

## **INCIDENCE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN CURRICULUM CONSTRUCTION PROCESS: THE APPROPRIATION OF THE PUBLIC PURPOSES OF EDUCATION<sup>1</sup>**

### ***ATUAÇÃO DO SETOR PRIVADO NO PROCESSO DE CONSTRUÇÃO CURRICULAR: O SEQUESTRO DOS FINS PÚBLICOS DA EDUCAÇÃO***

### ***IMPACTO DEL SECTOR PRIVADO EN EL PROCESO DE CONSTRUCCIÓN CURRICULAR: EL SECUESTRO DE FINES PÚBLICOS DE LA EDUCACIÓN***

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**ABSTRACT:** In Brazil, as in many other countries, the presence of the private sector in education has been increasing exponentially, as pointed out by many studies. Such a movement for the advancement of the private sector in education can be understood in the movement of crisis and capitalist expansion. This article is a theoretical essay based on research carried out by the author in more than 15 years of studies on the theme of privatization of education. It aims to reflect on the incidence of the private sector in the “curriculum construction process” and to highlight that this movement has led to the appropriation of the public purposes of education by business reformers. It points to the potential of democratic management as a possibility against hegemony in the perspective of defining public and collective purposes for education.

**KEYWORDS:** Curriculum. Commodification. Privatization. Democratic management.

**RESUMO:** *No Brasil, assim como em muitos outros países, a presença do setor privado na educação vem aumentando de modo exponencial conforme apontam muitos estudos. Tal movimento de avanço do setor privado na educação pode ser compreendido no movimento de crise e expansão capitalista. Este artigo se constitui em um ensaio teórico baseado nas pesquisas realizadas pela autora em mais de 15 anos de estudos acerca da temática da privatização da educação. Tem por objetivo refletir acerca da incidência do setor privado no “processo de construção curricular” e destacar que este movimento tem levado ao sequestro dos fins públicos da educação pelos reformadores empresariais. Aponta-se para as potencialidades da gestão democrática como possibilidade contra hegemônica na perspectiva de definição de fins públicos e coletivos para a educação.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Currículo. Mercadorização. Privatização. Gestão democrática.*

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**RESUMEN:** *En Brasil, como en muchos otros países, la presencia del sector privado en la educación ha aumentado exponencialmente, como señalan muchos estudios. Este movimiento de avance del sector privado en la educación puede entenderse en el movimiento de crisis y expansión capitalista. Este artículo es un ensayo teórico basado en la investigación realizada por el autor durante más de 15 años de estudios sobre el tema de la privatización de la educación. Pretende reflexionar sobre la incidencia del sector privado en el "proceso de construcción del currículo" y destacar que este movimiento ha llevado al secuestro de los fines públicos de la educación por parte de los reformistas empresariales. Señala el potencial de la gestión democrática como posibilidad contrahegemónica en la perspectiva de definir los fines públicos y colectivos de la educación.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Currículum. Comercialización. Privatización. Gestión democrática.*

## Introduction

This article is a theoretical reflection resulting from research that has been carried out by the author on the theme of privatization of education within an inter-institutional group called GREPPE - Group of Studies and Research in Educational Policy. The objective is to present a reflection on the incidence of the private sector in the “curricular construction process”<sup>3</sup> and to highlight that this movement has led to the hijacking of the public purposes of education by “business reformers”<sup>4</sup>.

In the last decade, we have witnessed an intensification of processes of privatization of education in Brazil (ADRIÃO *et al.*, 2009; BORGHI, 2018b; GARCIA; 2006, SANTOS, 2012; PERONI, 2018). Many of these studies show that the privatization processes in education do not correspond exclusively to the traditional model of transfer from state to private property.

Sader (2003), for example, argues that the commodification of education does not necessarily require the privatization of its provision. For the author, although formally state-owned, an institution can have private objectives (to serve the market) and operate guided by liberal assumptions such as individualism, competition between individuals and, generally, a conception of the world operational to capital.

Here, we understand privatization in a broad conception that has been taking place in a context of reconfiguration of the boundaries between the public and the private. In this sense, the arrangements and strategies between the public and the private are diverse and have

<sup>3</sup> The term “curricular construction process” is based on the writings of Gimeno Sacristan (2000) and will be presented later.

<sup>4</sup> Business reformers is a term used by Daiane Ravitch (2011) and Freitas (2018).

constituted and consolidated an intense privatization process. Belfield and Levin (2004, p.19) state that privatization:

It is an umbrella term referring to different educational programs and policies. As a general definition, privatizations transfer activities, assets and responsibilities from government/public institutions and organizations to individuals and agencies. Furthermore, privatization is often thought of as “liberalization” – where country agents are exempt from government regulations, or as “commodification” – where new markets are created as alternative services to government ones (BELFIELD; LEVIN, 2004, p. 19, our translation).

There are many studies that show this process, mapping and analyzing the different spaces and the multiple privatization strategies. Research by GREPPE – Group of Studies and Research in Educational Policy, has been mapping different strategies of privatization in education, particularly in the so-called dimensions of management, supply and curriculum. The Group provides a mapping of the insertion of the private sector in basic education in the different state networks in Brazil, showing how public networks are moving towards privatization.

As a whole, the GREPPE research projects analyzed, in different contexts, different ways in which basic education has been privatized. Throughout the research, three dimensions of the privatization of basic education stood out and became dimensions of analysis. This division stems from a methodological strategy recognizing that educational policy involves the interconnection between such dimensions, according to Adrião (2018a).

The first dimension, related to the privatization of educational provision, is operationalized in three ways: public funding (directly or indirectly) of educational provision by a private provider, increased enrollment in private establishments, and the introduction of parental choice policies or programs (voucher, homeschooling and charter school). The second dimension refers to the privatization of education management, captured in two areas: privatization of educational management, involving the proposition by private actors of systems that assume a systemic character, such as the introduction of rankings, bonuses or forms of outsourcing of teaching work; and privatization of school management, concerning the introduction of privatization mechanisms within the scope of specific school units. The last one refers to the privatization of the curriculum, it is about the privatization of pedagogical processes *strictu sensu*, involving the incidence of the private sector on the relationships between teacher, student and knowledge and curriculum inputs (ADRIÃO, 2018a).

In this article, the focus is on the dimension of curriculum privatization. Considering the current dismantling of the boundaries between the public and the private, the dispute over the public meaning of education, already pointed out by Borghi (2018b), is urgent. The question that arises is: is an education public in which the curricula/purposes are defined by business reformers? This issue is of great relevance if we consider that the meaning of public education is being disputed, co-opted, and broadened in scope. It is necessary to defend public education, public funding and public management - the only one that can be democratic in its essence and establish collective meanings and purposes for education.

First, the concept of curriculum as a process under construction will be presented, based on the studies of Gimeno Sacristan (2000). Next, examples are presented of how the materiality of the incidence of the private sector in the curriculum construction process takes place. Finally, considerations about this performance of business reformers and the hijacking of the public purposes of education are listed, and a necessary counter-hegemonic action is pointed out to resume and restore public and collective ends for education.

We start from the understanding that the advance of the private sector in education and the dismantling of the borders between the public and the private must be understood in the movement of crisis and capitalist expansion, as defended by Silva Jr and Sguissardi (2001, p. 101, our translation),

The understanding of the public and the private in capitalism and its movement can only happen with the understanding of the movement of capital and the crises of capitalism, which install new modes of conformation of the public and the private, which redesign the relations between the state and society and reconfigure the institutions of civil society and the state.

In a 2018 article, Peroni questions how the redefinition of the role of the State is reorganizing the boundaries between the public and the private. For the author, the state continues to be responsible for access, but the pedagogical content and school management are increasingly determined by institutions that introduce the mercantile logic. It is the mercantile private that defines public education.

It is also considered here, with Borghi (2018b), that privatization processes have been taking place in a context of expropriation of the right to education and calling into question the perspective and ideal of universalization of education. Ultimately, says the author, there is the privatization of a right. For the author, the concept of public education is currently in dispute and it is of great importance to define the essence of public education that we defend

and that allows us to face the defense, today almost hegemonic, of the privatization of education.

### **The role of the private sector in the curriculum construction process**

The path taken here begins with the conception of curriculum, in agreement with Apple (2002, p. 59-60, our translation), when stating that it is:

product of tensions, conflicts and cultural, political and economic concessions that organize and disorganize a people (...) there is always, therefore, a politics of official knowledge, a politics that expresses the conflict around what some see simply as neutral descriptions of the world and others, as elite conceptions that privilege certain groups and marginalize others

For the author, the curriculum is not just a printed document of educational institutions, but a document that reflects a whole complex of social relations of a certain historical moment. Apple (2003, p. 79-80, our translation) states that:

A 'new' set of agreements, a new alliance and a new power bloc have formed and are having an increasing influence on education and all aspects of social life. This power bloc combines multiple fractions of capital committed to the commodified solutions that neoliberals present to educational problems, with neoconservative intellectuals who want a 'return' to a better quality standard and a 'common culture', with fundamentalists populist and authoritarian religious, deeply concerned with secularity and the preservation of their own traditions, and with particular fractions of skilled professionals of the new middle class, committed to the ideology and techniques of evaluation, measurement and 'management'. Although there are evident tensions and conflicts within this alliance, in general its overall objectives are to provide the educational conditions that its components believe are necessary both to increase international competitiveness, profit and discipline and to return us to a romanticized past of home, 'ideal' family and school.

We also start from the concept of curriculum developed by Gimeno Sacristan (2000), for whom the curriculum must be understood as a process under construction, which is constituted and configured at different times, a synthesis of multiple determinations.

As a process under construction, according to Gimeno Sacristan (2000, p. 36, our translation),

curriculum refers to a selective cultural project that has extra-school, social, political and cultural constraints, and which is built and configured based on the school's conditions, thus being determined by intra-school constraints. The curriculum is not static, it is always in the process of construction and

development, ranging from the central levels of curriculum policy to its implementation in the classroom.

In this perspective, the curriculum must be understood as a process under construction, permeated by struggles, clashes and tensions. In this process of curriculum construction, different factors, internal and external to the school, shape and model the curriculum.

Also for Ponce (2018), school curricula are territories of political dispute, where the education that one wants to offer is at stake. According to the author, this is an arena of disputes between disproportionate forces. It is with this interpretation that Borghi (2018b) states that in the current process of expropriation of the right to education and its transformation into a commodity, the market can be understood as the current “Big Brother”, referring to the book 1984 by George Orwell. For the author, business reformers have had a strong impact on the curriculum construction process.

Ball (2014, p. 25, our translation) also tells us about the “universalization of market-based social relations, with the corresponding penetration into almost all aspects of our lives, the discourse and/or practice of commodification, capital accumulation and of generating profits”.

We understand here that the entire process of curriculum construction has been disputed. Gimeno approaches the curriculum construction process from different moments. The *prescribed curriculum* corresponds to the general norms and guidelines that act as a reference for the ordering of the curriculum system – they select and distribute knowledge within the school system. The *curriculum presented* refers to materials designed to translate and clarify for teachers the meaning and content of the prescribed curriculum, performing an interpretation of it. The *curriculum planned by teachers* are the annual, monthly, daily plans prepared by teachers, based on general norms and guidelines and the particular needs of their students. The *curriculum in action* represents the moment of pedagogical action, of teaching practice in the classroom; the *curriculum realized* comprises the effects produced by the practice, effects that are of different orders and that affect both students and teachers. Finally, the *evaluated curriculum* implies the moment of evaluation, which can be the performance of the students or the curriculum itself and its implementation.

### **The curriculum construction process and the performance of business reformers**

How, then, has the private sector been acting throughout this complex curriculum development process?

Regarding the “**prescribed curriculum**”, defined by Gimeno Sacristan (2000) as the curricular legal prescriptions, Borghi (2018a) points out the role of the “Movement All for the Common National Base” in the process of building the National Common Curricular Base as a example of the strong influence of the private sector. The Movement for the Common National Base was created in April 2013, as stated on its website, with the objective of discussing the creation of a common base that would influence the learning of each student, teacher formation, the didactic resources used in the classroom, as well as in external assessments. Currently, after the approval of the new BNCC, there is already on the Movement's website a package of actions aimed at its implementation and ready to be consumed by thousands of municipal and state public education networks. They are the so-called “business reformers” (FREITAS, 2012) thinking, or rather, dictating school curricula. The point is that, as Oliveira (2003, p. 51, our translation) points out, “because it has an economistic and fragmentary understanding of the multiple relationships in which individuals are inserted, [the business community] ends up valuing much more the role of the school as a space for preparation of the individual for the job market” reducing education to market interests.

Freitas (2012), criticizing the role of business reformers in curricular reform, points out that it is not just a curricular reform, but, ultimately, the very recomposition of educational purposes.

With regard to the “**curriculum presented**” to teachers through the production of materials designed to translate and clarify the meaning and content of the prescribed curriculum, an example of the performance of the private sector is the adoption, by many public networks, of the so-called “private schools systems” (BORGHI, 2018a). Adrião *et al.* (2009), address this trend in an article that deals with the growth of partnerships, through contracts between the municipalities of São Paulo and private companies in the educational area for the acquisition of “private teaching systems”. The authors understand that this purchase represents more than the simple acquisition of teaching materials, since it is a strategy through which the private sector expands its market, by focusing on the public space. To the same extent, the public sector transfers part of its responsibilities for education to the private sector. In a more recent study Adrião *et al.* (2016, p. 128, author's highlights, our translation) warn of the consequences of this process of commodification for the right to education. The authors claim that,

Business groups and economic conglomerates have been looking for ways to profit from education other than the direct offer of education (enrollment in private schools), putting at risk the paradigms of educational human rights, which are being replaced by the market logic based on cost × benefit and in the view of students as *commodities*.

Costola and Borghi (2018) point to another example of the incidence of corporate reformers. For the authors, the business movement in Brazil has significantly influenced the agenda and the construction of public policies. They claim that several fields of action open up in the process of implementing the BNCC. In this sense, there is a vast field for the private offer of “solutions” and “innovations” to educational “problems”. One of the areas of action of the Movement for the Base after its approval is precisely the development of teaching and support materials. For Ball (2014, p. 59, our translation), there is a vast movement formed by institutes, foundations, research centers whose point of convergence is “to make the market the obvious solution to social and economic problems”. For the author, the work of these political and business networks in favor of neoliberal capitalism is a supranational project capable of promoting political changes that generate more profit and new business opportunities.

In the “**planned curriculum**” we can consider the annual, monthly and daily plans prepared by the teachers, based on the general norms and guidelines and the particular needs of their students. In this phase, the private sector has had a strong influence, but we highlight again the adoption of private education systems (PES) by public school networks. As already presented by ADRIÃO *et al.* (2009, p. 806, our translation),

The PEEs consist of a basket of products and services: integrated by activities traditionally developed by the pedagogical teams of public administration bodies and schools: continuing education of educators, monitoring and supervision of teaching activities; investment in the production and distribution of teaching materials to students; external and internal evaluation processes, among the main ones found.

For Santos (2012), standardized pedagogical processes prevent the school from developing its political-pedagogical project with autonomy and transforming political commitment. For her, some questions underlie the elaboration of a PPP, among which we highlight: What society do we want to build? What school is needed for this construction? For the author, in times of neoliberal restructuring and disqualification of transforming and militant political action, the right to formulate – and above all to answer these questions was confiscated by the business community.



In this sense, as already pointed out by Borghi (2018a), such private education systems also interfere in what Gimeno Sacristán (2000) calls “**curriculum in action**”, which represents the moment of pedagogical action, of teaching practice in the classroom. Formation, capacity building, distribution of materials, control of teaching activities in the classroom are part of the private service packages. In a GREPPE research coordinated by Garcia *et al.* (2014) the studies highlighted the implications of adopting private education systems for the organization of work, planning and teaching work in public networks. In the context of this same research, Bertagna and Borghi (2011) stated that the reorganization of the pedagogical work of public schools, which had been carried out by private companies, in favor of improvements in the results of external evaluations, altered the course of the trajectory that had been moving towards the expansion of school autonomy and management in public schools. This is because, from the "basket of services" offered by private companies, it was observed that, in addition to the organization and systematization of content proposed in the filled and standardized systems, companies were responsible for thinking and planning the pedagogical work of public schools. The authors state that relegating the organization of pedagogical work to private companies means transferring to them the discussion about the desired ends of public education.

For Souza and Sarti (2013), the configuration of in-service formation policies based on courses and based on conceptions that disqualify the teacher seems to serve well to commercial interests, which aim to build a market of formation.

In the scope of the “**curriculum realized**”, Gimeno Sacristan (2000) understands the effects produced by the practice, effects that are of different orders and that affect both students and teachers. Here, the commodification of education itself, that is, its transformation into a commodity and individual investment, has implications for the responsibility of each individual for knowledge. The inclusion in current curricula of content such as life projects, entrepreneurship, among others, exemplifies this issue and takes individualism and meritocracy to their limit.

As for the “**evaluated curriculum**”, it is possible to state that there is a real market for large-scale assessment systems. They are also largely responsible in Brazil for the defense of standardized curricula, as Bertagna and Borghi (2011, p. 140, our translation) point out:

Another aspect that highlights the new direction given to the organization of the school's pedagogical work and that diverges from the legislation regarding democratic management and school autonomy is the current defense of the standardization of what is taught in schools as a strategy for improving results in external assessments.

From the way in which external assessment systems have been implemented in our country, it is possible to say that they are incompatible with both the right to difference - insofar as they induce standardization, there is no space for differentiated work, meeting different learning rhythms, students with special needs, etc.; as with the right to equality - how can we say that everyone has the right to quality education if the strategy for improving quality is competitiveness, which in itself presupposes an educational system with unequal supply?

### **The appropriation of the public purposes of education**

The great issue of privatization in the educational area is the fact that the educational purposes and, ultimately, the proposal of human formation, have been defined, based on the principles and values of the private sector and the self-appreciation of capital. For Freitas, this process reveals the appropriation of public education by the business community. The author states that “education is being hijacked by the business community to meet their objectives of ideological dispute” (FREITAS, 2018, p. 29, our translation). According to this author, neoliberalism looks at education from its conception of a society based on a free market:

having assumed such social Darwinism within the scope of society, justifying it by the survival of the strongest individual in the competition of the free market, it now wants to take it to schools and dispute the hegemony in the formation of youth within its logic. For this aspect, if the world is ruled by competition, it is necessary to prepare children to compete in it, as it is. No perspective of humanization or social transformation is added to educational processes, hence its reactionary and conservative character (FREITAS 2018, p. 28, our translation).

Freitas (2018) argues that this is a reason that should be sufficient to move away from these conceptions of society and education, even if academic performance results turn out to be effective.

Santos (2012) also approaches the “hijacking” of public education from the same perspective. To the author

The disintegration of the public school in the last two decades of the 20th century precedes its savior hijacking by the market. The hegemonic bloc invests in the disqualification of the public school – even counting on the unnoticed adhesion of popular sectors – to then present the solution: handing the school over to the administrative competence of business lords and their institutes (SANTOS, 2012, p. 11, our translation).

In this sense, the same author complains that:

The entire process of pedagogical production is subject to the logic of the market: teaching-learning relationships, syllabus, pedagogical principles of the curriculum and evaluation of results. The meaning and purposes of education incorporate commodification within the scope of production (SANTOS, 2012, p. 20, our translation).

In this way, it is possible to affirm that the impact of the private sector on current curriculum policies reveals in a more comprehensive way the very hijacking of the public purposes and values of education. We are effectively experiencing a process of privatization of curricula and, in this sense, of appropriation of educational purposes by the business community in a dispute for the monopoly of human formation. In this sense, the commodification of education refers to the recomposition of the very nature of education and its ends, transforming it into a commodity. As stated by Borghi (2018a, p. 105, our translation) “the restriction of the ends of education to an individual perspective and its economic impact is one of the most comprehensive privatization strategies”.

For Paro (2000, p. 3, author's emphasis, our translation), the school aims to produce a historical human being and subject:

Understanding education as a historical update of man and an essential, although not sufficient, condition for him, through the appropriation of historically produced knowledge, to build his own historical-social humanity, it seems fair to admit that the elementary school should be guided by the achievement of objectives in a double dimension: individual and social. The individual dimension concerns the provision of the knowledge necessary for the student's self-development, giving him conditions to achieve his personal well-being and the enjoyment of social and cultural goods placed within the reach of citizens; in short, it is about educating to “*live well*” (Ortega y Gasset, 1963). In turn, the social dimension is linked to the formation of citizens with a view to their contribution to society, so that their actions contribute to the construction of a social order that is more adequate to the achievement of “living well” for all, that is, for the realization of freedom as a social construction. If we understand democracy in this higher sense of mediation for the construction and exercise of social freedom, encompassing all the means and efforts that are used to achieve understanding between groups and people, based on historically constructed values (see Paro, 1999, pp. 105-106), we can say that this social dimension of the school's objectives is synthesized in education *for democracy*.

As an individual investment and a commodity, education loses its social and collective dimension, therefore, public. Ultimately, the proposal of an “education for democracy” proposed by Paro (2000) is lost.

What are the limits and possibilities of counter-hegemonic action?

Garcia (2006, p. 88, our translation) points out the “need for public policies that are in fact committed to the democratic management of education and schools, producing favorable conditions for exploring the transforming potential of the school institution”.

It is urgent to revitalize this struggle for democratic management to guarantee the right to a truly public education. Democratic management is essential for the definition of public and collective ends, that is, for an essentially public education. It is the fundamental principle of public education, full of potential for a counter-hegemonic action towards the rescue of the collective meanings of an essentially public education.

There is a current deliberate strategy of symbiosis between the public and the private, favoring a broadening of the scope of the conception of public education, integrating to it several arrangements between the public and the private. Therefore, the importance of disputing the conception and essence of public education that we defend is highlighted, as well as defending democratic management as the only form of management capable of defining collective ends and meanings for education.

The current movement “School without Party” also enters the scene in the dispute over the curriculum and the purposes of education. How do business reformers and religious sectors of the non-party school movement articulate and distance themselves in the dispute for the ends of education? This is a topic for other reflections!

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