

ARTICLES

Itaú Social Foundation, Renaissance 2010, inequalities and segregation: critical analysis of the application of the US education model in Brazil ^{1 2 3 4}

Fundação Itaú Social, Renaissance 2010, desigualdades e segregação: análise crítica da aplicação do modelo educacional estadunidense no Brasil

Fundación Itaú Social, Renaissance 2010, desigualdades y segregación: análisis crítico de la aplicación del modelo educativo estadounidense en Brasil

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⁴ Funding: this article results from doctoral research funded by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel - Brazil (CAPES) and a doctoral stay financed by the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel - Brazil (CAPES) - Financing Code 001.



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e-ISSN 1980-6248

Abstract

This article performs a critical analysis of the projects advocated by business organizations that propose public education policies in Brazil (in this case, the Itaú Social Foundation). To this end, the article presents, based on documents signed by the FIS, how this institution defends that measures implemented in the U.S. (such as Chicago's Renaissance 2010) serve as a model for the country. Then, based on quantitative and qualitative data, derived from bibliographic research in primary and secondary sources in Brazil and the USA, the paper discusses results of these projects in their place of origin (especially Chicago). Thus, it is shown how, contrary to what their proponents indicate, such guidelines can be related to the maintenance and worsening of social issues, such as racial segregation. Finally, the paper demonstrates that, despite these reforms being presented as the expression of a social consensus, in the USA, the school community has led intense mobilizations against them. Therefore, considering this scenario, the article reflects how the insistence on maintaining these guidelines is not justified by data, but by the political and economic interest of capital and its institutions.

Keywords: Educational reforms, Renaissance 2010, US Model, resistance

Resumo

Este artigo realiza uma análise crítica dos projetos defendidos por organizações empresariais que propõem políticas públicas de educação no Brasil (no caso, a Fundação Itaú Social [FIS]). Para tal, o texto apresenta, a partir de documentos assinados pela FIS, como esta instituição defende que medidas implementadas nos Estados Unidos (como o Renaissance 2010 de Chicago) sirvam de modelo para o país. Em seguida, a partir de dados quantitativos e qualitativos, decorrentes de levantamento bibliográfico em fontes primárias e secundárias no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos, o trabalho discute alguns resultados desses projetos em seu local de origem (especialmente Chicago). Assim, será demonstrado como, ao contrário do que indicam seus proponentes, tais diretrizes podem ser relacionadas à manutenção e ao agravamento de problemas sociais, como a segregação racial. Por fim, o artigo mostra que, apesar de essas reformas serem apresentadas como expressão de um consenso social, nos Estados Unidos, as comunidades escolares têm protagonizado intensas mobilizações contra elas. Portanto, considerando tal cenário, o texto reflete como a insistência na manutenção de tais projetos não é justificável por dados, mas pelo interesse político e econômico do capital e suas instituições.

Palavras-chave: Reformas educacionais, Renaissance 2010, Modelo EUA, resistência





e-ISSN 1980-6248

Resumen

Este artículo realiza un análisis crítico de los proyectos defendidos por organizaciones empresariales que proponen políticas públicas de educación en Brasil (en este caso, la Fundación Itaú Social). El texto presenta, a partir de documentos firmados por la FIS, cómo esta institución defiende que medidas implementadas en EE.UU. (como el Renaissance 2010 de Chicago) sirven de modelo para el país. A continuación, a partir de datos cuantitativos y cualitativos, derivados de un estudio bibliográfico en fuentes primarias y secundarias de Brasil y EE.UU., el documento discute algunos resultados de estos proyectos en su lugar de origen (especialmente Chicago). Así, se demostra cómo, contrariamente a lo que indican sus defensores, tales directrices pueden estar relacionadas con el mantenimiento y el empeoramiento de problemas sociales, como la segregación racial. Por último, el artículo mostrará que, a pesar de que estas reformas se presentan como la expresión de un consenso social, en EEUU la comunidad escolar ha protagonizado intensas movilizaciones en su contra. Por lo tanto, considerando tal escenario, el artículo refleja cómo la insistencia en mantener estas directrices no se justifica por los datos, sino por el interés político y económico del capital y sus instituciones.

Palabras clave: Reformas educativas, proyectos educativos, resistencia

Introduction⁵

At the beginning of 2023, debates about Secondary Education Reform (REM – Reforma do Ensino Médio) (Law No. 13,415/2017) reached an unprecedented scale in the country. As Ferretti (2018) showed, this education model had already raised criticism since before its approval. However, questions about REM were multiplied based on experiences in state public networks. Examples include creating disciplines with a generic name and debatable content from a scientific perspective, such as "O que rola por ai?" [What is going on out there?] (Lima, 2023), which showed the need to expand discussions on the topic.

While the implementation of changes is the responsibility of the states, as defined by legislation, it did not occur randomly. This is because, on the one hand, the new curricula were being structured based on the REM and the *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* (National Common Curricular Base – BNCC, 2018), which is of national scope. On the other hand, the presence of

⁵ This article is part of the author's dissertation (Moimaz, 2022). It highlights the research at Pennsylvania State University, with support from the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel - Brazil (CAPES) - Financing Code 001.



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certain business entities in the creation and deliberation of educational policies is notable, acting to guarantee the implementation of an education model "in the image and likeness" of the market (Krawczyk, 2014; Laval, 2004).

These organizations formulate training and propaganda materials on the topic, have representatives in State and government bodies (such as State Education Councils and the National Council of Education Secretaries), establish partnerships with State Education Secretariats (SEDUC), finance meetings between public authorities and companies, etc. (Krawczyk, 2016).

Therefore, the business community's stance on this matter is not secondary. The ongoing reforms result from *its* elaborations, turning its speeches into essential research objects.

In defense of REM and BNCC, experts⁶ argue that they bring the Brazilian school model closer to that of other countries, emphasizing central capitalist economies. The United States is cited as one of the primary references here (Krawczyk, 2020).

Thus, this text has as its object the conception of education brought in documents signed by the Itaú Social Foundation (FIS) brand, which, among several examples, highlight the Chicago reforms as inspiration for projects to be carried out in Brazil. In this sense, research results relating to the American city will be presented, mainly from the implementation of Renaissance 2010 (Ren2010).

Thus, in its first stage, the article revisits documents published with the FIS's signature before the REM and the BNCC, which provide elaborations on topics that would later be present in these reforms. These texts highlight, in particular, the inspiration of their ideas in the educational models of the United States.

It then presents how the bibliographical survey, carried out in primary and secondary sources in Brazil and the United States, shows that applying these guidelines in Chicago did not have the positive impact defended by its proposing entities on variables such as improvement of student scores on standardized tests. In the opposite sense, the bibliography links such measures to the reproduction and worsening of critical social issues, such as racial segregation.

⁶ The figure of the expert, a supposedly neutral technician devoid of political positions, is understood as an ideological construction that legitimizes the interests of capital (Apple, 1995).



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In this sense, the voluminous resources (public and private) invested in these proposals would represent more of a political positioning of capital organizations in defense of their education project (and society) rather than the construction of a demonstrably positive educational model (Uetricht, 2014).

Finally, it discusses how school communities have developed processes of resistance to such projects. Thus, if the reforms are presented internationally as the result of a social *consensus* in defense of education, in the United States, teachers, students, and their families have been leading significant opposition, which has even impacted the formation of the teaching union organization in the country.

1. US model as a guide for reformers in Brazil

Critical studies explain how American models are referenced in education policies implemented in Brazil. This does not necessarily mean that projects identical to those experienced in the United States are applied, but that Brazilian education policies are specifically designed according to the paradigm established by the US Model (Krawczyk, 2016, 2020).

For Krawczyk (2020), the US Model determines that there is a single standard, a specific set of actions and techniques, defined by capitalist powers and International Organizations (IO), such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), whose implementation would be essential to reestablishing the quality of education. This model establishes the United States as the guide to be followed—disregarding that, in international exams, the best performances are recorded by countries that do not follow this method, such as Finland (Krawczyk, 2020).

In other words, the definition of this education agenda, more than being related to effectively proven results, is linked to the need for central countries, mainly the United States, to reaffirm their position as dominant capitalist powers (Sahlberg, 2016).

Thus, as Krawczyk (2020) highlights, these policies reproduce global relations of domination. However, their application is not mechanical: these guidelines are appropriated by local ruling classes and adapted according to specific contexts.

In this way, there are intrinsic relationships between educational projects implemented in central countries and on the periphery of capitalism. In this sense, Krawczyk (2020) highlights





the importance of analyzing the projects carried out in both places, allowing us to develop an expanded understanding of such models, their impacts, and their contradictions.

Highlighting the case of Brazil, the author explains that the US Model can be seen in different forms of business action. In other words,

educational policy has at least three different types of business action. 1) *Todos pela Educação* [All for Education] model, a movement that constitutes a broad coalition, bringing together businesspeople and governments, acting as a dense network of influences and as a think tank [...] 2) Business foundations that work in different educational policy decision-making spaces – especially with the State Education Departments [...] 3) Alliances between national and foreign corporations, [...] in the provision of educational services, such as teacher training [...]; scholarships and leadership training for Brazil (case of the Lemann Center, in Stanford/California) (Krawczyk, 2016, pp. 40-41, free translation).

Thus, the propagation of a discourse trumpeting a profound crisis in public education drives the construction of the US Model. In this logic, the solution to such a crisis must be sought in international examples, such as "success stories" that could inspire proposals for Brazil (Krawczyk, 2016).

This argumentative logic is not exclusive to Brazil. Robertson (2012a) shows that IOs constantly apply this formula to advocate the increasingly direct presence of business organizations in government and State institutions, participating in elaborating education policies *within* public bodies.

Two documents will be analyzed as examples of this process, articulated at international, national, and regional levels: A Reforma Educacional de Nova York: Possibilidades para o Brasil (2009) and Modelo de Escola Charter: A Experiência de Pernambuco (2010). Both were published by an Itaú bank brand (Itaú Social Foundation), with technical coordination from the Fernand Braudel Institute.

Although published years before the approval of the REM and BNCC, these texts draw attention because, as speeches and proposals, they show strategic convergences with the highlighted reforms. Furthermore, they provide detailed recommendations on how projects implemented in the United States could support proposals in Brazil.





It is also worth noting that Banco Itaú institutions have played a prominent role in formulating, approving, implementing, and monitoring educational reforms in the country (Catini, 2021).

The capillarity of these organizations is a prominent topic. FIS, for example, is a component of the *Movimento Pela Base* [Movement for the Base], a fundamental organization in the approval process of REM and BNCC on several fronts, from the organization of social agents and preparation of the proposal to the effective lobbying for its approval (Tarlau & Moeller, 2019).

FIS is also part of the *Frente de Currículo e Novo Ensino Médio* (FCNEM – Curriculum and New Secondary Education Front) of the Ministry of Education, composed of all state Secretaries of Education members and private institutions' members. Among its responsibilities, it can be highlighted that FCNEM formulates support materials for implementing educational changes throughout the country (Goulart & Moimaz, 2021).

The banking institution also operates at the state level. A relevant example is his participation in the *Associação Parceiros da Educação* (APE – Educational Partners Association), a civil society organization that is a protagonist in the implementation of pro-market educational policies in the State of São Paulo.

Among them, we can mention the *Programa Educação Compromisso de São Paulo* [Education Commitment Program of São Paulo], established in partnership with SEDUC of São Paulo. This program ranges from proposals for changes in SEDUC's structure to the elaboration and implementation of significant projects, such as the *Programa de Ensino Integral* (PEI – Full-time Education Program), which has been ongoing since 2012 (Gomide, 2019)⁷.

These findings show how business organizations present a significant level of articulation, whether participating in developing educational policies in public bodies or being part of each other's administrative and financing councils, as analyzed by Fontes (2020).

These facts reinforce the discussion proposed by this article. In other words, such examples indicate the enormous degree of coordination between private agents and the

⁷ Still, PEI in São Paulo refers to the experience of PROCENTRO of Pernambuco, headed by the *Instituto de Corresponsabilidade na Educação* (ICE – Institute of Co-responsibility for Education) (Gomide, 2019). It is important to emphasize that Itaú BBA is one of the leading financiers of ICE.



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concentration and control of the public policy deliberation process by their institutions. The documents will be analyzed within these frameworks of articulation and deliberation capacity.

The first text, published in 2009, A Reforma Educacional de Nova York: Possibilidades para o Brasil, written by Gall and Guedes, explains its objective from the title: to develop an education model in Brazil that mirrors the one applied in New York. Even so, the document states that it does not just seek to import projects but "to evaluate and discuss possible proposals for educational issues present on the agenda of every public manager" (Gall & Guedes, 2009, p. 5, free translation).

Among elements that stand out, the material highlights the importance of the relationship between accountability and schools' results in external evaluations. In other words, Gall and Guedes (2009) emphasize how the measures taken by the Michael Bloomberg administration (started in 2002), based on No Child Left Behind (NCLB)8, would be essential to improving the performance of schools and students in external exams, with emphasis on the closure of schools that did not reach pre-determined targets and the implementation of charter schools9.

In other words, the accountability provided by the document can be understood as the identification of those responsible and punishment. In other words, as the authors state, the "central problem with academic performance is that most teachers and administrators literally do not know what to do to improve students' academic work" (Gall & Guedes, 2009, p. 11, free translation). They add that in Brazil, public education networks would work more to serve the interests of "officials and politicians than of their children and families" (Gall & Guedes, 2009, p. 128, free translation). Thus, they argue, this time based on the project implemented in Chicago, that breaking these "corporatist" interests would be essential to improving the quality of education. More details on the Chicago example will be explained in the following topic.

⁹ Charter schools are schools run by private management with public funding. Among its main characteristics, it can be highlighted "that they lack regulation regarding the form of admission/selection of students, the working conditions of teachers, what to teach with what methods, the use of public money and management... [Also noteworthy is] the lobbying of charter schools in the legislative sphere and also because this movement is part of the political platform of some governments [...]; or because they use the 'shock doctrine' to implement private management in public schools" (Krawczyk, 2020, p. 10, free translation).



⁸ Law approved by the George W. Bush government in 2002, with support from Democrats and Republicans, which established the application of standardized tests, holding schools and teachers accountable for performance, implemented bonuses based on results, expanded incentives for private participation in education, such as through charter schools and the voucher system, etc. (Krawczyk, 2016).



Another critical aspect of the text is the idea that unsatisfactory performance obtained in standardized tests can be reversed by technical measures. For Gall and Guedes (2009), Brazil would have more favorable social conditions for the implementation of these innovations than the United States because, in Brazil, schools would not be subject to the same *racial and ethnic tensions* as in the United States, which would live in a state of constant ethnic-racial conflict.

This is a reading that is open to questioning. For example, by disregarding almost four centuries of Black slavery as a critical point in the Brazilian social structure, the text promotes a kind of renewal of the ideology of racial democracy, adapted in favor of the education (and society) project of its proponent institutions.

In other words, this argument presupposes the denial of the racial issue as an axis of the Brazilian social divide. Thus, as there is no fundamental historical element in defining which portions of the population would be subjected to violence and extermination applied by capital and the State, the resolution of social issues would be simple: in the case of education, its improvement would involve the application of specific techniques, implemented in successful cases—this evolution being measurable through better test scores.

However, as will be pointed out later, history is not restricted to what the speeches fantasize about, as the actual impacts of these reforms have apparent racial aspects.

Another front emphatically defended in the text is the expansion of private sector participation in public decision-making bodies. The document states that the direct engagement of business would allow the formation of coalitions. By representing different sectors of society and driven by the common interest of promoting quality education, they would be decisive in its transformation. As analyzed in the relevant bibliography (Fontes, 2020; Tarlau & Moeller, 2019; Catini, 2021), the business community represents civil society and its common interests in this ideology.

In this sense, inspired by the American process, the document defends the offer of places in *specialized schools* to be chosen by families. These schools would be charter schools, which, for the authors, were still in their initial stages in Brazil.

The example most highlighted by the text is *Programa de Desenvolvimento de Centros de Ensino Experimental* (PROCENTRO – Development Program for Experimental Teaching Centers) on the state of Pernanbuco. Such focus on this experience resulted in its own document, the second





analyzed here: *Modelo de Escola Charter: A Experiência de Pernambuco*, de 2010, written by Dias and Guedes.

This material claims to seek to "contribute to reflection on public-private partnerships in education" (Dias & Guedes, 2010, p. 7, free translation), emphasizing the experience of PROCENTRO between 2005 and 2007 as an example of a partnership between the private sector and SEDUC of Pernambuco.

Following the example of American experiences (and in line with the OI), this formulation advocates that schools be managed not only by the public sector but also by the private sector, by leaders from civil society (more specifically, from the business community).

In this sense, Dias and Guedes (2010) highlight that charter schools are important references, as they have more *freedom* than regular public schools, i.e., less regulation on aspects such as employment contracts, internal functioning, and the use of invested funds. In fact, the text highlights that for-profit or non-profit institutions could manage the schools.

Regarding daily school life, the authors explain what the selection processes would be like for those who attend these schools (workers and students): the retention or replacement of staff would be based on subjective criteria, such as "school commitment" and desired "profile"—unlikely to be objectively measured but sufficient to justify dismissals or expulsions.

Here, once again, the example of Chicago in implementing these guidelines is highlighted for its pioneering spirit and the breadth of the initiative. Dias and Guedes (2010) identify the administration of Barack Obama during the presidency of the United States as central to implementing charter schools. In 2009, Obama nominated Arne Duncan, the Executive Director of Chicago Public Schools¹⁰, to the US Department of Education. The charter model was expanding across the country at this time.

Duncan is an iconic figure. In addition to spearheading educational reforms in Chicago and taking over the United States Department of Education, he stood out for statements such as the one about Hurricane Katrina in 2005, which devastated New Orleans. For Duncan, the

¹⁰ Institution that determines the functioning of public education in the city.





hurricane would have been "the best thing that happened" to local education, as its reconstruction was carried out along pro-market lines.

The text takes up the example of Pernambuco to defend the charter model. ICE, a private non-profit institution, partnered with the Departments of Education, Planning, Civil House, and Finance there. This agreement would be as follows: the government would mobilize to guarantee the necessary legal changes to the initiative, while ICE would raise resources with other companies to open ten schools. The executing body, PROCENTRO, would be based at SEDUC-PE (Dias & Guedes, 2010).

The document highlights the partnership established between 2004 and 2007 as an example of the relationship between public and private management, regretting that, from 2008 onwards, the state government assumed the leading role in the project. As described by Nazareth (2019), it is worth noting that, in 2007, the State covered 95% of the initiative's expenses.

The text highlights some aspects of the functioning of PROCENTRO schools, among which it is worth highlighting the instruments for controlling and punishing school workers. When comparing regular public schools with those under the partnership, Dias and Guedes (2010) state that the working hours of PROCENTRO teachers were more intense and longer and required greater dedication, both in contact with students and in bureaucratic duties. Furthermore, using hierarchical superiors (coordination and management) in the classroom to supervise classes appears to be a recurring and recommended practice.

As the document states, these measures were justified by a notion of vocation, in which teachers understood that this project "is not for everyone" and that, therefore, they would be part of a select layer of educators, capable not only of implementing the institution's proposal but, in addition, of supporting working conditions (Dias & Guedes, 2010).

Other points in the documents in question must be debated. However, the excerpts already exposed are sufficient to show how institutions such as FIS, which is directly involved in formulating public education policies in Brazil, defend the American model as a reference in their interventions.

¹¹ "I think the best thing that happened to the education system in New Orleans was Hurricane Katrina" (Hinton, 2010).



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The next topic is to present specific data about one of the cases most referenced in the texts: Chicago. Below, some of its characteristics and impacts will be highlighted.

2. US model in practice: Chicago's case

As demonstrated in the previous topic, institutions that play a prominent role in formulating educational policies in Brazil, based on their propositions, defend models implemented in other countries, such as the United States.

However, it is worth asking whether these arguments actually reflect the results of such experiences or whether, on the contrary, these ideas are mobilized to justify the implementation of a conception of education (and society), even if the data do not confirm the conclusions presented. Quantitative and qualitative data on these processes will be mobilized below to contribute to the debate.

This topic will analyze Chicago's case. Chicago represents the third largest educational system in the United States and the country's first large-scale implementation of the charter school program: Ren2010 program (Uetricht, 2014).

Chicago is also the focus of this study for another reason: it was one of the leading centers of resistance to such reforms. There, radical opposition to them was generated, involving teachers, students, and the school community (theme of the next item).

Carrying out a brief historical resumption, in Chicago, the operation of charter schools has been authorized since 1996. However, it was in 2004, under the mandate of Mayor Richard Daley (Democratic Party) and the actions of Arne Duncan, that the initiative was promoted as a prominent educational policy. Ren2010 was also supported by critical private organizations, especially philanthropic ones: for example, the Gates Foundation invested, at the time, US\$ 90 million (Uetricht, 2014).

The program encouraged and expanded charter schools, which should replace traditional public schools. Based on criteria such as the performance of schools and students in external assessments or enrollment rates, a decision would be made on which schools should





be closed and replaced by charter schools. In other words, units that recorded unsatisfactory numbers were characterized as those that failed and were closed. Most closures, 88% of the total, occurred in neighborhoods with a majority African American population (Lipman, 2011).

The expectation of the program was the opening, under these terms, of 100 charter schools. The speeches in defense of this project stated that these schools would be "learning laboratories," whose good practices could serve as an example for other education networks (including traditional public ones), which would result in a general improvement in education (Karp, 2010; Kunichoff, 2020).

In other words, it is understood, in this discourse, that market competition would exert "positive pressure" on other educational systems, which would offer better services, at the risk of losing "customers."

The program, implemented at a national level, involved figures that deserve attention: from 2020 to 2021, for example, more than 3.4 million students were served in around 7,700 American schools (White & Hieronimus, 2022).

However, studies (Lipman, 2011; Uetricht, 2014) point out that, even though Ren2010 was justified by the supposed need to close failing schools as an essential step toward improving education, in practice, it proved to be a project related to privatization and gentrification. In other words, schools with sufficient numbers to remain open and satisfactory enrollment numbers were also closed—such evidence shows that the closures were motivated by issues beyond "technical" parameters.

It is also worth highlighting that, in principle, the largest entities representing teaching in the country—the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA)—did not take a position against charter schools or Ren2010. Initially, their understanding was that, in fact, public education needed reforms and that such projects should be disputed "from within," with the participation of these organizations, to influence the definition of the final model (Uetricht, 2014).





It is worth noting that, given the pioneering spirit and intensity of public investment in these educational reforms in Chicago, the average number of students served by charter schools is higher than the national average (in 2020, 14% of the 355,000 students attended these schools, compared with 9% in 2010). Even so, since 2015, the program has seen a slight drop in enrollment (when it comprised 15% of the total), which has been explained by factors such as the increase in legal challenges to charter schools and their administrators and fiscal crises in governments, which reduce the amount of funding for the program (Kunichoff, 2020).

Relevant findings are reached regarding comparisons between regular public schools and charter schools, highlighting aspects not restricted to budgetary issues.

As analyzed in the bibliography, public schools have been the focus of defamation campaigns driven by large media conglomerates throughout the 2000s. On the one hand, the constructed idea is that corruption, violence, administrative problems, and ineffective public investments mark public schools. On the other hand, private management is presented as the only possible salvation (Robertson, 2012a, 2012b). However, more than a decade after the implementation of Ren2010, concrete evidence allows these presumptions to be questioned.

For example, according to Chenoweth (2021), between 2007 and 2019, Chicago's regular public network showed significant advances in the percentage of students who finished High School (from 60% to 62%) and those who entered universities directly after finishing High School (from 50% to 63%), in addition to better grades in external assessments (such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress).

The author also highlights that essential groups of charter schools have not achieved similar rates or advances. Emphasizing the Frazier Preparatory Charter (FPC) and Chicago Virtual Charter (CVC) networks, a survey carried out by the *Chicago Sun Times* ("Charter schools," 2019) showed that, despite these companies having experience in the sector (since 2006 and 2007, respectively), the performances for the year 2019 were considered "very unsatisfactory." At the end of High School, 14% of FPC students had reached national standards in Reading and 15% in Mathematics. Regarding the CVC, around 50% of students



immediately entered higher education, a percentage significantly lower than that of regular public schools.

Bringing data that deepens this characterization, the 2014 report *Charter Schools in Chicago:* No Model for Education Reform, published by the Institute on Metropolitan Opportunity at the University of Minnesota Law School [IMO]), presents essential assessments of the implementation of charter schools in Chicago, from 2000 to 2013.

According to the document, more than not resulting in improvements in the city's educational system, the program represented its weakening, even considering the quality criteria proposed by the reforms (such as student performance in external assessments, emphasizing Mathematics and Reading, course completion, etc.). In other words, the report states that the long-term application of this model would not be justified by the recorded data (IMO, 2014).

Highlighting different models of school administration¹², the report presents information on the number and percentage of students enrolled by type of school and how race/ethnicity and income markers express these data. In Chicago's school districts, at the time of the survey (2012-2013), of the 395,198 existing enrollments, 300,523 (76%) were in traditional public schools, and 48.707 (12%) were in charters (IMO, 2014).

Highlighted here are the comparisons between the performances of charter schools and traditional public schools, based on the approval rates of students in Reading and Mathematics in each grade, separated by ethnic-racial and income criteria (Table 1, item A); approval in these same areas of knowledge, using school averages (without division by series), separated by ethnic-racial and income criteria (Table 1, item B); and school averages, considering other results, without specifying income and ethnic-racial markers (Table 1, item C).

¹² The selection does not include other forms of school management, such as selective, gifted, and magnet schools, whose issues are beyond the defined limits of this article.





Table 1

Performance of charter schools compared with traditional schools, in percentage points, from 2012 to 2013

	A. Comparison by evaluated grade		B. Comparison by school averages	
	Pass rates in Mathematics	Pass rates in Reading	Pass rates in Mathematics	Pass rates in Reading
Overall	-2.3	-2.5	-0.8	-2.2
Negras/os [Black]	-3.5	-3.9	-0.7	-3-3
Latinas/os [Hispanic]	-1.7	-2.1	0.5	-1.6
Baixa renda [Low-income]	-2.0	-1.9	-4.0	-3.1

C. School averages,
without ethnic-racial and income markers

	Four-year High School Graduation Rate	Five-year High School Graduation Rate	
Overall	-13.2	-29.1	

_	Progress in Reading throughout the year	Progress in Mathematics throughout the year
Overall	-3.7	-4.3

	Average Total ACT	Average ACT English	Average ACT	Average ACT Science
	Score	Language Score	Mathematics Score	Score
Overall	0.4	0.4	1.1	0.1

Source: Elaboration based on data from IMO (2014)

As the report states (IMO, 2014), according to the table comparing traditional and charter schools, between the years 2012 and 2013 (therefore, within the framework of almost a decade of implementation of Ren2010), the latter obtained lower scores in Reading and Mathematics, both by school year and in the overall average of students; and, mainly, among Black, low-income, and Hispanic students (except the school average in Mathematics for Hispanic students, 0.5 percentage points higher, which is characterized by the report as "not statistically relevant").

Charters' performance was also lower regarding progress rates in Reading and Mathematics and the completion percentages of the four- and five-year school cycle. Their data were superior only in the ACT¹³ results in Science, Mathematics, and English (of these, only in Mathematics did the difference exceed 0.5 percentage points).

The document also highlights the mark of punitivism registered in Chicago charter schools. Through the guideline called *no excuses*, these schools adopt fewer measures such as

¹³ American College Test: used to assess admission to universities in the United States.





"suspension" of students, opting for direct exclusion. In the period analyzed, they expelled students at a rate ten times higher than traditional public schools (IMO, 2014).

This finding allows us to advance a topic about the universal character of public schools. Expulsions carried out by charter schools are justified by subjective criteria (challenging to measure objectively) with generic names, such as "disciplinary aspects." Thus, studies state that the *no excuses* guideline excludes those with unsatisfactory school performance in assessments, whose permanence would impact the funds allocated to the school (Solari, 2014).

The regular public school, in turn, continues to receive all students.

As Lipman (2011) states, the different forms of regulation of school admission change the social dynamics of neighborhoods because, in places like Chicago, in the regular public network, public schools must enroll students who live close to the schools. On the contrary, charter schools receive students through a lottery process, in which students are drawn, which means that families living close to the schools will not always be served.

This condition caused the compulsory displacement of hundreds of families, a decisive element in the gentrification process of these communities. For Lipman (2011), the forced transfer of students to other regions is part of the movement to expel people who live in the region since schools are decisive institutions in constructing the identity of neighborhoods and the permanence of their residents, who are primarily Black.

Still, regarding restricting universal access to school, another element must be highlighted: the democracy of decision-making bodies.

If, for regular public schools, the legislation in force in Chicago (and in other regions of the country) establishes a School Board that must decide on the operating rules of these units, for charter schools, these determinations would not be mandatory (Uetricht, 2014).

This element is significant because, in Chicago, the School Board is elected by the school community—which implies the presence of a democratic instrument for regulating public schools. By not submitting to the School Board, charter schools do not follow a democratic body, following only investors and their interests (Uetricht, 2014).

The differences in the functioning of the models also affect work relationships. For example, charter schools have greater "flexibility" in hiring teachers than regular public schools. Thus, they can employ teachers with "less restrictive" criteria. In other words, teachers have



longer working hours, lower average remuneration, and more mechanisms such as bonuses based on results, shorter employment contracts, more crowded classrooms, etc. (Karp, 2010).

In this sense, punitive guidelines affect not only students: in charters, teacher unionization rates are lower; there is the implementation of more surveillance and work control mechanisms; and turnover reaches attention-grabbing percentages: in 2010, 50% of charter school teachers left their schools (Karp, 2010; Uetricht, 2014). It is worth noting that, for defenders of this model, this data would not indicate a negative aspect in itself, as it would include the removal of "bad professionals" (Karp, 2010).

Despite this set of data, which allows questioning about the discourse of success that permeates such educational reforms and the insistence on their application, it is still worth bringing to the discussion another fundamental aspect: the implementation of this model was made based on massive public investments.

To analyze this aspect, it is worth bringing another report, *Broken Promises: An Analysis of Charter School Closures from 1999-2017*, prepared by the Network for Public Education (Burris & Pfleger, 2020).

According to the document, between 1999 and 2017, the United States Department of Education spent approximately US\$ 4 billion on the charter school program, of which around US\$ 1 billion was allocated to schools that closed quickly. As the survey states, 27% of charters in Elementary Schools closed their activities after less than five years (Burris & Pfleger, 2020).

Therefore, the report's opinion is incisive: This educational policy is marked by fraud, management failures, and a lack of transparency, which have serious consequences such as expanding social and racial inequalities (Burris & Pfleger, 2020).

These conclusions, in turn, can be better scrutinized based on analyses focusing on qualitative aspects of consummating charter schools as an educational guideline.

Analyzing the data concerning Ren2010, Lipman (2011) reflects on the city's urbanization process, relating racial segregation and neoliberalism.

The author emphasizes that implementing charter schools was not done without justification. It even had some support from the school community. In other words, implementing pro-market reforms like these requires the mobilization of schoolgoers.





For Lipman (2011), this would have been due to the country's definition of public education. In other words, the discourse that states that public schools are flawed has a concrete basis: historically, the education offered to non-white populations in the United States has been exclusionary and of poor quality. Thus, the notion that charter schools represented a possible solution would not arise from the populations' ideological support for privatization but from the need for alternatives that differed from those experienced until then.

Thus, for the author, the business community sought to bring together ideas such as *public good* and *market interests* in a process of dispute to redefine urban space, in which educational policies occupy a vital space (Lipman, 2011).

The effects of this process can be observed, mainly in neighborhoods occupied by a majority of African-Americans, in the closure of dozens of schools due to "low performance." In contrast, in regions with a white majority, school units with similar performances were not closed (Lipman, 2011).

As stated above, when charter schools replaced them, schools began to select students from other neighborhoods, from whiter and higher-income families. These movements were part of making the lives of the populations that lived in the neighborhoods unviable, ultimately aiming at their removal (Lipman, 2011). In other words, for the author, a racial spatialization of inequalities is noticeable.

For Lipman (2011), the argument mobilized by these projects defines that the areas affected by the aforementioned educational projects could only be recovered through the replacement of "bad" subjects with "good" ones, with bad neighborhoods being precisely those occupied by a majority Black and Hispanic population, which the white middle class would replace.

This guideline would be consistent with a historical process of disinvestment in public services in the same communities, a racialized policy that has been implemented for decades (Lipman, 2011) and that seeks to link, in discourse and policy, "failure" to the public, the Black population, to the old that needs to be overcome and "success" to the private, to the entrepreneur, to the white, to the new.





Thus, she concludes: "This is a class project that is also deeply racialized and enabled by white supremacist history and ideology" (Lipman, 2011, p. 225).

However, despite billion-dollar investments in this model, the inequalities generated and reproduced in such projects have not gone unnoticed. On the contrary, teachers and the school community faced them, as presented in the following part of this article.

3. Public schools as a space for conflict

As previously mentioned, educational policies such as Ren2010 did not initially face direct opposition from the main unions in the American teaching profession. The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), the third-largest teaching union in the country, even implemented a policy of participation in the project (Uetricht, 2014).

However, the concrete experiences with such reform and the impacts felt by the entire school community caused dissatisfaction that, over the years, turned into mobilizations led by families, students, and teachers.

Among the prominent examples of this process, we can highlight the founding of the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE), an organization of education workers founded in 2001 following the merger of other groups. It comprises activists who were not part of the union leadership (and who, at the same time, did not resign from the entity) (Stark, 2019).

Since the beginning of the implementation of Ren2010 in 2004, CORE, diverging from union guidelines, has sought to mobilize teachers in unity with the school community on several fronts, such as meetings for debates and training in school units, discussions in union bodies, and study groups (Uetricht, 2014).

These actions, implemented in different schools and regions of the city, enhanced the reach of CORE's actions. In 2008, CORE was already the leading political force calling for mobilizations against the reforms. The mobilizations were expanded in size and intensity, with participation and support from the school community.

¹⁴ "This is a class project that is also deeply racialized and enabled by white supremacist history and ideology."



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This process had profound effects in just a few years: in 2010, CORE won the union elections, remaining the main driving force of the union so far, 2023 (Uetricht, 2014; Ashby & Bruno, 2016).

CORE's victory in the elections marked a historic moment for American trade unionism. The change of leadership in one of the country's main unions, after 30 years of dominance by a political force aligned with the Democratic party, was a milestone that stimulated new movements. The success of an organization that positioned itself politically to the left of the then union leadership, which organized itself independently of this leadership, with disproportionately smaller resources, based on mobilizations at school bases, and which did not deny the union as an organization and mobilization entity of the working class, boosted other processes of struggle in the United States (Uetricht, 2014; Ashby & Bruno, 2016; McAlevey, 2016).

One of the main factors that explains the impact of CORE's actions was its ability to ally with the school community. In other words, if Ren2010 was presented by its proponents as a consensual policy to defend education, organizations such as CORE, through intervention in school units, increased popular dissatisfaction resulting from such a model. This proposal of unionism, organization, and construction of demand agendas together with the school community has been called social movement unionism, social justice unionism, or common good unionism (Uetricht, 2014).

Studies on the topic even state that the radicality of the mobilizations was due to the maintenance of ties with the school community. In other words, the first direct actions, such as demonstrations and road closures, came from the affected communities and were accompanied by teaching organizations (Uetricht, 2014).

CORE's electoral victory and the consequent union reorientation toward facing educational reforms placed the union on a collision course with the municipal government. As part of these confrontations, policies to combat the union were implemented, such as, in 2010, the approval of laws that required the quorum to be raised to recognize the strike vote (to 75% of members). Even so, in 2012, with the intensification of conflicts between the union and municipal authorities, in the same context of movements such as Occupy Chicago (in 2011), 94% of teachers voted for the strike, the first since 1980 (Uetricht, 2014; Ashby & Bruno, 2016).



The strike occurred between September 11th and 19th, 2012, with the motto "The School Students Deserve." Decentralized actions throughout the city marked it, many without direct union control (pickets, street demonstrations, marches to the mayor's house, etc.).

Their agendas involved demands for not only a salary increase for teachers but also a reduction in class size, the presence of nurses in schools, equalization of funds for schools that received a majority of Black and Hispanic students, and reversal of policies privatization of schools, etc. Among its main results are the 16% salary increase in installments, the priority in rehiring teachers fired due to the reforms, and the reduction in the weight of standardized tests in the evaluation of schools (Jaffe, 2019).

Furthermore, another balance of mobilizations is difficult to quantify: the demonstration of the concrete possibilities of organizing resistance against neoliberal policies and building an independent, radical, and democratic trade unionism.

In this sense, there is talk of a "Chicago model" of union organization, which boosted both new struggles in Chicago and organizations in other regions. Among several examples, we can mention the union victory of the Union Power Caucus in the 2014 union elections in Los Angeles as an organization that already worked with CORE. Other vital cases that show the dimension of this process were the victory of the BMORE group in Baltimore in 2019, of PODER in San Antonio, and the proliferation of other union opposition groups across the country.

Finally, it is essential to emphasize that these organizations maintained contact through a network called UCORE (United Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators), which brings together groups with experience in organizing, fighting, and winning unions and those starting their mobilization project (Stark, 2019). This process was influential in the movement of struggles that occurred in states where strikes are still illegal—but which occurred nonetheless, such as West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona, and Kentucky (Blanc, 2019).



Final considerations

The examples of mobilization were listed not to create mechanical relationships between social movements in Brazil and the United States, nor to propose predictions of the future, as if the processes of revolt against American educational policies indicated as a necessary consequence, in Brazil, the outbreak of struggles across the country.

However, as highlighted previously, the occurrence of such policies on an international scale according to guidelines implemented globally cannot be ignored. Furthermore, convergences of this kind should not be considered random. Specifically, and resuming the debate developed in this article, the presence of representatives linked to private foundations in spaces such as the National Education Council, a relevant entity concerning the production of opinions on education in the country, and which, in theory, would guarantee autonomous and democratic participation in these debates, is significant¹⁵.

Reflecting on the consequences of the implementation of neoliberal reforms and the similarities that can be observed with the American process, studies such as those by the *Rede de Escola Pública e Universidade* (REPU – Public School and University Network) already indicate how the application of educational reforms in the Brazilian context, affects more directly and seriously the Black population (Rede Escola Pública e Universidade, 2021). The results, quantitative and qualitative, of the educational policies referred to in the Chicago case—one of the prominent examples cited for Brazil—allow us to ask whether this has, in fact, been a successful model, as its proponents claim. These data, added to the confrontation carried out by social movements and communities, indicate this is not the case.

However, even so, the project continues to be implemented.

One hypothesis for understanding this movement is that applying such guidelines is a conscious and defined policy. Therefore, its justification does not depend on the results achieved. In other words, for each failure recorded by the data, proponents of the neoliberal agenda respond by applying new rounds of the same policy, blaming schools, teachers, and communities for not achieving the goals (Robertson, 2012a).

¹⁵ For further discussions, see Tarlau and Moeller (2019), Fontes (2020), and Krawczyk (2020). It is also recommended to read the composition of the National Education Council (Ministério da Educação, 2023).





However, as observed in the case of Chicago, it cannot be said that there is consensus around such guidelines. On the contrary, the confrontation processes carried out in the United States by subjects who actually live the reality of public education show that the contradictions of these projects remain unresolved and that their effects on everyday school life must be observed and analyzed carefully.

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Submission data:

Submitted for evaluation on July 26, 2023; revised on November 12, 2023; approved for publication on January 03, 2024.

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