

Education, Autocracy, and Bourgeois Hegemony in Dependent Capitalism

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Abstract

This paper results from research on socio-historical processes that determine the current movement of counter-reforms in Brazilian educational policy. We sought to analyze the insertion of "behavioral modeling" proposals, a new organizing axis of the national curriculum to educate the working class. We used historical and dialectical materialism as a theoretical and methodological reference to increase our knowledge about the causes of this problem in the context of the current movement of bourgeois recomposition in the face of the 2008 crisis. We present the role international organizations, such as the World Bank, play in policy creation for educational reforms in the periphery of capitalism. We complemented our literature review with OECD and World Bank reports, documents produced by business organizations inserted in associative networks in civil society, with significant influence in the agencies of the state, such as the Ministry of Education. We conclude that there is a correspondence between the current metamorphoses in the world of work, characterized by intensified precariousness and overexploitation, and new changes proposed by the bourgeoisie for workers' education.

Keywords: *Educational Reforms; World Bank; Behavioral Economics; Autocracy.*

Introduction

The research from which this article originates analyzed a set of documentary sources produced by international organizations, such as the World Bank (WB), and business organizations operating in Brazil, such as the Ayrton Senna Institute, in addition to legislation and other sources related to the implementation of the “New High School” in Brazil. In this article, we aim to understand how recent educational reforms, promoted by international organizations and adapted by business agencies to the Brazilian context, which are based on the modeling of workers’ behaviors as a strategy of disciplining in the face of the refractions of a structural crisis that imposes on the working class an unbearable context of economic insecurity (related to the world of work) and social insecurity (food, housing, health, education, transport, etc.).

The first section discusses the structural crisis of capital, seeking to understand how its characteristics impose a new morphology of work. It also discusses how the condition of economic dependence and the autocratic pattern of bourgeois action deepen the characteristics of this crisis and the consequent scourges imposed on the working class in Brazil.

The second section analyzes the assumptions of Behavioral Economics (BE) and its influence on the WB’s guidelines for recent educational reforms (WB, 2011; 2015; 2018). Behavioral Economics has been enabling new mechanisms of legitimization of the neoliberal programmatic framework in the context of deepening structural crisis after the devastating social consequences of implementing the agenda of its first variant in the 1980-90s. Thus, the logic embedded in the ideal of “learning” of these hegemonic agencies and their national partner organizations is linked to the acquisition of fragmented skills as

a pedagogical foundation for the learner to achieve particular objectives through the simple, pragmatic change of their behaviours.

The third section presents how this project unfolded in Brazil through the support of business organizations and movements in which education based on socio-emotional skills came to be recognized as an indispensable instrument for the reproduction of order.

We highlight the theoretical-political determinations that have influenced Brazilian educational policy, especially in the context of the recent reforms that provided the basis for the so-called “New High School” (Law No. 13,415/17) and the National Common Curriculum Base (NCCB), relating them to the recommendations of international agencies, national private organizations and the references of Behavioral Economics. In this way, it is understood that it was possible to understand the essence that motivates the current educational reforms, what interests are expressed that are not explicit, beyond the appearance of statements described seductively to attract social adherence.

1. Crisis, work, and bourgeois recomposition

Several authors have analyzed the crisis cycles developed under the capitalist mode of production. Although there are differences in understanding, it is possible to see that some of the analysts who sought to understand the characteristics of the recent crisis, under the bias of the historical-dialectical materialist method, converge in the understanding that there is a process of intensification of this that dates back to the transition period of the 1960-70s (Harvey, 2011; Mészáros, 2011), but that deepens, especially in the years 2008-09.

Mészáros (2011) points out that the crisis that began in the late 1960s and early 1970s has structural elements linked to the ontology of the capital system but under a historically deepened bias. From this period arise insurmountable limits in which any exercise carried out by the bourgeoisie deepens the limiting elements of the expanded reproduction of the capital system itself. Among these are the expansion/intensification of capital's dependence on the public fund and the destruction of nature, limits to the free expansion of mass consumption, and, therefore, the expansion of production/realization of more capital (Mészáros, 2011).

Bringing the Marxian formulation to the context of the recent crisis, the author exposes the complexity of the mechanisms that produce the search for an expanded expansion of this system without limits because its objectivity is the continuous production of more capital. The system has become increasingly autophagic, resulting in marked destructiveness due to its expansion and reproduction. In its relentless pursuit of self-valorization, the capital system calibrates elementary forms of human interaction, particularly social labour, through a kind of “second nature”, as Marx himself pointed out (Antunes, 2020).

By adopting this “second nature”, the fulfillment of human needs, which should be the primary objective of social production, is subordinated to the self-reproduction of capital. The production of goods is geared towards profit and the creation of more and more commodities. Thus, to account for the constant expansion of the realization of capital, the useful life of products is constantly reduced so that there is a decreasing rate of utilization of the use value of these commodities that flood the system. Labour power is the only one that can create surplus value, since it is also a commodity, as Marx proved. And like other commodities it shows a downward trend in its use value, because of worse work

conditions and expanded forms of overwork extraction (Antunes, 2020). The very principles of the system of capital's social metabolism and the totality of socio-historical relations created by it allow Mészáros (2011) to call the crisis of the recent period the “structural crisis of capital”.

Ricardo Antunes (2020) notes that since the crisis in the 1970s, but especially in its deepening in 2008, these trends have found a “more favorable social ground to resurface and intensify” through various developments. Among these, breakneck rhythms of corrosion of labor, destruction of nature, deep propagation of the cult of ignorance, and contempt for science are all always aimed at boosting the process of valorization and expanded expansion of capital imposed by the bourgeoisie.

The 1980s saw several global changes how work is organized, how it is inserted into the productive structure, how workers are represented, and in politics itself. The period saw a tremendous technological leap in the world of production, in which various new techniques such as automation, robotics, and microelectronics entered the industrial universe, aggressively inserting and unfolding themselves in capital's labor and production relations. The pattern of Fordist/Taylorist organization of production, which predominated in the large industry since the beginning of the century, no longer presented itself as a single form. To it was added a diversity of new production processes that increased the precariousness of work (Antunes, 2011).

Initially used in Japan, in the Toyota factories, the modalities of seeking to increase productivity and adapt production to the logic of the market are mixed with or even replace the Fordist pattern by the flexibilization of production. In this crisis of the Fordist/Taylorist bloc, dominant in the previous period, a new flexible pattern of production and, therefore, of capital accumulation emerged,

based on what was called Toyotism or the “Japanese model”. The flexibilization of the production process and the organization of work sought a more specific – more “individualized” – market service format to adjust the production process more precisely to demand, thereby avoiding possible losses of accumulation.

New superstructures capable of legitimizing the changes and forging a “new type” of worker were being formulated closely suited to the new productive modalities, corresponding to all the transformations in the structural dimension. The search for a way out of the crises of the 1970s contributed to the creation of a new form of organization and order of the capital-labour relationship. In addition, seeking the development of relations between workers and companies based on “cooperative” and “collaborative” forms, to broaden their adherence to the “entrepreneurial spirit” through cooptation or consensus. The acceptance or incorporation of attributes formulated by capital, such as productivity and competitiveness, come to penetrate the ideology of the working classes. The introduction and expansion of toyotism in the central countries of the world capitalism cycle eventually contributed to further destabilize the “social welfare” model developed by the central countries of world capitalism in previous decades. The flexibilization proposed by the new forms of capitalist social production is much more in line with the neoliberal logic that transforms public social rights into services (Antunes, 2011).

This process of developing a new and broad consensus on certain forms of conduct at the global level has given rise to new forms of social subjectivity. These have been captured and reformulated under modern and sophisticated concepts to undertake new levels of incorporation of social demands developed under other characteristics. This movement corresponded to a global process of market expansion, and thus to the expansion of accumulation. As Chesnais (1996) rightly points out, to speak of the “globalization of capital” – or to

provide a more rigorous treatment of the term “globalization” – means to define a much larger process than simply one more stage in the process of internationalization; it is in fact to analyze a new configuration of world capitalism and the mechanisms that underpin its performance and regulation. For the author, it is essential to distinguish in capitalist history moments in which a wide range of factors develop a complex of relations at the international level that begin to shape social life not only in the economic sphere but in all its dimensions.

Analyzing the deepening consequences of the crisis in Brazil requires understanding the nuances of the country’s socio-historical formation, especially concerning the central countries of capitalism, but also its specificities regarding the nations on the periphery of the global capital system. This analysis aims to understand the particularities of the constitution of the working class in Brazil and its relationship with the forms of domination existing here. Moreover, making it possible to subsidize the subsequent examination of the pedagogical strategies and mechanisms developed historically by the ruling class for the conformation of the worker today.

In the periphery, overexploitation and precariousness are the foundation of the historical constitution of the working class, having emerged in Brazil – as well as in other countries that had their history linked to colonial slavery – from the abolition of slave labor. As such, inheriting the evils of one of the most extended periods of slavery, so that precariousness is a particular feature since its genesis as a class. In contrast, in the central capitalist countries, due to the historical legacy of Fordist-Taylorist development and the societal pattern of the *welfare state* – a condition never developed in Brazil – the precariousness of work is a more recent condition of the current conformation of its class, which

is driven by the structural crisis of capital and the advent of neoliberalism (Antunes, 2018).

The specificity of the Brazilian economic and social formation, in which there was no classic bourgeois revolution, contributed to the development of a *sui generis* form of bourgeois hegemony, which developed mainly – especially the social formation that occurred in the central countries of world capitalism – through autocratic mechanisms. In the process of evolution of capitalism in the country, the external impulses of modernization to become a concretely revolutionary process required the convergence of internal and external bourgeois interests, using autocratic procedures typical or rearranged from previous forms of bourgeois domination, contributing to the forging of a satellite economy in relation to the hegemonic centers of world capitalism (Fernandes, 2006).

Brazilian capitalist modernization was consolidated through a kind of tacit agreement between the bourgeois fractions on the need to maintain and reinforce the autocratic character of domination, even though the liberal-democratic bases existing in the capitalist centers in which the bourgeois revolution developed in its classical form were damaged (Fernandes, 2006). This *sui generis* path of capitalist evolution contributed to forging the specific form of Brazilian industrialization. The use of autocratic mechanisms determined a selective and unilateral character to the expansion of the State in Brazil which developed through the incorporation of the associativity of bourgeois interests at the same time as it sterilized, through coercion and violence, the forms of organization of a popular nature (Fontes, 2005). The transition from the Empire to the Old Republic marks the beginning of a recomposition of power structures between the end of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century still under oligarchic hegemony¹. Despite the

increase in external modernizing pressure, the Brazilian bourgeoisie, at the advent of republican Brazil, preserved a large part of the autocratic traits previously dominant. The existing economic and social preconditions provided the material basis by which the confluence of bourgeois interests, internal and external, could be reproduced in the creation of a competitive capitalist economy of a peripheral type.

The analyses of Florestan Fernandes (2006) warn us that the specific economic, historical, and social conditions of dependent capitalist economies exclude the possibility of a “repetition of history” of the bourgeois-democratic pattern of the Bourgeois Revolution. On the contrary, what materializes even if in different intensities, is a dissociation between capitalist development and democracy and a deep “rational” association of the latter with autocracy. In these nations, the notion of “bourgeois democracy” is dissimulated within the process of domination, being restricted to the members of the owning classes, since a process of dual appropriation of the economic surplus is developed – from within, by the national bourgeoisie, and from outside, by the hegemonic nations –, hypertrophying the social and political dimensions of bourgeois domination. Due to this dual order of the appropriation process, the mechanisms of exploitation of the labor force are intensified, the value of wage labor suffers deep depression, archaic historical modalities of work persist, and the concentration of social wealth is significantly accentuated due to the drainage of part of the national economic surplus outside the country, all this contrasting with the development of a self-defensive character of domination or simply repressive of popular desires and dynamisms.

2. The World Bank and Behavioral Economics

In the face of the structural crisis of capital and, more particularly, in the last two decades, the WB has been systematically redefining its guidelines for

education (Pereira, 2014; Pronko, 2014, 2019). The focus on the “poverty alleviation” strategy, prominently used in the 1970s-80s was directed towards promoting basic education². This change did not mean the universalization of this stage of education in an egalitarian manner, but the configuration of differentiated school education offers focused on poor populations (Pronko, 2014). This reorientation became known as the “Education for All” strategy, with the World Conference on Education for All, held in 1990 in Jomtiem, Thailand, as its initial milestone. The conference was held at the initiative of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), sponsored by the WB, UNESCO, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), with a commitment to governments that signed the final declaration of the event for providing basic quality education (Pronko, 2014).

However, the “Education for All” strategy, which has been a priority goal of international organizations since the late 1980s, has been expanded recently. According to Neves & Pronko (2008), after the implementation of most of the structural and superstructural reforms typical of the neo-liberalization process and the rise of a second wave of technological diffusion, which was accelerated by the irradiation of information and communication technologies (ICTs), directed the development of concrete training actions for new demands of complexification of social work aimed at the construction of a “new society”, and the so-called “knowledge society”. Thus, according to Pereira (2014), the entry of new population contingents into a new type of higher education – as differentiated from the classic university education and aimed at meeting the new demands of the market – reorient the education promoted by international organizations to the process of complexification of work in the 21st century.

In this shift in the orientation of international organizations, what appears to increase the demand for training is also expressed as a reduction in the role of official institutions focused on general training, such as schools and universities. Thus, the “Education for All” strategy has been replaced by “Learning for All”, which expands the educational space beyond the classic definition of the educational system (Pronko, 2019). In this perspective, the emphasis is on what students learn beyond the years of schooling and the certifications received. The concern with the quality of education is reconfigured by the focus on learning, which becomes an indicator and result of a supposed educational quality. On the one hand, the old perspective of development and overcoming poverty involves direct adaptation to the labor market and reduction of the educational horizon. On the other hand, this agenda refers to the modeling of individuals’ behaviors to allow the productive insertion of the “poor” in an increasingly adverse context, which requires constant adaptations to meet market transformations (Pronko, 2019) in the context of structural crisis.

Since the elaboration of the “2020 Strategy for Education: Learning for All. Investing in people’s knowledge and skills to promote development” (WB, 2011), the new strategy launched by the WB in 2011, the idea that operates is that with the previous strategy, there was a significant advance in the number of enrollments, school retention and gender equality in school. Thus, the centrality of education as an instrument of development shifts from the perspective of schooling to a focus on learning, based on the idea that there is a big difference between schooling and the learning and/or skills that individuals must possess to contribute to the economic growth of their countries. This new strategy reaffirms an old questioning of the centrality of the school, which refers to the unschooling desires of the 1960s, overturning social achievements aimed at an omnilateral training education, deepening a historical orientation of an education aimed at meeting market demands, and defending business interests,

in addition to calling into question the public guarantee of rights (Pronko, 2014).

In the document's foreword, Tamar Atinc, Vice President of the WB's Human Development Network, points to the premise under which the organization's strategic inflection for education was developed. Based on the idea that "a wealth of evidence shows that many children and young people in developing countries leave school without having learned much", the "Learning for All" strategy would focus on ensuring that children and young people have access not only to school but also to the knowledge and skills necessary for their life and productive integration (WB, 2011). Thus, the Bank points out that the global objective of its "Strategy 2020" for education is "not only schooling but also learning", focusing on what is learned inside and outside school (WB, 2011, p. 1). The way to achieve this goal would be to promote reforms in countries' education systems.

During the 1980s and 90s, the WB's educational guidelines for the periphery of capitalism focused on promoting the increase of basic education and creating so-called "human capital" to reduce poverty. With the expansion of the school offer, the economic condition of these countries is justified by a supposed learning crisis (WB, 2018), which would support the elaboration of the institution's new educational strategy, promoting reforms in the countries' education systems. The high levels of unemployment are not directly related to the structural crisis the world is going through but highlight the "inability of education systems to train young people with the right skills for the labor market" (WB, 2011, *Preface, translated by the authors*). Emptying the centrality of the role of school and the relevance of the dissemination of humanly systematized knowledge, the Bank predicted that reforms should be based on shifting the application of school resources to accelerate learning,

which would be done “more effectively” by ensuring that young people acquire such skills.

In the new strategy disseminated by the WB, the pedagogical logic based on skills would be aligned more pragmatically with the demands required for the workforce since the *know-how* or the set of skills acquired throughout life by working individuals would have more value to the productive process and the increase in economic growth rates than the years of schooling and educational certifications accumulated. From this perspective, adjusting these skills to the demands of the production process would generate fewer “externalities” in the educational process, consequently promoting the adjustment of school education to the imperatives of capital. The contraction of the educational horizon due to its pragmatic adaptation to market demands, developed by the logic based on skills, would result in an expansion of the understanding of education, which would no longer be based on the school institution, but on the multiple possibilities of learning (Pronko, 2014). Hence the shift in the WB’s “Strategy 2020” (WB, 2011) away from the previously desired “education for all” towards the so-called “learning for all”.

Based on the assessment that the recent increase in resources had made it possible to increase enrolment, the Bank reoriented its strategy under the idea of “accelerating learning”, which, according to the organization, would be more financially effective. The concentration of resources should be aimed at reforming education systems to achieve this, pushing the so-called “partner countries” – which would therefore demand these resources – to develop their strategy based on the implementation of measurable performance standards and policies supposedly based on a “proven basis”, the oft-repeated “evidence”.

Pronko (2019) warns that the production of evidence, particularly economic evidence, as a justification for intervention and policy formulation has become a constant for the WB in recent decades, even if such production is aimed at legitimizing the organization's policy propositions. Although these educational guidelines are presented through examples of experimental "good practices" carried out on a global basis, the essential learnings are those that would allow individuals to insert themselves in an adequate way into the flexible world of work in contemporary times. It is, therefore, no coincidence that they are aimed specifically at countries on the periphery of capitalism, where the poor individual, the focus of the social policy directive, has his condition naturalized, erasing the relationship with the causes of such a situation. Thus, poverty is explained by itself, and it is up to the individual's will or capacity to overcome it.

In its relentless pursuit to make "schooling adequately represent the demand for labor market skills" (WB, 2011, p. 9, *translated by the authors*), starting with the "World Development Report 2015: mind, society, and behavior", the WB deepens its strategy through "entirely new approaches to understanding and fighting poverty" (WB, 2015, p. 3, *translated by the authors*). According to the organization, these would already be well known by private sector companies to understand the behavior of their customers.

According to Pronko (2019), the Report completely changes the tradition of these documents, which began to be edited in the 1970s. Instead of providing information on specific sectors of the countries' activity, as is usually done in the previous ones, the document traces a cross-sectional analysis to understand how people think and behave, proposing the design of policies supposedly more effective in addressing more complex development issues. Supported by experimental studies produced mainly in Anglo-Saxon universities on the so-

called “Behavioral Economics” (BE), the document calls into question the idea that individuals’ behaviors are based on rational choices. Not surprisingly, one of the premises presented in the document is that “poverty is not only the deficiency of material resources but also a context in which decisions are made” (WB, 2015, p. 14, *translated by the authors*).

According to Pronko (2019), the WB has redefined its role in subsidizing public policies for the capitalist periphery from a dual perspective. On the one hand, the centrality of learning within the set of educational strategies for “development and poverty alleviation” promotes the reduction of the educational horizon through a close relationship with the preparation for the labor market while broadening the understanding of education, no longer restricted to the school space, but to the various possibilities of learning. On the other hand, this agenda has explicitly promoted the perspective of a “new behaviorism”, with a focus on modeling the population’s behaviors to promote decisions that allow poor forms of productive insertion, or at least, a positive adaptation to the context of deregulation, flexibilization of work, underemployment, and unemployment. The logic based on learning that is not necessarily school-based seeks to enable the dissemination of topical initiatives to alleviate poverty, reconfiguring the concern with the quality of education since learning becomes a more expressive indicator and result.

BE has been strengthening as a new discipline in economics in recent decades by incorporating empirical findings and new theories from psychology and neuroscience. Initially linked to the analysis and orientation of consumption habits and, later, to the ideology of individual entrepreneurship, more recently, this area of economics has been turning to the understanding of ways of being and being in the world, eventually constituting itself as a fundamental tool for modeling behaviors in times of structural crisis (Pronko, 2019).

Seeking to unite the field of psychology with economics and defending a transdisciplinary approach, the BE would have brought from the former the tradition of the experimental method, not widely accepted by economics until then, to develop economic models based on individual's choices, decisions, and behaviors. Although the origins of related areas, such as Economic Psychology, are much earlier, scholars of BE usually point to the 1970s as a breaking point in its emergence (Bianchi & Ávila, 2019; Ferreira, 2019) when decision and behavior processes enter the field of economics. Recently, BE has also used other areas of the humanities and social sciences, such as the influences of neuroscience, which has already presented new segments for the economic field, such as the so-called "neuroeconomics". In addition, the advancement in the use of experimental methods in the field, to more closely reproducing behaviors and decisions to reality, has boosted the use of BE in implementing public policies (Bianchi & Ávila, 2019).

BE has been advancing as a relevant area in *mainstream* economics.

Demonstration of this gain in projection can be identified by the award of 13 Nobel Prizes in economics to behavioral scholars since the 1970s (Winter, 2019). The popularization of the field in public policymaking, especially in central countries, is also noteworthy. In 2008, in the United States, Richard Thaler (Nobel Prize in 2017) and Cass Sustein – authors of the book *Nudge*, considered a bestseller by the *New York Times* – participated in policymaking during Barack Obama's presidential campaign. The UK government also founded the *Behavioural Insights Team* (BIT) in 2010, known unofficially as the "*Nudge Unit*", a unit focused on applying behavioral science to public policy and services. In 2013, the US government would also form a *nudge* team³ on the same grounds (Samson, 2019).

Another indicator of the advancement of the area repeatedly pointed out by scholars of BE is the “World Development Report 2015” itself, in addition to the relevant adherence of the WB and other major international agencies to the use of this area of knowledge in the promotion of public policies (Samson, 2019). In an interview, Varun Gauri (2019) – Senior Economist at the WB and co-director of the 2015 Report – points to the great expansion of BE at the WB through the creation of the “*Global Insights Initiative*” (GINI), launched in October 2015. According to the economist, the initiative intended to work in three ways: (i) in the incorporation of behavioral knowledge in the design of WB projects; (ii) in supporting governments to use it in the formulation of public policies; and (iii) in the promotion of dissemination campaigns and research by the WB itself to change the mental model of policymakers, to understand the effects of psychological and behavioral factors on economic development.

The assumptions of BE are based on an individualistic and immediate ethic that does not presuppose the transformation of concrete social conditions but only the change in the pattern of choices, which supposedly would be the very attribute of freedom individual. Under these bases, the idea of “poverty” and “development”, as conceived by the WB, is guided by a logic of blaming the individual himself for his material condition since behavioral economists link the autonomy of individuals to simple, informed choices. The simple modification of the “architecture of choice” (Bianchi, 2019, p. 223), according to them, would make it possible to modify the conditions of poverty and development. Once the options are made available correctly, the maintenance of a given individual in poverty would be due to the individual’s poor choices. Following this orientation, the condition of poverty would not be related to its functionality in a class-structured way of producing social life, being

simplistically associated with individual behaviors influenced by an “environment of deprivation” (Haushofer & Fehr, 2019, p. 141).

The idea of “poverty reduction” was academicized by successive WB studies and publications, turning it into a “political imperative” and giving rise to a kind of “povertology” (Pereira, 2014). Using a discourse based on a philanthropic character of “aid to the poor”, the WB and other international agencies began to develop their actions and financing programs under conditionality of compliance with their recommendations to the requesting countries. Thus, they imposed their ideology on the countries, under the subterfuge that increasing the productivity of the poor would guarantee other development conditions.

According to Pereira (2014), such a proposition operates a triple movement: (i) it erases the difference in the forms of labor exploitation between peripheral and central economies, hiding the “functionality of these poor” for capitalist accumulation; (ii) it segregates poverty as a phenomenon isolated from the set of social relations of the current way of producing life, having a root in itself; and (iii) by translating poverty as an externality of progress, it elevates the most predatory capitalist relations to the condition of supreme forms of development.

Neoliberalism presents itself, in essence, as an economic policy prescription that was restricted to theoretical discussion for almost three decades, finding fertile ground only from the beginning of the structural crisis in the 1970s (Paulani, 2005). Dardot and Laval (2016, p. 193) rely on four dimensions for what they call the “great turn” towards “the new rationality” that occurred in the transition between the 1970s and 1980s. The first is the reciprocal reinforcing relationship between neoliberal policies and the transformations of capitalism, which is not only due to the crisis but was preceded by a systematic ideological struggle of scholars and politicians against the so-called “welfare state”. The second would be governments' actions that contributed to legitimizing neoliberalism as a norm

in its practical genesis. The third – which is related to the rise of the BE – is linked to the need to change behavior through the use of economic and social disciplining techniques that impose self-government on individuals through the pressure of competition and a logic of capital appreciation. The fourth is the progressive expansion of these disciplinary systems and their institutional instrumentalization, establishing a “general rationality, a kind of new regime of evidence that has imposed itself on rulers of all lines as the only framework of intelligibility of human conduct”.

While in the 2015 World Development Report, the WB was based on the third point presented above by Dardot and Laval (2016) as its goal for education by pushing reforms of educational systems based on the need for behavioral changes, presenting scientific techniques to achieve the required disciplining and maximization of results. In the 2018 Report entitled “Learning to Realize the Promise of Education” (WB, 2018), the Bank points to a link with the fourth element, a progressive expansion of these disciplinary systems through educational reforms carried out by countries and celebrating a “new rationality” that reaches beyond the school community.

Countries have already taken a big step forward with schooling many children and young people. Now it is the time to realize the promise of education by accelerating learning. True education, which encourages learning, is a tool to promote shared prosperity and end poverty. This kind of education will benefit many: children and families whose positive experience of schooling restores their trust in government and society rather than undermining it; young people who have the skills that employers seek; teachers who can respond to their professional calling rather than political demands; adult workers who have learned how to learn, preparing them for unpredictable economic and social change; and citizens who have the values and thinking skills to contribute to civic life and social cohesion (WB, 2018, p. 27, *translated by the authors*).

Recognizing the historical expansion of schooling levels in so-called developing countries but stating that “schooling is not the same as learning”, the Bank declares a “learning crisis” which, according to it, is a “moral crisis” (WB, 2018, p. 3). Such “crises” – a distinction used repeatedly to erase the existence of a structural crisis – would be the argument for the continuity and deepening of the ongoing reforms. According to the excerpt above, this “true education” would be an instrument capable of providing prosperity and the end of poverty by itself without recognizing the structural factors that generate poverty⁴.

Beyond this positivity in the discourse to ensure social adherence to its strategy, other issues presented in the excerpt deserve to be highlighted. Firstly, the utilitarian business character of its educational proposal by seeking to align exactly the public educational policies to the development of skills sought by “employers”. Second, the search for disciplining possible behaviours considered antisocial in the face of a constant deepening of austerity since re-establishing trust in government, contributing to social cohesion, preparing workers for unpredictable economic and social contexts, and promoting teachers without autonomy⁵ and unpoliticized has become the new mantra by which education must be based in the context of structural crisis.

Finally, it is also worth analyzing the question that arises from constantly repeating the motto “learning to learn”. Laval (2004, p. 17) points out that “learning to learn” would be the first skill or the “meta-skill”, which would make it possible to face the conditions of uncertainty of professional life and the permanent obstacles to the very existence of the subjects. However, the question is not about providing workers with skills but the very purpose that the word denotes, its recipient, the company. Still, according to the author, the link between diploma and craft typical of the Fordist period, which was based on statutes and granted titles that endowed subjects with rights through collective

agreements, when undone in the neoliberal period, declared knowledge a perishable product, in which skills are, in themselves, the object of a permanent “creative destruction”. Thus, the worker was given dimensions even closer to a commodity like any other, losing its collective dimension and its legal-institutional characteristics (Laval, 2004).

3. The pedagogy of socio-emotional skills and the New High School in Brazil

The celebratory tone of the WB regarding recent educational reforms in parts of the 2018 Report is not surprising, as it demonstrates the clear scope of its strategic objectives⁶. Since 2016, through “Provisional Measure No. 746 – High School Reformulation”, Brazil has been undergoing a comprehensive reform of the final stage of school education for young people. The reform proposal was consolidated with the institution of Law No. 13,415/2017, known for implementing the so-called “New High School” (NHS), as explained by the Ministry of Education (ME) below.

Law No. 13,415/2017 amended the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education and established a change in the high school structure, increasing the minimum time of the student in school from 800 hours to 1,000 hours per year (until 2022) and defining a new, more flexible curricular organization, which includes a National Common Curriculum Base (NCCB) and the offer of different possibilities of choices to students, the formative itineraries, focusing on the areas of knowledge and technical and professional training. The change aims to guarantee the provision of quality education to all young Brazilians and to bring schools closer to the reality of today’s students, considering the new demands and complexities of the world of work and life in society (ME, 2022, *translated by the authors*).

Therefore, the NHS focuses on technical and professional education to the detriment of general education. The curricular organization is guided by

flexibility – a slogan recurrently used in neoliberal jargon and toyotist inspirations – making it possible to adapt schooling to the market or the “new demands and complexities of the world of work” (ME, 2022) – that is, the social refractions of the structural crisis. Problematically, the High School Reform in Brazil aims to adjust the legislation to the movement of educational reforms proposed at the global level in the 21st century by international organizations, adapting the curriculum to the demands of the workforce needed by the business community in the current productive context (Accioly & Lamosa, 2021).

Law No. 13,415/2017 also establishes the progressive expansion of the annual workload of high school to 1,400 hours, with a minimum of 1,000 hours per year already being offered since 2022. However, even though the workload is being expanded, a maximum of 1,800 hours, of the total 3,000 hours already in force in high school, are destined to comply with the National Common Curriculum Base (NCCB) – it will be 4,200 at the end of the progressive expansion. The remaining 1,200 hours – or 2,400, at the end of the expansion – will be filled by the formative itineraries, which according to the ME, are:

The formative itineraries are the set of subjects, projects, workshops, study centers, among other work situations, that students can choose in high school. The formative itineraries can deepen in the knowledge of an area of knowledge (Mathematics and its Technologies, Languages and its Technologies, Nature Sciences and their Technologies and Applied Human and Social Sciences) and technical and professional training (TPT) or even in the knowledge of two or more areas and TPT. The education networks will have the autonomy to define which training itineraries they will offer, considering a process that involves the participation of the entire school community (ME, 2022, *translated by the authors*).

According to the amendment of the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (Law No. 9,394/1996), implemented by the high school reform law,

the teaching curriculum being composed of the NCCB and formative itineraries, it should “adopt a work aimed at the construction of its life project and its formation in the physical, cognitive and socio-emotional aspects” (BRASIL, 2017, *translated by the authors*). Therefore, the bases of the Brazilian high school reform emphasize the behavioral aspects of students, proposing the dissemination of a minimum of low-complexity skills and abilities, in addition to the distribution of small amounts of fragmented knowledge, the latter aimed mainly at the neediest families, all oriented under the logic of the market and meeting the demands of the business community (Accioly & Lamosa, 2021).

This pedagogical proposal based on behavioral aspects, in which the educational process of socialization occurs from the development of a set of skills, has been analyzed by some authors as derived from a neopragmatist logic (Araujo, 2004; Ramos, 2010) and deterministic logic (Machado, 2002). Pragmatist because it is based on utilitarianism and immediacy aimed directly at forging psychosocially adapted subjects to the demands of work, developing useful and applicable learning to the pattern of intensification of the liberal logic of the ways of producing social life. It is deterministic because it seeks to erase the real content of the social transformations underway in the world of production and the forms of social use of the workforce, producing subjects conformed to this reality, which appears derived from a nature abstractly imposed by technology and market changes.

Hence, pedagogy based on the logic of skills overshadows the constant flexibilization of labour relations and the loss of historically acquired social rights, advocating a prerogative of “quality”, and “employability”, which concretely means increased control of workers’ minds and bodies to raise productivity and, consequently, profitability. Based on the same strategies of modernization of business management, they imply the legitimation of values

and social norms to be developed pedagogically by a set of subjective skills, which must be individually acquired to guarantee the very maintenance of the subjects in conditions of employment. All this is in a context where the reality is the expansion of unemployment, underemployment, deregulation, and the precariousness of working conditions (Machado, 2002).

Following the guidelines and recommendations of international organizations, the pedagogical foundations of the NCCB were written with a focus on developing skills (NCCB, 2018). By establishing the NCCB as the “normative document that defines the organic and progressive set of essential learning that all students should develop throughout the stages and modalities of Basic Education” (NCCB, 2018, p. 13, *translated by the authors*), the Brazilian State formalizes in the legal-administrative sphere the logic of skills promoted by international organizations for recent educational reforms. As Machado (2002) points out, the institutionalization of the notion of skill is not an isolated phenomenon of the social transformations that have been occurring more broadly. However, it results from a process of global ideological homogenization by proposing to provide answers to apparently general issues when in fact, they fundamentally affect social classes, countries, institutions, and social groups in different ways.

Accioly & Lamosa (2021) consider that although socio-emotional skills have been more explicitly inserted in Brazilian educational policy since 2017 – with the high school reform and the NCCB –, from the beginning, the mass school has exercised the function of disciplining students’ bodies and minds in accordance with the social transformations necessary for the expansion of capitalism. Coercive pedagogical methods employed by the school were widely criticized by educators in the early twentieth century, eventually removing the physical punishments commonly used in everyday school life. However, with

some level of autonomy and discretion, educators and administrators have continued to use disciplining strategies (Apple, 2003).

However, the authors warn to the advent of the skill-based curriculum and the remarkable ascendancy of socio-emotional skills in the educational reforms of the 21st century. In this case, there is a confluence between the fields of psychology and economics in educational debates that have taken behavioral disciplining to higher levels, in an organized and systematic attempt to standardize and execute as public policy strategies for directing and controlling students' subjectivity. Under this orientation, researchers pointed out that behaviors considered antisocial should be treated through a broad strategy, which, based on empirical evidence and being systematically introduced in schools through daily practices, sought to reinforce positive behaviors.

As a pedagogical foundation of the NCCB, skills were defined as the “mobilization of knowledge (concepts and procedures), skills (practical, cognitive and socio-emotional), attitudes and values to solve complex demands of everyday life, the full exercise of citizenship and the world of work” (NCCB, 2018, p. 8, *translated by the authors*). The Brazilian minimum curriculum has deepened the emphasis on the behavioral aspects of students, associating these aspects several times with the current demands of the so-called “world of work”. In the NCCB, this association is expressed in the so-called “life projects”, inserted as part of the minimum curriculum – which further reduces the workload of curricular components focused on areas of knowledge – and defined in the NCCB as a central axis for organizing school practices.

Adopting “flexibility as a principle of curricular organization” (NCCB, 2018, p. 468, *translated by the authors*) has raised questions not only among educators and researchers but also among the students themselves. Because it is based on

an individualistic inspiration based on behavioral issues, some authors point out the social selectivity character⁷ of the proposal. With the individualization of training processes arising from the shift centered on knowledge to a system focused on the individual/student, what would be underway would not be a process of valuing the human element but the weakening of its solidarity as a collective (Araujo, 2004), a form of sociality based on competition and meritocracy currently promoted by the business community.

Moreover, without critical analysis, socio-emotional skills – such as motivation, perseverance, adaptability, engagement, among others – used as a way to support students’ “life project” produce a belief that determination and effort are enough to change individual living conditions (Accioly & Lamosa, 2021), without discussing the essence of these real possibilities of transformation in a class-based society. In this sense, the use of skills to guide the students’ “life project” would not be presented as a real concern with the conditions of employment and qualified insertion of these in the labor market, but mainly with the promotion of a certain type of socialization for work, which seeks the conformation and adaptation of the subjects to the instabilities of the market (Machado, 2002).

Following this orientation, in the publication “Social and Emotional Skills: well-being, connection, and success” (OECD, 2017), the OECD not only advocates the use of socio-emotional skills in educational processes but also presents the basis of a broad study being carried out – between 2017 and 2020 – to examine the level of these skills in children and the learning conditions that affect their development (OECD, 2017, p. 5). The publication also states that studies measuring these skills are still scarce but assessments such as PISA – in which Brazil participates – cover a growing range of socio-emotional skills (OECD, 2017, p. 4).

In addition to promoting the logic of socio-emotional skills by these supranational entities, it is possible to perceive a diversity of national-level organizations disseminating them according to the Brazilian social and economic context. In other words, even if it is a broader ideological expression, the links with the local reality and conjuncture are carried out by internal organizations, generally said to be non-profit, but managed and/or maintained by companies.

At the national level, the Ayrton Senna Institute (ASI) leads research and debates on socio-emotional skills (Accioly & Lamosa, 2021), working in partnership with the Secretariats of Education, other government agencies and decision-making bodies in the definition of public policies. As for links with international agencies, the Institute was the first non-governmental organization to receive the UNESCO Chair in Education and Human Development, in addition to being the first Brazilian organization in the OECD's global network of foundations dedicated to promoting social impact. ASI is part of Brazilian business movements focused on education, such as the "Todos pela Educação Movement" and the "Movimento pela Base", which "is dedicated to supporting and monitoring the construction of the quality implementation of the NCCB (National Common Curriculum Base) and the New High School" (Movimento pela Base, 2023).

Besides being one of the main promoters of this logic in Brazil, the ASI proposed a structure of 17 socio-emotional skills based on the "*Big Five*" model – known as "*Big Five*" and used by organizations such as the OECD – which, according to the institution itself, are appropriate to the Brazilian school context and "do not cover all existing ones, but comprise the socio-emotional aspects that are explained in the 10 general skills of the NCCB" (ASI, 2022a). Based on the same assumptions of the BE, the Institute has been advocating the proposal

of models to organize socio-emotional skills from the union of areas such as economics and psychology (ASI, 2022b), as can be seen from one of its publications below:

In recent decades, education has begun to emphasize approaches that include other dimensions of human development, such as affective and social, in addition to the traditional emphasis on cognitive and knowledge acquisition. With the research developed mainly in the fields of Economics and Psychology, the interest in socio-emotional skills has been expanding and gaining greater visibility in the world. In the field of Economics, research has expanded the understanding of the importance of socio-emotional skills in predicting socially relevant outcomes, focused on the economic aspect, such as employability, remuneration (salary), educational qualification, less involvement in risk situations, among others (Sette & Teixeira *in* ASI, 2021, p. 12, *translated by the authors*).

Pronko (2014, p. 109) states that in recent decades, the WB has become the main articulator of educational policy for “developing” countries, gaining prominence in the international field of education. Although it seems to have lost visibility to the OECD in this area, the author assesses that its outreach and persuasion capacity in the face of educational policies developed on the periphery of capitalism is undeniable. For the author, the huge network of agencies and agents that collaborate with this irradiation of political orientations based on the interests and programs of the WB gives it legitimacy and reach so that there is the illusion of a single global discourse, outside of which there would only be irrationality, incompetence, and disorder. Therefore, understanding the mediation by governments and civil society organizations implies recognizing the non-unilateral character of the Bank’s actions. This perspective is essential to overcome the double misconception that its intervention is carried out from the outside and that civil society organizations and governments, imbued with business interests, are victims. It is not that the

imposing character of the Bank's guidelines, required in the form of financing conditionalities, cannot occur in specific cases, but that interpretations of this type obscure the role of this complex network of agencies and agents involved in the formulation and dissemination of a given bourgeois conception of the world, which crosses the various dimensions of social life in the conformation of hegemony in the Gramscian sense (Pronko, 2014, p. 90).

Conclusion

We conclude that there is a correspondence between the current metamorphoses of the world of work, characterized by the intensification of precariousness and overexploitation, and the new changes proposed by the bourgeoisie for the formation of the working class. The WB agenda, reorganized in the face of the structural crisis of capital, has been directing educational policies through a perspective based on modeling workers' behaviors, using assumptions from BE, disseminated in Brazil through the so-called Socio-emotional Skills.

In Brazil, this agenda has recently materialized in a set of educational policies guiding the organization of education systems in the same direction proposed by WB. In this process, school education is being recalibrated to meet the demands imposed by a deepening crisis in a country where social inequalities, reflected in training processes, are historically characterized by overexploitation. Thus, although international organizations have recommended these reforms at the global level, they affect the periphery of capitalism in a specific and more forceful way.

Notes

¹ The use of the term “oligarchy” does not refer to the “traditional” agrarian dominant fractions as non-bourgeois fractions. The crisis of the forms of bourgeois domination, which began in the period known in historiography as the Old Republic, introduced a process of transformation and complexification of the strategies of domination used by the bourgeoisie itself.

² In Brazil, basic education is the level of compulsory education for children and young people between the ages of 4 and 17.

³ The term “nudge” is among the most popularized terms in CE. According to Thaler and Sustein (2008 in Samson, 2019, p. 44, *translated by the authors*) a *nudge* “is any aspect of the choice architecture that changes people’s behavior in a predictable way without prohibiting any options or significantly altering their economic incentives. For an intervention to be considered a mere nudge, it must be easy and cheap to avoid. Nudges are not impositions. Arranging fruit at eye level is considered a nudge. Banning junk food is not”.

⁴ It is interesting to note that in 2022, four years later, the WB itself declared stagnation in global progress towards extreme poverty reduction, as available at: <<https://www.worldbank.org/pt/news/press-release/2022/10/05/global-progress-in-reducing-extreme-poverty-grinds-to-a-halt>>.

⁵ In the Report, the WB even agrees with the high level of autonomy granted to teachers in the Finnish education system. However, it warns that in other systems, considered by the Bank as “less efficient”, providing the same level of autonomy to Finnish teachers may generate disappointing results (WB, 2018, p. 13).

⁶ According to the Report (WB, 2018, pp. 15-6, *translated by the authors*): “More recently, Chile, Peru, Poland and the United Kingdom have made serious and firm commitments to reform the quality of their education systems. In all these countries learning has improved over time, not always uniformly, but enough to show that system-level reforms can pay off. The education systems of Shanghai (China) and Viet Nam today – and Korea decades ago – show that it is possible to perform much better than income levels would predict, thanks to a sustained emphasis on learning with equity. Brazil and Indonesia have made considerable progress, despite the challenges of reforming large, decentralized systems.”

⁷ This selectivity contributes to the deepening of school duality. In public schools, instead of old subjects such as history, sociology, physical education and others, students are receiving classes in elective subjects such as “What’s going on out there”, “RPG”, “Homemade Brigadeiro”, “Mundo Pets SA”, “Art of living”, “Keeping an eye on the digital network!”. Students, teachers, researchers and parents have been denouncing the lack of teacher training, school infrastructure and integration within the networks themselves for these subjects. In this sense, a whole social pressure has been developed on the EM in the sense of revoking the new high school, although intellectuals from organizations linked to business interests – such as the Todos pela Educação Movement – are against the revocation and defend only an improvement of the proposal. Source: <<https://exame.com/brasil/apos-reforma-do-ensino-medio-alunos-tem-aulas-de-o-que-rola-por-ai-rpg-e-brigadeiro-caseiro/>>. Accessed on: April 26, 2023.

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