

Research articles

Between discipline and democracy: the militarization of schools as an expression of conservatism in public education system

Entre a disciplina e a democracia: a militarização das escolas como expressão do conservadorismo na educação pública

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Abstract

This article examines how the militarization of public schools in Goiás expresses and institutionalizes conservative values, based on a qualitative documentary analysis guided by the dialectical method. The study analyzed the Internal Regulations of the State Military Police Colleges and the Political-Pedagogical Projects of two non-militarized state schools. Interpretation was structured around four dialectical categories: Social Totality, which reveals the convergence between militarization, neoliberalism, and conservative modernization; Contradiction, marked by tensions between pluralistic discourse and ideological control; Objective and Subjective Conditions, which highlight administrative hierarchization, aesthetic standardization, and corporal discipline; and Educational Praxis, contrasting a moralizing, adaptive formation with the critical orientation found in regular state schools. The findings indicate that militarization reinforces conservative patterns and exclusionary practices, generating tensions with the democratic principles that underpin Brazilian public education.

Keywords: school militarization; conservative modernization; educational policies; democratic education; neoliberalism in education.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa como a militarização das escolas públicas em Goiás expressa e institucionaliza valores conservadores, a partir de uma análise documental qualitativa orientada pelo método dialético. Foram examinados o Regimento dos Colégios Estaduais da Polícia Militar e os Projetos Político-Pedagógicos de duas escolas estaduais não militarizadas. A interpretação fundamentou-se em quatro categorias dialéticas: Totalidade Social, que evidencia a vinculação entre militarização, Neoliberalismo e modernização; Contradição, marcada pela tensão entre discursos de pluralismo e práticas de controle ideológico; Condições Objetivas e Subjetivas, que revelam hierarquização administrativa, padronização estética e disciplinamento corporal; e Práxis Educativa, que contrapõe uma formação adaptativa e moralizante à perspectiva crítica presente nos colégios regulares. Os resultados mostram que a militarização reforça padrões conservadores e práticas de exclusão, tensionando princípios democráticos que orientam a educação pública brasileira.

Palavras-chave: militarização escolar; modernização conservadora; políticas educacionais; educação democrática; neoliberalismo na educação.

INTRODUCTION

Over recent decades, Brazilian education has been permeated by profound transformations, driven by the intensification of neoliberal policies, the rise of conservative forces, and the growing dispute over the meanings and purposes of public schooling. Within this complex scenario, the process of militarization of educational institutions has emerged forcefully,

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whether through traditional military schools, militarized schools under the management of state security forces, or, more recently, civic-military schools linked to federal programs. This movement has gained particular relevance in the state of Goiás, where the expansion of the State Military Police Schools (Colégios Estaduais da Polícia Militar – CEPMG) has been consolidated as a continuous policy, widely defended by the state government and strongly incorporated into the social imaginary as a synonym for discipline, order, and educational quality.

Parallel to the expansion of this model, there has been a strengthening of conservative discourses in the country that seek to restore traditional moral values, reinforce hierarchical structures, and redefine the role of education based on homogeneous conceptions of citizenship, family, and behavior. For authors such as Apple (1999, 2002, 2003), Dantas (2020), and Mascarenhas and Goulart (2023), this phenomenon constitutes a “conservative modernization”, in which neoliberal economic elements and conservative sociocultural values converge, producing new forms of regulation and control over educational practices, curricula, and school identities.

In this context, militarized schools become privileged spaces for observing how such discourses materialize in the daily life of institutions. These schools mobilize principles such as civics, patriotism, strict discipline, and aesthetic and behavioral standardization, which are often associated with the promise of improving learning outcomes and school coexistence. Their expansion coincides with a moment in which public schooling is increasingly pressured to operate according to the logic of efficiency, meritocracy, and accountability—characteristics typical of neoliberal rationality applied to education. At the same time, in conventional state schools, which predominantly serve low-income students with trajectories marked by social vulnerabilities, discourses guided by democratic principles, the valorization of diversity, and the pursuit of critical education prevail.

The coexistence of these models, with their distinct and even antagonistic orientations, raises questions about the educational purposes that have been prioritized and about the role each institution plays in the formation of new generations. Militarization, defended by governmental sectors as a response to the “problems” of public schooling, involves selective processes, mechanisms of covert exclusion, practices of symbolic control, and the moralization of conduct, all of which merit careful analysis, especially when contrasted with the principles that guide public education as established in Brazilian legislation.

In this way, the present study is situated within this broader debate by proposing a comparative analysis of documents from a State Military Police School in Goiás and from non-militarized state schools, seeking to understand how different schooling models express distinct conceptions of society, citizenship, and education. Considering that institutional documents are privileged expressions of educational intentionalities, their analysis makes it possible to identify how certain values, principles, and expectations of conduct are formalized and legitimized within these institutions.

Thus, the research problem guiding this study is formulated as follows: How do military/militarized schools reflect and institutionalize conservatism within the sphere of public education, and is there differentiation between them and other regular public schools?

Based on this problem, the general objective is to assess whether, and in what ways, military/militarized schools reflect and institutionalize conservative ideals in their guiding documents, taking non-militarized state schools as a comparative reference.

The relevance of this study lies in the need to understand the meanings attributed to schooling at a time of expansion of militarized models and of the intensification of conservative discourses. By examining how these elements appear in schools’ institutional documents, the study seeks to contribute to the debate on the social role of public education and on the risks that certain political orientations may pose to democracy, diversity, and the emancipatory character of schooling.

METHOD

The study adopts a qualitative research approach, guided by the dialectical method (Demo, 1995), with an emphasis on qualitative documentary analysis (Lüdke; André, 1986). The choice of dialectics is grounded in the understanding that educational phenomena cannot be analyzed in isolation, but must be interpreted in terms of their historical, political, cultural, and institutional determinations. As noted by Demo (1995), the dialectical method makes it possible to apprehend reality in its totality, taking into account the contradictions and mediations that structure social practice.

For Apple (1999, 2002, 2003), the school constitutes a field of ideological dispute in which hegemonic policies and discourses materialize in curricula, official documents, and institutional routines. Saviani (2005), in turn, emphasizes that educational documents express historical conceptions of human formation and are therefore privileged sources for understanding competing societal projects. These perspectives support the decision to analyze official documents as expressions of pedagogical and politico-institutional intentionalities.

The research sources are concentrated in two sets of documents:

1. The School Regulations and internal norms of the State Military Police Schools of Goiás (Colégios Estaduais da Polícia Militar de Goiás – CEPMG) (Goiás, 2023b);
2. The Political-Pedagogical Projects (PPP) of two non-militarized state schools (Colégio Estadual Dom Bosco – CEJDB and Colégio Estadual Roberto Civita – CERC) belonging to the same public school system (Goiás, 2023a, 2024).

These documents were selected because they represent the normative and organizational foundations of each school model and therefore express conceptions of discipline, citizenship, human formation, management, and patterns of coexistence.

Analytical procedures

The documentary analysis was carried out in two complementary stages:

1. Analytical reading and initial categorization (multistage);
2. Dialectical reinterpretation and construction of partial syntheses.

The analytical reading and initial categorization were conducted through an exhaustive, line-by-line reading of all selected documents. During the initial exploratory reading, the researchers became familiar with the internal organization of the documents, identifying sections, chapters, and thematic axes; discursive emphases (for example, civics, discipline, citizenship, diversity, inclusion); recurring terms; and descriptions of norms, rules, objectives, and philosophical foundations. This reading made it possible to identify elements that differentiate the CEPMG model from conventional state schools.

Subsequently, a systematic reading was carried out, with highlighting and marginal notes. For this purpose, the following were explicitly marked: excerpts describing institutional values and principles; norms related to discipline, uniformization, and hierarchical obedience; references to family, civics, patriotism, morality, and tradition; pedagogical guidelines; and conceptions of curriculum, the school's general objectives, and the expected student profile. These excerpts were separated and recorded in an analytical framework to compose the categorization process.

The highlighted excerpts were grouped according to similarity. This process was not mechanical: several passages were initially allocated to more than one category, requiring successive returns to the text. For example, excerpts that mentioned civics and patriotism, or norms concerning uniformization, appearance, and behavior. This movement corresponds to what Demo (1995) refers to as the “constant back-and-forth” characteristic of dialectical analysis: reality never fits immediately into categories but instead requires successive revisions. The dialectical reinterpretation and construction of partial syntheses were aimed at reinterpreting the categorized excerpts, articulating them with one another and with the theoretical framework.

Each categorized excerpt was reread in light of the mediations that permeate it: neoliberalism, conservatism, conservative modernization, school management, education policy, institutional

culture, and the dispute over projects. Thus, excerpts related to civics and patriotism were connected to the analyses of Apple (2002, 2003); disciplinary, aesthetic, and behavioral norms were articulated with the discussions of Foucault (2014); and elements related to school selection and exclusion were associated with the reflections of Santos (2016), Bezerra (2017), and Dantas (2020) on the elitization and moralization of public schooling.

Categories and definitions

With the mediations identified, a set of syntheses was organized and ultimately framed into four categories: Social Totality, Contradiction, Objective and Subjective Conditions, and Educational Praxis. Social Totality refers to the interpretation of the CEPMG as part of the convergence between neoliberalism and conservatism, situating their documents within the historical context of the expansion of militarization. The category of Contradiction represents the confrontation between normative discourses of pluralism and democracy and the mechanisms of control, standardization, and silencing present in the militarized regulations. Objective and Subjective Conditions refer to the distinction between organizational structure, norms, and resources (objective conditions) and values, moralities, military ethos, bodily discipline, and institutional identity (subjective conditions). Finally, the category of Educational Praxis refers to the analysis of the formative purpose implicit in the documents, contrasting critical formation with adaptive and disciplined formation.

RESULTS

The present analysis, constructed on the basis of the four dialectical categories - Social Totality, Contradiction, Objective and Subjective Conditions, and Educational Praxis - sought to critically understand how militarized schools are embedded within a broader historical movement, articulating structural, ideological, and pedagogical elements. Drawing on institutional documents and the theoretical formulations of Demo (1995), Apple (2003), Saviani (2005), Meszáros (2011), and Dantas (2020), it was possible to demonstrate the complexity of the determinations that permeate the model of militarized schooling in Goiás.

Social totality: militarization as an expression of conservative modernization and neoliberalism

The analysis of the CEPMG institutional documents makes it possible to understand that such schools do not emerge in isolation, but are instead embedded within a broader social movement marked by the intertwining of neoliberalism and contemporary moral conservatism. As Tapajós and Silva (2023) argue, the militarization of public schools is associated with the alignment between the neoliberal movement, hegemonic in the economic sphere, and the (neo) conservative movement, which pressures for the restoration of traditional moral values. The authors emphasize that this articulation produces a school model oriented toward disciplining young bodies, reinforcing hierarchies, and shaping subjects aligned with the demands of the market and the prevailing moral order.

This movement appears clearly in the CEPMG Regulations, which present the moral and civic formation of students as one of their pillars. In Chapter II—On the principles, purposes, and objectives of education—the document establishes, for Elementary Education:

III – the development of learning capacity, with a view to the acquisition of knowledge and skills and the formation of attitudes and values;

IV – the strengthening of family ties, bonds of human solidarity, and reciprocal tolerance upon which social life is based (Goiás, 2023b).

At the upper secondary level, the document intensifies moralizing and patriotic aspects by stating that the school should:

[...] provide students with the education necessary for the development of their potentialities [...] restoring civics, patriotism, urbanity, and mutual cooperation (Goiás, 2023b).

A The recurring presence of these values evidences a conception of schooling that approximates what Apple (2003) refers to as “conservative modernization”. This project simultaneously combines neoliberal rationality, oriented toward efficiency, meritocracy, and standardization, with a moralizing and disciplining agenda centered on the traditional family, civics, and hierarchy.

This interpretation is corroborated by the official CEPMG documents, which emphasize an explicit commitment to civics, order, and patriotism, elements that, according to Harvey (2008), are mobilized by neoconservative movements to respond to real or imagined social crises. In this sense, the militarized school functions as an instrument of moral recomposition of society, reinforcing patterns that oppose cultural diversity and democratic pluralism.

Similarly to military philosophy, which seeks a certain standardization of behaviors, and even while advocating a plural education, in Section II of the school regulations, which addresses Duties and Prohibitions, there are also provisions concerning the conduct of staff members:

II - to engage in religious, political-party, or ideological proselytism, under any circumstances, as well as to preach doctrines contrary to national interests, influencing other members of the community to adopt indisciplined, irreverent, or agitating attitudes, even if in a disguised manner (Goiás, 2023b, p. 28).

Thus, the CEPMG have, at the regulatory level, instruments that may sanction teachers who express ideologies considered by military commanders to be contrary to national interests, making it difficult for teachers to address religion, politics, and ideology in their classes.

The restriction and attempt at uniformization go beyond discourse and are imposed on bodies, not only those of students, which is more evident in everyday school life, but also those of teachers and staff members, who are likewise required to wear uniforms while on duty. The specifications of these uniforms are set out in the School Regulations, in Titles XIII and XIV (Goiás, 2023b), extending across several chapters that describe in detail how the uniforms of students, teachers, and administrative staff must be configured.

The CEPMG impose aesthetic standards on their uniforms, which reflect values, tradition, discipline, and hierarchy. Their regulations govern the manufacture of the uniforms and the mandatory nature of their use by teachers, students, and other staff members, both administrative and support personnel. In the regulations and bylaws previously mentioned, the composition and classification of the uniforms are described in detail, as are specifications regarding hair appearance and footwear. The use of clothing worn over the uniform is expressly prohibited; likewise, any accessory that alters the shape or colors of the standard uniform is not permitted. There are specific uniforms for pregnant women, and uniforms appropriate to activities are mandatory for students, whose improper use is subject to penalties, since the pedagogical and administrative staff are responsible for monitoring and enforcing compliance. Such uniforms must be purchased by students with their own resources (Lima; Brzezinski; Menezes Júnior, 2020).

Lima, Brzezinski and Menezes Júnior (2020) argue that, despite the discourse of democratic management, the CEPMG adopt a bureaucratic management model that uses real and symbolic power, associated with military uniforms and dress codes, to establish “discipline” and “order”, thereby controlling students both inside and outside the school and, to some extent, teachers and staff members, while simultaneously regulating and normalizing such procedures. These schools ultimately become exclusionary, since the children of military personnel are granted reserved places and the responsibility for uniforms falls on families.

Inequality and the elitization of this school model are intensified, because even while selecting their students, whether directly through reserved places or through the charging of “contributions” and the purchase of uniforms, these students retain public school status and are therefore eligible to compete under public school quotas in the National High School Examination (ENEM).

Thus, the implementation of the CEPMG ultimately generates the exclusion of the poorest populations, transforming the school into an elitist institution and excluding a significant portion of the population from the process. In addition, it is known that public school students compete for university admission through quota systems based on the National High School Examination (ENEM); however, this competition becomes unequal, since the CEPMG, even while charging fees and selecting students, are considered public institutions and compete

on equal terms with other schools that have fewer resources (Santos, 2016). In general, the CEPMG do not serve the poorest populations, whom the State should serve, and, as they are more costly for families than regular schools, they elitize part of the public sphere. What was intended to be access for all becomes access for a segment of education.

In contrast, the PPPs of the state schools analyzed (Dom Bosco and Roberto Civita) affirm a conception of education more closely aligned with the critical framework, citing authors such as Paulo Freire, Luckesi, Norbert Elias, and Saviani, and indicating the formation of the “critical citizen” as a formative horizon. These documents explicitly acknowledge the social conditions of students:

Low purchasing power: Some students face problems such as malnutrition, family disorganization, hunger, and domestic violence; others display low self-esteem, emotional deprivation, and difficulties in social interaction and learning; many students are workers (Goiás, 2024, p. 58).

Unlike other models of public schooling, in which diversity and respect for the plurality of thoughts, opinions, and expressions are promoted, in militarized schools this same diversity is viewed as something to be combated and normalized according to established standards. The subject ceases to exercise political protagonism, conforming to pre-established molds.

Thus, within the category of social totality, it can be observed that the CEPMG are situated within a schooling project oriented toward the preservation of the social totality, traditional values, and disciplinary training, whereas state schools seek, albeit with limitations, a form of education that recognizes the social and cultural determinations of their students.

Contradiction: discursive pluralism vs. ideological and disciplinary restriction

As the dialectical analysis advances, the category of “Contradiction” makes it possible to highlight internal tensions between discourse and the institutional practices of the CEPMG. The Regulations affirm general principles of Brazilian education — pluralism of ideas, democratic management, and freedom to teach and learn — but establish mechanisms that restrict such principles.

The Article 139 of the Regulations is illustrative:

It is prohibited [...] to engage in religious, political-party, or ideological proselytism, under any circumstances, as well as to preach doctrines contrary to national interests [...] even in a disguised manner (Goiás, 2023b, p. 28).

Although presented as a defense of neutrality, this provision grants military administrators broad interpretive power over what constitutes “proselytism” or “national interest.” As Dantas (2020) argues, narratives of neutrality often conceal practices of domination, since the absence of explicit positioning favors the reproduction of dominant ideology.

Furthermore, this norm restricts teaching practice by hindering the discussion of political, historical, social, or identity-related issues that are indispensable to the exercise of critical citizenship. At the same time, it allows for sanctions against discourses deemed “inappropriate” by military commanders, consolidating an environment of self-censorship. There is also a dispute between the educational and military fields in the formation of the “ideal citizen”, which reflects different views on the role of the individual in society. While the educational field seeks to promote active and conscious citizenship within a globalized context, the military field emphasizes discipline and obedience as pillars of citizenship. The choice between these models can significantly influence how individuals perceive their role in the contemporary world and how they prepare to face current social challenges. This contradiction appears in the Regulations of the Military Schools, which aim to form conscious students but punish those who do not obey. Note that the regulations establish the following principles for military schools:

Article 4. The education provided shall be based on the following principles, purposes, and objectives:

I - equality of conditions for access, permanence, and success in school, within the norms established in these Regulations;

II - freedom to learn, teach, research, and disseminate culture, thought, art, and knowledge;

III - pluralism of ideas and pedagogical conceptions;

IV - respect for freedom and appreciation of tolerance (Goiás, 2023b, p. 2)

At the same time that a plural conception of education is articulated, there is a centralization of authority, such that neither students nor teachers may write or give interviews without prior authorization, with the possibility of sanctions.

The contradiction between discourse and practice also appears in school management. Although the documents mention “democratic management”, the Managing Commander is appointed by the Military Police, and teachers and students are subject to a military hierarchical chain. In state schools, by contrast, management takes place through elections by the school community, as indicated in their PPPs.

As Saviani (2005) reminds us, a school cannot be democratic if it is not structured as such. The dialectical contradiction between formal pluralism and practical authoritarianism reveals that the CEPMG adopts a school model that reinforces obedience and limits dissent, characterizing a form of pedagogy oriented more toward social control than toward critical formation.

Regarding contradictions present in values, in conventional schools one of the most prominent values is respect for diversity, since, unlike the CEPMG, which emphasize uniformization and standardization, these schools seek to encourage individuality and respect for differences. This is also because, as stated in the PPPs, they work with a highly diverse student population in terms of gender, race, and family background, as many students come from non-traditional family arrangements. They also face situations of family violence, as in the case of the CEJDB, with a significant proportion of migrants from the North and North-east, presenting a context marked by heterogeneity in terms of origin and cultural diversity.

The CERC establishes as guiding values ethical and moral principles that enable an understanding of the role of work in students’ professional formation, with the aim of combating any form of discrimination, whether within the school environment or outside it. As follows:

Students’ socioeconomic level

Low purchasing power:

- Some students face problems such as malnutrition, family disorganization, hunger, and domestic violence;
- Others display low self-esteem, emotional deprivation, and difficulties in social interaction and learning;
- Many students are workers;
- A significant proportion are migrants from the North and Northeast. In this respect, the school works with a student population marked by heterogeneity in terms of place of origin and cultural diversity (Goiás, 2024, p. 58).

Thus, as in the CEJDB mentioned above, the CERC also serves a similar student population:

Roberto Civita State Public School serves a student population originating primarily from a low socioeconomic background, in which a large proportion of families face significant difficulties. Many students experience emotional and nutritional deprivation, which is reflected in their emotional, cognitive, and physical development. It is observed that some of these students lack family guidance regarding rules and values of conduct necessary in all environments (Goiás, 2023a, p. 12).

These values are also cited in the CEJDB, always emphasizing the role of citizenship, while stressing that citizenship is exercised in society with the aim of transforming it in order to reduce inequalities, seeking first to understand it so that action may then be taken toward overcoming the prevailing social model.

The school is the place where intentional formal education takes place and, therefore, must be understood as a permanent space of investigation and reflection so that an educational practice meaningful to the community (students, fathers, mothers, teachers, and administrative staff) may be developed. In this sense, scientific knowledge and cultural practices must be (re)signified so that students may apprehend and reflect upon them, taking as a reference the social reality of which they are part (Goiás, 2024, p. 13).

Basically, both conventional schools and military schools refer to the same values, such as citizenship and family, for example. The difference lies in how these concepts are understood: while, for the CEPMG, citizenship consists of adapting to prevailing social models, seeking to understand and fit into society, traditional schools, at least in their documents, hold that it is necessary to overcome this social structure.

Objective and subjective conditions: elitization, selectivity, and bodily discipline

The category “Objective and Subjective Conditions” makes it possible to understand how militarization produces forms of exclusion and control. Within this category, the aim is to distinguish and detail material conditions (physical, bureaucratic, and administrative structures) from ideological conditions (moral values, institutional identity, and worldview).

Objective conditions are those determined externally to individuals; they are given without their choice and constitute what is given. They refer to concrete material and historical circumstances that influence and determine social, economic, and natural processes. These conditions are external to individuals, yet they condition their actions, choices, and possibilities for transforming reality (Demo, 1995). Within certain limits, they determine freedom and possibilities for change, and are essential for understanding the dialectical development of reality.

In the Marxist dialectical tradition (Demo, 1995), subjective conditions refer to conscious, ideological, and organizational factors that influence the capacity of social subjects either to transform reality or to struggle to maintain it. While objective conditions constitute the material basis (economy, social structure), subjective conditions are the “human factor” perception, political will, and the organization necessary for revolutionary action. In dialectics, subjective conditions are the internal aspects of subjects’ consciousness, will, and knowledge which, in interaction with objective conditions, determine the process of social transformation, whether historically or socially. They are essential for material conditions to be understood and transformed, or, in the case of military schools, to be maintained or even regressed to an earlier point in history.

It is necessarily within subjective conditions that conservative ideals operate and, in the case of this research, they make use of objective conditions, namely the structure of military schools, in order to achieve greater effectiveness and reach in their intent.

With regard to objective conditions, an extremely hierarchical administrative structure is observed, centralized in military authorities, with limited democratic participation by teachers and students. In addition, the CEPMG require the acquisition of specific uniforms, rigid aesthetic standardization, and strict compliance with norms of personal presentation. The Regulations describe these requirements in detail:

Appearance of hair and footwear [...] any other accessory that alters the shape or colors of the standard uniform is not permitted; improper use is subject to penalties; uniforms must be acquired with one’s own resources (Goiás, 2023b).

This aesthetic standardization is accompanied by legal and administrative mechanisms of exclusion. As analyzed by Santos (2016, p. 37):

[...] the implementation of the CPMG generates the exclusion of the poorest, brings together dependents of the Military Police, and selects the most capable, transforming the school into an elitist institution.

This selectivity is not made explicit in official discourses, but it appears in practice. As Meszáros (2011) notes, educational institutions may operate as social filters, reinforcing structural inequalities by selecting students who already possess favorable conditions for learning.

The contrast with state schools is evident: these institutions receive students in situations of vulnerability, low income, hunger, early entry into work, and emotional and social problems, as described in their PPPs. Thus, militarization shifts the responsibility for addressing the most complex social demands to regular public schools.

Subjectively, the CEPMG operate a strong disciplining of bodies. The regulation of uniforms, posture, vocabulary, behavior, and appearance constitutes what Foucault (1982) would call a “microphysics of power” applied to the school environment. This reinforces identities based on obedience, erasing cultural and subjective differences. This identity construction appears in studies such as that of Ribeiro (2019), who states that the Military Command introduces into the school “a methodology grounded in order, discipline, impersonality, and the homogenization of conduct”.

Educational praxis: conservative reproduction vs. critical formation

Finally, within the category of “Educational Praxis”, we synthesize how the preceding principles materialize in everyday school life. The analysis of the documents shows that the CEPMG operate a praxis oriented toward conforming students to traditional norms and values, emphasizing discipline, hierarchy, civics, and patriotism.

This conception stands in opposition to the idea of education as a practice of freedom (Freire, 1987) and also to Saviani’s (2005) historical-critical pedagogy, which understands the school as a space of mediation between systematized knowledge and social transformation.

While the CEPMG privilege values such as obedience, civility, civics, and respect for authority, the state schools analyzed seek, at least at the discursive level, to promote critical reflection and the acceptance of differences, recognizing students’ socioeconomic realities. As Apple (2003) notes, moralizing and disciplining curricula produce a form of “adaptive citizenship” oriented toward maintaining the prevailing order, whereas critical curricula seek to develop a “transformative citizenship” capable of analyzing contradictions and acting upon them.

Thus, the results show that militarized educational praxis is embedded in a project of social conservation, reinforcing structures of inequality and producing subjects adjusted to the neoliberal-conservative ethos, while the praxis of state schools, despite their limitations, moves closer to an emancipatory formative horizon.

Comparative chart based on the categories

Chart 1 synthesizes and illustrates the differences between the educational models analyzed, as well as their proximity to or distance from the critical-emancipatory ideal presented here.. Based on the chart, several considerations can be made, including a profound divergence between militarized and conventional educational models, particularly with regard to the critical conception of education advocated by authors such as Saviani (2005) and Apple (1999).

Chart 1. Synthesis of the Dialectical Categories.

Dialectical Category	CEPMG	Conventional Schools
Social Totality	Embedded in neoliberal and conservative advancement; conservative social reproduction.	Context of greater social diversity and critical orientation.
Contradiction	Critical discourse; disciplining and conformist practice.	Discourse and practice more aligned with a critical perspective.
Objective/Subjective Conditions	Rigid and elitist administrative structure; traditional, conservative, and moralizing values.	More democratic and inclusive structure; plural and democratic values.
Educational Praxis	Adaptive and disciplining education; social reproduction..	Education more open to critique and diversity; pursuit of social transformation.
Source: Authors.		

Saviani (2005) highlights education as an instrument of social transformation through the critical appropriation of historically accumulated knowledge, aiming to overcome social inequalities and to enable an emancipatory praxis. In turn, Apple (1999) emphasizes that education can serve both to reproduce social inequalities, through hidden curricula that legitimize dominant values, and to foster resistance to and transformation of these power structures.

The results indicate that the CEPMG operate from a conservative and disciplining perspective, emphasizing social conformity, rigid discipline, and hierarchical obedience as central values, in line with the reflections of Ribeiro (2019) and Pinheiro and Guimarães (2018). These institutions are situated within a broader political-ideological context of neoliberal and neoconservative advancement, whose primary function appears to be the maintenance of the prevailing social order through institutional mechanisms such as rigid regulations, uniformization, and reward systems that reproduce a meritocratic logic.

In this context, a certain degree of coercion appears to be considered necessary for the restoration of order. Neoconservatives thus emphasize militarization as a remedy for the chaos of individual interests. For this reason, they tend to accentuate threats, real or imagined, at both domestic and external levels, to the integrity and stability of the country (Harvey, 2008, p. 93).

On the other hand, the conventional schools analyzed prove to be more closely aligned with a democratic and plural education, despite their limitations and practical contradictions, as also pointed out by Ribeiro (2019). These institutions tend to value diversity and respect for individualities more explicitly and seek, at least at the discursive level, a critical and transformative formation of individuals. This perspective is closer to the emancipatory theoretical assumptions of Saviani and Apple, as it recognizes education as a space for the collective and critical construction of knowledge, rather than merely as the reproduction of existing structures.

Thus, Chart 1 highlights a tension between conservative social reproduction, typical of militarized schools, and the attempt to establish a critical and emancipatory educational praxis, theoretically proposed by the authors adopted and partially practiced by conventional schools. Understanding this dialectical tension is fundamental to deepening the debate on the directions of Brazilian public education and its implications for the formation of citizens capable of critically transforming the society in which they live.

CONCLUSION

The analysis carried out made it possible to understand that the militarization of public schools, especially in the state of Goiás, is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather a concrete manifestation of the convergence between neoliberalism, conservatism, and control practices that have reconfigured the role of public education in the country. By examining the institutional documents of a State Military Police School in Goiás and of non-militarized state schools, it was possible to identify significant differences in the ways each model conceives the student, the social function of the school, and the values that guide human formation.

The documents of the CEPMG analyzed present a structure strongly marked by discipline, hierarchy, aesthetic standardization, civics, and patriotism, composing a school ethos aligned with conservative values and with the ideal of an “obedient citizen”, prepared to follow rules and to act in an adaptive manner to the demands of the prevailing social order. These principles appear not only as pedagogical guidelines, but also as norms regulating students’ appearance, conduct, and behavior, reinforcing mechanisms of symbolic and material control. The rhetoric of “order” and “discipline” in these documents functions as a justification for practices of surveillance and moralization of school life, in line with what is indicated by the critical literature on militarization.

On the other hand, the Political-Pedagogical Projects of the non-militarized state schools reinforce the defense of democratic management, diversity, inclusion, and welcoming practices. In these documents, public schools are conceived as spaces for confronting social inequalities, fostering critical formation, and engaging in dialog with students’ multiple cultural realities. The emphasis is placed on building an education committed to social rights, plurality,

and the expansion of opportunities—a vision that, although constrained by material operating conditions and structural inequalities, points toward an emancipatory conception of education.

The comparison between the two models reveals the existence of distinct projects of society that compete over the configuration of public schooling: on the one hand, a conservative, hierarchical, and disciplining model, associated with conservative modernization and with the interests of groups seeking to restore traditional patterns of behavior; on the other, a model that, despite its difficulties, is grounded in democratic principles, the valorization of diversity, and the perspective of critical formation.

Returning to the research problem, it can be stated that school militarization, as expressed in the documents analyzed, institutionalizes conservative values, reinforces the standardization of bodies and behaviors, and redefines the function of public schooling, bringing it closer to an educational project oriented toward obedience, order, and meritocracy. This movement contrasts with the perspective of education defended by conventional state schools, which understand schooling as an instrument for the expansion of rights, the production of knowledge, and democratic civic formation.

Therefore, the results point to the need to deepen the public debate on the directions of basic education, especially in light of the growth of policies that, rather than promoting educational democratization, tend to reinforce inequalities and limit plurality within the school environment. Based on the documentary analysis conducted, it becomes evident that understanding militarization is not merely a matter of understanding a form of management, but of recognizing its insertion within a broader project of society that contests, within school spaces, the formation of new generations.

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Authors contribution

WAC: Conception of the study, Data analysis and interpretation, Drafting the initial version of the manuscript. EBVR: Definition of the method, Critical content review, Drafting of the final version of the manuscript.

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