurring in Londrina-PR, it has not yet been universally implemented across all Brazilian municipalities.

Other educational modalities were also studied by researchers from the group. Torres (2020) conducted a survey of the financial resources received by institutions offering *Specialized Educational Assistance* (*Atendimento Educacional Especializado – AEE*) and found that funds generated by the institutions themselves, through fundraising and philanthropy, are



essential for the maintenance of these schools, despite the existence of public funding transfers. Torres also studied two programs aimed at *Youth and Adult Education (Educação de Jovens e Adultos – EJA)*, namely *Alfabetização Solidária (ALFAsol)* and *Brasil Alfabetizado*, programs that rely on volunteer teams to provide adult literacy education (Torres, 2020a).

Bufalo (2018) joined our research efforts to analyze programs that claim to promote the democratization of reading and access to books. The study focused on how education and reading are mediated by content control, both through curricular proposals and through the way books are distributed to schools. It found that Public Policy programs for Books and Reading often use the discourse of democratization, but in practice serve primarily market-oriented interests, rather than creating real conditions for the act of reading to take place in schools. The research identified that the agendas of these programs tend to prioritize the interests of the publishing industry in education. In the field of book and reading policies, it became evident that there is a dispute over the privatization of education through the expansion of standardized teaching systems (*sistemas apostilados*), which poses an imminent threat—particularly through the implementation of the *National Book and Teaching Material Program (Programa Nacional do Livro e do Material Didático – PNLDM)*, as a strategy by the State to reconcile the interests of the publishing market with those of standardized education systems. Thus, it was concluded that the democratization of reading is treated as a secondary concern in this process.

In line with the discussion on standardized education systems, we critically examined the acquisition of the *Sistema de Ensino Aprende Brasil* by a municipality in the northern region of the state of Paraná. Through bibliographic research, document analysis, and interviews, the study concluded that business logic has been turning public schools into “favorable spaces for the expansion of major publishing market corporations,” thereby reiterating the findings of Bufalo’s (2018) research. As a result,

[...] beyond standardizing the content, method, and materials used in public schools, the evaluation systems themselves also become standardized, which breaks away from the proposal of building a collective process within public education, one in which school stakeholders are able to exercise autonomy in planning and action based on what is outlined in the *Political-Pedagogical Project (PPP)*, which in this perspective, becomes a document of no real value. (Sandaniel; Ruiz, 2019, p. 144).

In 2021, Sandaniel conducted a study on *Itaú Social* and its *Education Improvement Program*, demonstrating that this program promotes a managerial model of educational administration within municipal education systems, emphasizing results, individualism, and competitiveness, at the expense of democratic management. This is seen as part of a broader

hegemonic influence strategy by corporations within society, aligned with neoliberal principles. That same year, Rissi (2021) conducted research discussing how *public-private partnerships* materialized in the municipal schools of Londrina through the implementation of the *Young Entrepreneurs First Steps Program* (*Programa Jovens Empreendedores Primeiros Passos*). This program is based on SEBRAE's guidelines and aims to integrate school education with business practices. Its goal is to develop adaptable individuals who are responsible for improving their skills, seeking further qualifications, and engaging in creative and innovative entrepreneurship—so they can adapt to a context of structural unemployment.

Continuing our research efforts, in the present text we seek to broaden the understanding of the interests and intentions of the corporate/financial sector regarding education. We will continue mapping the actions and political networks (Ball, 2014) of certain groups within civil society who, through consensus, seek to universalize their class interests within public education—now with a focus on *think tanks* that disseminate research and proposals for entrepreneurship in the public education sector.

### **Tink Tanks: actors in networks and educational policies**

One form of political network action is through *think tanks*, which, according to Moraes (2015), originated in the United States during the Cold War period. These groups, highly diverse in their nature, may operate autonomously or be linked to specific interest groups such as governments, private companies, foundations, universities, political parties, etc. However, despite their diversity, research shows that a significant portion of think tanks are financed by business-sector resources (both national and international) and, broadly speaking, advocate for the reduction of the State's role in social areas. These groups are generally aligned with the neoliberal prescriptions of Friedman, Hayek, and others (Ruiz; Bufalo, 2017), and they have been growing in both number and network reach across Brazilian territory. In Brazil, the first think tanks were organized between the 1940s and 1960s, primarily connected to institutions such as the Getúlio Vargas Foundation and the Victor Civita Foundation.

Many of these groups promote the idea of modernizing the Brazilian State through various forms of privatization. “*This is the case of the Institute for Studies on Industrial Development (IEIDI) and the Atlantic Institute (IA), both created in the 1990s.*” There is also the *Business Leaders Group (LIDE)* and the *Competitive Brazil Movement (MBC)*, from the 2000s, and the *Millennium Institute*, created in 2006 during the *Freedom Forum* held in Porto Alegre.

The Freedom Forum mentioned was organized with the aim of bringing together major liberal and ultraliberal think tanks that operate both in Brazil and in other countries around the world. At an event promoted by the *Freedom Forum* (*Fórum da Liberdade*) in 2012, the movement *Students for Liberty* was launched in Brazil, targeting university students. “*Estudantes pela Liberdade* (EPL) is the Brazilian version of *Students for Liberty* and is linked to the mega think tank *Atlas Network*.” This group has financed and continues to finance the actions of the *Free Brazil Movement* (*Movimento Brasil Livre – MBL*) in Brazil, influencing its guidelines and actions both politically and ideologically. With such funding, the movement manages to mobilize large groups of people, and through its street mobilization activities, gains visibility in the media. (Portella, 2019, p. 01). These think tanks act to reinforce the hegemony of the ruling class by consolidating consensus (Gramsci, 1980) and strongly influence public opinion.

Thus, it can be observed that think tanks operate in various ways. In addition to these more activist configurations, they also function as research institutions, forming their own *organic intellectuals* (Gramsci, 1989) to reaffirm the strategies and ideas of neoliberal and neoconservative groups, which constitute what has come to be called the “*new right*” (Casimiro, 2018). These think tanks are highly skilled in translating “specialized research findings into language and formats accessible to public policy implementers and the general population.” (Rocha, 2015). This same author reiterates our understanding that think tanks engage in “ideologically oriented political activism [...] using strategies of persuasion and influence” with the declared goal of “shaping the political process of public policy formulation and implementation” (Rocha, 2015, p. 262).

In the field of education, specifically educational policies, think tanks, although still under-researched, have been gaining influence and form powerful, complex political networks that are deeply interconnected. These organizations may be affiliated with private foundations, national and international philanthropic institutions, and are becoming decisive actors in managing municipal and state education systems. They operate as management consultants and are increasingly sought after by governments to advise and draft reports aimed at influencing and shaping public education at regional, state, and national levels (Ball; Youdell, 2015).

Viseu and Carvalho (2018) affirm that these groups tend to emphasize the accountability of individuals (teachers, students, parents) or educational systems (such as municipalities) in an isolated and decontextualized manner. They focus on so-called “best practices” in school management. In this sense, a competent management would be one that solves its own problems creatively with its own resources—partnering with civil society in the search for the means to maintain the institution.

An important area of activity for think tanks is the training of educational managers and leaders at the postgraduate level for public sector positions<sup>10</sup>. This occurs because, within their private-sector-influenced worldview, they believe that existing postgraduate programs fail to meet the demands of Education Departments in forming personnel with a pragmatic vision of education. Some think tanks have well-defined areas of focus, such as *Instituto Endeavor*, which is dedicated to disseminating entrepreneurial ideas, as we will explore below.

### **Entrepreneurship as an expression of the private sector ideology in public Education: Endeavor and the Entrepreneurial Actor**

The *Endeavor Entrepreneur Institute* (*Instituto Empreender Endeavor – IEE*) is a think tank created in 1997 in the United States as a non-governmental organization (NGO), with the goal of promoting entrepreneurship. Endeavor operates in 27 countries across several regions, including Latin America, Africa, and Asia—regions with high levels of social vulnerability. In Brazil, it was established in 2000 and is structured within political networks that include actors from diverse affiliations, such as the *Brazilian Service of Support for Micro and Small Enterprises* (SEBRAE), business groups that finance its actions and projects, public organizations, among others—forming a highly heterogeneous network. This think tank brings together individuals and institutions of various natures. However, Santos (2017) points out that market and business rationality based on entrepreneurship is the core axis that articulates the discourse and actions of this think tank.

When it comes to education, Endeavor works on two fronts: the first promotes training proposals for entrepreneurs starting from the early years of basic education. The second supports the formation of entrepreneurs who will design and produce innovative materials and technologies to be sold to the education sector. In defense of entrepreneurial training beginning in basic education, Endeavor argues that:

[...] There are several reasons for the lack of training among Brazilian entrepreneurs, but one very evident reason is the lack of encouragement to start their own businesses from an early age. [...] A major feature of entrepreneurship is working for a purpose: even in the face of risk, there is a mission so important that it leads entrepreneurs to give up everything for their business—even high salaries and stable

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, the Center for Excellence and Innovation in Educational Policies (CEIPE) – This center is associated with the Program on Education Policy and Governance at Harvard University and is recognized as the first Brazilian think tank focused on producing knowledge within a specific field of action, aimed at conducting applied research and implementing innovative educational policies. [Source: <https://portal.fgv.br/noticias/ebape-e-harvard-inauguram-primeiro-think-tank-brasileiro-politicas-educacionais>]

careers. [...] Entrepreneurial action can also help resolve bottlenecks in the country—especially for those most affected by inefficiency: the poorest.” (Endeavor, 2020, p. 1) <https://endeavor.org.br/ambiente/ensinar-empreendedorismo-escola-universidade/>

There are studies that align with Endeavor’s entrepreneurial aspirations, such as the research by Sela, Sela, and Franzini (2006), who argue that children and young people must develop “new behavior patterns from an early age, based on discoveries about their personal potential, cultural context, motivations, and dreams”, especially in so-called “mass schools.” They argue that the 21st century will be marked by “peculiarities and uncertainties” and by the “end of employment” era, therefore, these schools must seek new educational paradigms that develop work-related competencies. “Entrepreneurship thus becomes the unexpected social revolution that is set to take place in the 21st century, comparable to the effects of the industrial revolution in the last century.” (Sela; Sela; Franzini, 2006, p. 2). In line with Endeavor, these authors also argue that entrepreneurship is the main driver behind “eliminating poverty and reducing the gap between rich and poor.” (Sela; Sela; Franzini, 2006, p. 5).

It is important to highlight that the agendas in defense of entrepreneurship are intentionally well-aligned with neoconservative and neoliberal interests, in accordance with the agendas of multilateral organizations. Evidence of this is the 2017 World Bank (WB) report entitled “*Skills and Jobs: An Agenda for Youth*”, which highlights what it considers to be the main challenges faced by Brazilian youth in achieving “higher levels of employability and productivity in the labor market” (World Bank, 2017, p. 4).

In this report, the WB emphasizes that, in addition to academic knowledge, which is visibly downplayed, the schools and educational institutions should be concerned with the development of socio-emotional skills<sup>11</sup>, through activities based on practical experience beyond academic concepts and it also recommends the implementation of complementary policies that place more emphasis on entrepreneurial training. Thus, it is expected that schools, even in the early years, will foster labor-related skills in order to shape workers according to the needs of the market and companies (World Bank, 2017).

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<sup>11</sup> Socio-emotional competencies are individual capacities that manifest in ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving—or in attitudes used to relate to oneself and others, to set goals, make decisions, and face adverse or unfamiliar situations. They can be observed in our habitual patterns of action and reaction in response to personal and social stimuli. Examples include persistence, assertiveness, empathy, self-confidence, and curiosity for learning. Examples of so-called hybrid competencies include creativity and critical thinking, as they involve both socio-emotional and cognitive skills. (Instituto Ayrton Senna) [Competências Socioemocionais dos Estudantes](#)

This shows that the struggle for control over the content and form of public education has become even more intense, and that there is a well-organized political network involving financial agents, business institutions, third-sector organizations, and others, which exerts strong influence over education policies. This is particularly evident in a recent curricular policy, the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), which also includes socio-emotional competencies in its content. However, this is not entirely new—similar ideas can already be found in UNESCO education reports produced during World Education Conferences held in the 1980s and 1990s.

## A Critical Analysis

Based on these brief considerations, we can infer that the foundations underlying the principles of entrepreneurship—advocated by various groups and social actors, including the think tank Endeavor—seem to be aligned with a positivist/scientificist perspective (Gamboa, 2012), which sees human actions as based on technical rationality, neutral in relation to politics and the economy. In this perspective, humanity and social reality are understood as forming an organic and harmonious whole, and individuals—seen as autonomous agents—are supposedly capable of understanding and mastering social dynamics. In this discourse, complex social phenomena such as poverty, which should be analyzed through the lens of political, economic, and social contradictions and totality, appear in abstract and naturalized ways.

It also appears "natural" that individuals, based solely on their personal potential, cultural context, motivation, and dreams, could overcome their socioeconomic conditions, if they have a clear purpose and are willing to take risks in starting a business, which would even be a solution to extreme poverty in the country. Thus, these groups reinforce the **hegemony of the ruling classes**, diverting attention from broader structural analyses grounded in the observation of economic crises (Wallerstein, 2001; Mészáros, 2009), which are themselves a product of financial capitalism. Authors such as Chesnais (2013), Paulani (2008), among others, have long warned that the financialization of the economy allows financial resources to be withheld from the production of goods, circulating instead in the realm of financial speculation, where large capital is restricted to the world of investments. This has contributed to rising mass unemployment, especially among young people. It is therefore crucial to recognize how perverse and ironic it is to claim we live in a "jobless society" while shifting the burden onto children and youth—who are expected to "learn how to become entrepreneurs" from an early age as a means of financial survival. Once again, the strategy is to blame the victim.



From a Marxist critical perspective, we understand that entrepreneurship education in the early years of basic education carries the explicit connotation of:

[...] dissolving the class question, rendering it irrelevant in explaining the process of economic development under capitalism, since class inequalities, wealth, and poverty are presented as outcomes of individual actions and aptitudes which, [...], are unequally distributed and disconnected from class issues" (Valentim; Peruzzo, 2017, p. 110).

Giving the above, we can also infer that entrepreneurship, as a business-oriented proposal for public education, appears to be based on behaviorist psychology. This claim is supported by Freitas (2012), who analyzed proposals by American entrepreneurs for education and identified that they are grounded in human competence theory, which is based on behavioral analysis and individual performance. According to this perspective, given equal access to opportunities, the decisive factor becomes personal effort—which may lead to merit or failure, depending on the subject's proactive behavior and motivational drive to achieve success and social mobility (Freitas, 2012).

At a preliminary level—which will be expanded upon in future studies—it is also clear that Endeavor promotes large-scale assessments and educational performance indicators as tools to improve public education. This thesis has already been challenged by both national and international researchers, including Freitas (2012, 2018), Ravitch (2011), and Laval (2004). We understand that such processes are detrimental to public education, as they ignore the principle of school autonomy and democratic management, once it is the school itself that, through a continuous self-assessment process based on its Political-Pedagogical Project, should develop strategies for improving its educational practices based on its own contextual reality. By disregarding this premise, private programs and projects in public education directly interfere with education management.

Dardot and Laval (2016, p. 135) reinforce this critique by emphasizing how neoliberalism strategically creates markets and shapes the "entrepreneurial self"—an anthropological model of the enterprise-man. According to the authors:

The novelty lies in triggering a chain reaction, producing entrepreneurial subjects who in turn will reproduce, expand, and reinforce competitive relations among themselves, this will require them, according to the logic of the self-realizing process, to subjectively adapt to increasingly harsh conditions that they themselves have created. (Dardot & Laval, 2016, p. 329).

From these ideas, we reiterate that there is an ongoing effort to promote entrepreneurial subject formation in a society increasingly marked by high unemployment<sup>12</sup> rates and the progressive loss of labor and social rights—conditions that have intensified in this era of neoconservatism aligned with neoliberalism, experienced across various countries. It is necessary to deeply question and research the pedagogical principles, human development approaches, and labor training foundations behind these programs in order to uncover their true intentions, limitations, and contradictions within a class-based society, understanding with Chauí (2017), that, in such a society, to be an entrepreneur is to become “a seller of oneself” in a free market (apud Freitas, 2018a).

## Final Considerations

This text presented a synthesis of the studies we have been developing on the democratization of education, in light of the redefinition of the State’s role, which by withdrawing from the provision of public services, aligns itself with the corporate/philanthropic civil society, establishing various forms of partnerships to address, albeit precariously, social issues, affecting the constitutional principles of the universalization of social rights and contributing to different forms of privatization of public goods.

In the field of education, this phenomenon is evident across the various levels and modalities of basic education. As we have seen, privatization does not only mean transferring ownership, i.e., selling public institutions to the private sector, but occurs in covert ways, one of which is the incorporation of market/entrepreneurial logic into public policies, and the establishment of a specific public management model, namely: managerial/business-oriented governance, focused on merit and results.

In this paper, we emphasized that certain think tanks, which operate from a neoliberal and neoconservative perspective, have positioned themselves as important intellectual hubs aiming to establish consensus that legitimizes the tenets of neoliberalism—among them, the withdrawal of the State’s role as provider of social

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<sup>12</sup> According to a study by the Institute for Applied Economic Research (Ipea) published in June [2019], 3.3 million Brazilians had been unemployed for over two years. The number of people in this situation increased by 42.4% over the previous four years. Additionally, the number of underemployed workers also reached a record high of 7.3 million, while the discouraged workers (those who have given up looking for a job) totaled 4.8 million. The proposals issued by the Ministry of Economy tend to further worsen this precarious scenario, as they strictly follow the neoliberal playbook. (Source: Brasil de Fato <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2019/12/24/retrospectiva-2019-or-brasil-a-venda-estagnacao-economica-desemprego-e-precarizacao>) It is true that, with the change in government in 2023, these figures have improved. However, they are still far from what would be considered ideal for achieving full employment. See, for example: <https://www.ipea.gov.br/portal/categorias/45-todas-as-noticias/noticias/13825-taxa-de-desemprego-atinge-no-mes-de-abril-menor-patamar-em-oito-anos>

welfare. Faced with this argument, there is the spread of entrepreneurship as a supposed solution to poverty and destitution, which are intensified by the development of capitalism. This shifts the focus away from the true causes of crises, which lie in the perverse dynamics of capital — a system that generates wealth while concentrating it in the hands of a few, thereby preventing broader access to social rights.

We sought to argue about the political and ideological foundations that underlie entrepreneurial proposals, which grounded in behaviorist, meritocratic, and socio-emotional competency frameworks, are placing the burden of success or failure, whether in business or employment, on the individual. It is a perverse dynamic, especially when we consider populations living in poverty and social vulnerability. In these cases, what is expected from entrepreneurship is that individuals manage to achieve just the bare minimum for subsistence, so as not to collapse the capitalist system under the weight of extreme poverty. This logic has led to the spread of various forms of precarious work that affect all areas of society.

We emphasized one think tank in particular, which focuses on promoting entrepreneurship in the education sector, including the early years of basic education, the Endeavor. As a breeding ground for neoliberal ideas, this think tank operates within political networks, with one of its key arms being SEBRAE. In an ongoing study, we are observing that SEBRAE has been successful in bringing its entrepreneurial proposals closer to municipal education systems. Some of these systems have implemented the program *Young Entrepreneurs: First Steps* (*Jovens Empreendedores: Primeiros Passos – JEEP*), which was not the main focus of this text, but is mentioned here to reinforce the idea that the private sector is increasingly infiltrating the public sphere, often using corporate civil society and third-sector organizations to do so. Moreover, these proposals, aligned with the World Bank's agenda, have also been making significant inroads into educational policies—such as the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC), which also emphasizes the importance of socio-emotional competencies in the training of basic education students.

We conclude this text with the understanding that research conducted by progressive scholars, committed to building a more just and inclusive society through the defense of free public education funded exclusively by the State, plays an essential role in denouncing this alarming scenario and must foster debate within collective spaces (such as associations, movements, forums, research groups, events, blogs, etc.). It is crucial that these collectives also work towards the training of organic intellectuals, capable of understanding the political dynamics within a broader context.

There is an urgent need to study, denounce, educate, and inform about the ongoing dismantling of hard-won rights. These groups must encourage workers to adopt a broader analysis of policies, mediating between international and national educational agendas, without losing sight of the economic context and the interests of the ruling class.

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