

# The impact of neoliberal globalization on education policy

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- Every point of view is the view from a point. If you want to know what I think look at the ground I walk on.
  - Brazilian theologist and philosopher Leonardo Boff, in his better-known work, *The Eagle and the Hen: The Metaphor of Human Condition* (Boff 1997)

- **António Teodoro** is Professor of Sociology of Education and Comparative Education in Lusofona University, at Lisbon, and Director of the Interdisciplinary Research Centre for Education and Development (CeiED), and Director of Institute of Education. In 1974, it was one of the young militaries that put an end to one of the dictatorships that shamed Europe, thus allowing the democratization of Portugal and the independence of its African colonies. Simultaneously, he actively participated in the democratization of education, first as Chief-Inspector of Primary Education, then as leader (and co-founder) of the largest teachers' union for nearly two decades. In the 1990s, he collaborated with the Office of the then Prime Minister, António Guterres (the current UN General-Secretary), contributing to a project placing Education, Training, Culture and Science at the centre of the processes of European development, resulted in the formulation of the so-called 2000 Lisbon Strategy. As university lecturer and researcher, Teodoro has led major research projects, both at national level as well, especially, the international level, which has enabled him to build a vast and qualified network of European and Latin-American researchers on education policies, the RIAIPE Network. Currently, Teodoro is member of the Executive Committee of World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES) and Chair of the Portuguese Society of Comparative Education (SPCE-SEC). Founder-Editor of Revista Lusófona de Educação (Lusophone Journal of Education), and member of Scientific Council of dozen of journals in Portugal, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Spain, and US (e.g. American Educational Research Journal). Expert invited of INSERM, France, and evaluator of Narodowe Centrum Nauki (National Science Centre), Polónia, Comisión Nacional de Investigación Científica y Tecnológica (CONICYT), Chile, and Agencia Nacional de Promoción Científica y Tecnológica, Argentina. Author and co-author of more than 250 indicators of scientific production (articles, books, and chapters), published in Portuguese, English, Spanish, and French.

# Previous remarque

- We may be witnessing the end of an era. The signs were already there, but the war in Ukraine has accelerated this process: the (possible) end of a certain type of globalization and the creation of economic, political and military blocs, with distinct borders and strategic interests
  - energy autonomy from Russia
  - the (re)industrialisation of Europe and reduced dependence on China
  - the introduction of limitations on the purchase by Chinese companies of European companies, or by Russian 'oligarchs'
  - new protectionism. Limitations on the international trade regulatory system (tariffs, 'economic war', crisis of WTO)

# The Ukraine war is the defeat of Kant's maxim

- In his 1795 essay *Perpetual Peace*, Immanuel Kant argued, among other things, that "the spirit of commerce . . . sooner or later takes hold of every nation, and is incompatible with war."
- For Kant, **regulated international commerce would contribute to the establishment of conciliation**. The state of nature being that of war rather than of concord (in which, even if there are not always hostilities, threats are constant), as a result of the relations between men and states with peculiarities, diversities, imposed by nature, commercial relations would serve to overcome disagreements, bring distant people closer together, perpetuate peace.

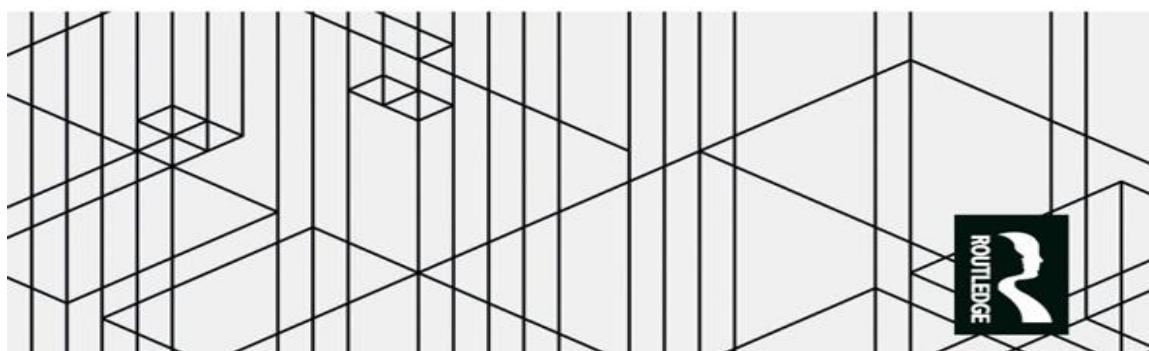
- What I will address with you precedes this new, terrible and dangerous time we are living in.
- At the suggestion of Prof. Massimiliano Tarozzi, I will address a theme of a book published by Routledge in 2020, with the title "Contesting the Global Development of Sustainable and Inclusive Education. Education Reform and the Challenges of Neoliberal Globalization".
- The publisher released some chapters of the book, which I will be able to give you.



# CONTESTING THE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

EDUCATION REFORM AND THE CHALLENGES  
OF NEOLIBERAL GLOBALIZATION

António Teodoro



# Globalisation: a disputed concept

- From the rejection of the concept, the buzzword according to the founder of the world-system approach, I. Wallerstein, to the classic definition by A. Giddens:

Globalization “refers to the fact that we all increasingly live in one world, so that individuals, groups and nations become more interdependent” (Giddens and Sutton, 2009, p. 126).

According to Giddens, globalization is an integral part of reflexive modernity and affects all sectors and aspects of modern social life. One should not consider globalization just as the development of worldwide networks—economic and social systems distant from our individual concerns. It is also a local phenomenon that affects the daily lives of us all.

- The theoretical dispute continues, but there is beginning to be a certain consensus on the use of the plural: globalisations. The proposal of Boaventura de Sousa Santos of four ‘globalisations’, or the Held and McGrew waves.

# Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2001)

## Four forms of globalization

- **Globalized localism**, when a local phenomenon is globalized successfully, pushing other competing local phenomena to subordinate or local positions
- **Localized globalism**, which consists in the specific impact at the local level of the transnational imperatives and practices derived from globalized localisms
- **Cosmopolitanism**, defined as the transnational organization of the resistance of nation-states, regions, classes, or groups victimized by unequal power exchanges and relations
- **The common heritage of humanity**, also defined as the set of transnational struggles toward protecting and demarketing resources, entities, artifacts or environments considered to be essential to the survival of humanity and whose sustainability can only be ensured at the world level

## Neoliberalism as Expression of the Forms of Hegemonic Globalization.

### *The origins of neoliberalism*

- Social scientist David Harvey, in his *Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Harvey, 2005), argues that future historians will look back on the years from 1978 to 1980 as a “revolutionary turning point” in the economic and social history of the world. Although the long march of neoliberalism began in 1947 with the theoretical work and the institutions outlined by Hayek and had in General Pinochet’s Chile its first moment of experimentation (in the 1970s, after the 1973 coup), Harvey (2005, p. 1) defines four key moments as being the revolutionary turning points of world history that confirm neoliberalism as hegemonic globalization.

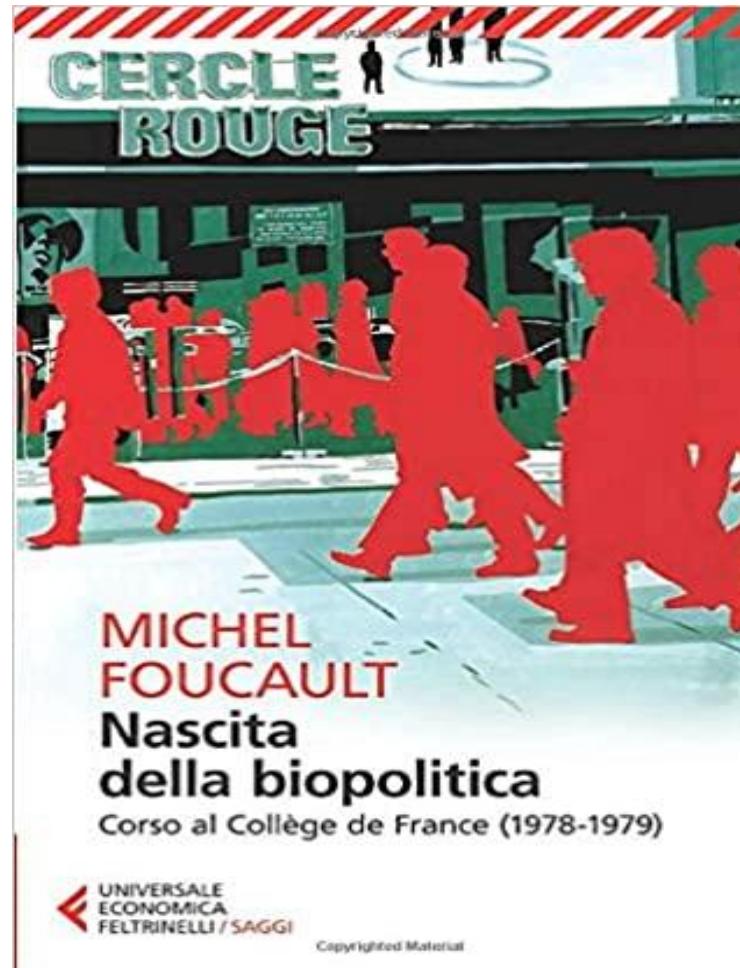
# David Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005)

1. In 1978, with the first steps taken by Deng Xiao Ping toward the liberalization of the Chinese communist economy—in a mere two decades this turned the country, which comprises one-fifth of the world population, into an open center of dynamic capitalism with growth rates unparalleled in the history of humanity.
2. Likewise, in 1978, but from the other side of the Pacific, the Paul Volcker's nomination as governor of the US Federal Reserve drastically changed monetary policy.
3. In 1979, Margaret Thatcher as prime minister in the United Kingdom had a mandate to overpower the unions and put an end to the inflationary stagnation in which the country was immersed in the past decade.
4. In 1980, Ronald Reagan, elected president of the United States, kept Paul Volcker at first, and furthered his policies aiming to decrease the power of the unions; to deregulate industry, agriculture and the extraction of resources; and to unleash the powers of finance, both internally and externally.

# Harvey (2005) definition of neoliberalism

- Harvey (2005, p. 2) defines neoliberalism, first and foremost, as a **theory of political economy that argues that human well-being and development can best be attained through the liberation of individual business skills within an institutional structure characterized by strong rights of private property, free markets, and free trade**. On the other hand, this political economic theory awards the (national) state the role of creating and preserving the institutional structures suitable to these practices, ensuring the quality and integrity of money as well as the legal structures, armed forces, and police capable of defending the rights of private property, if necessary by the use of force, along with the functioning of the markets. In those sectors where the markets do not yet exist, such as land, education, health, social security, water, or environmental pollution, it will be the state's responsibility to create these markets. In turn, the state should abstain from intervening in the markets, or should have minimal intervention, on the basis of the argument that it does not have enough information to read market signs (price formation) and, also, because it is strongly subject to powerful interest groups (unions, professions, and regions) that inevitably, as a result of political action, introduce distortions to their own benefit.

Another approach is that of Michel Foucault, in *Birth of Biopolitics*. It is a particularly interesting work for understanding a little-studied, but very influential version of neoliberalism in Europe: German ordo-liberalism. Italian edition



- After the 1970s, a discourse is multiplied, especially at the level of intergovernmental institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, or the OECD, but also of many think tanks, focusing on a few **key words**: *deregulation, privatization*, state's pulling back from social sectors, such as health and education, presented as services and not as institutions that play a role in enforcing fundamental human rights. As stressed by David Harvey (2005), *neoliberalism becomes hegemonic first as discourse mode*, seeking to create common sense centered on the idea that, in view of the wide-ranging, fast changes underway in such sectors as new information technologies and in the organization of large multinational corporations, the only path lay in the decrease of the state's regulating (and distributive) role.

- In view of the crisis of the welfare state in central countries in the 1970s and 1980s, neoliberalism represents the reaction of the major equity holders to this balance led by Keynesian policies, precisely when they realized that a new balance of power was decidedly favorable to them.
- From this perspective, **rather than being seen as an economic theory, neoliberalism should be studied and understood as a governance technology**, as calculated mobile techniques that can be decontextualized from their original sources and recontextualized in the constellation of contingent and mutually constitutive relations. As Ong (2006, p. 13) argues, “This milieu is a space of betwixt and between that is the site of the problem and of its resolution.”

- According to theory, **the neoliberal state must strongly favor the rights of individual property and the rule of law, allowing the free working of markets and free trade** (Harvey, 2005). Even though at the center of this theory lies an idea of freedom, albeit nearly always degenerating in the single defence of private property and business freedom, *neoliberal theorists are suspicious of democracy, considered a luxury only possible for rich societies, with a broad middle class capable of ensuring political stability*. On the whole, they prefer forms of government led by elites and technocrats, based on strong executives and on institutions autonomous of the democratic decision-making of parliaments, such as the Central Bank and the regulating bodies. Law and legislation, when they conform to their interests, play a central role in neoliberal theory. All the solutions and cures must be sought, individually, within the legal system.

# The New Modes of Transnational Regulation of Education Policies

- In previous studies (Teodoro, 2003, 2007), I have sought an explanation for the relations between (hegemonic) globalization and education.
- John Meyer and his colleagues from Stanford University argue that the world expansion of education systems is fundamentally based on common models and objectives defined within the framework of Western modernity, such as progress, equality, or human rights (Meyer, 2000; Suarez and Ramirez, 2007).
- Roger Dale prefers to emphasize that globalization does not mean the dissipation or weakening of states that are already powerful but rather the reinforcement of their ability to respond collectively to forces that none of them can ever control individually. Dale (2001) suggests that the influence of (hegemonic) globalization is manifest above all by setting a globally structured agenda for education (GSAE), where multilateral agencies such as the UNESCO, the World Bank or the OECD play a crucial role.

- Putting forward another type of approach, of a historical-social nature, Jürgen Schriewer has sought to show the limits of the neo-institutionalist approach set forth by Meyer and his colleagues. Based on a broad body of empirical work carried out at the Centre for Comparative Education of Humboldt University, in Berlin, Schriewer (2004) argues that trends do not point to the construction of a single world but rather, much more so, to the persistence of multiple worlds. According to this perspective, world influence is always mediated by a process of “externalization” (Schriewer, 2000), in other words, reconstructed according to the traditions, values, and objectives assumed within national societies.

- The new development project created by hegemonic globalization has brought to the foreground a strategy to liberalize world markets, turning the axiom of competitive advantages into the center of that project and, thus, leading to the recuperation of the neoclassical theory of human capital. No wonder then that Roger Dale (1999) would argue that the clearer effects of globalization on education policies are the result of the states' reorganization to become more competitive, namely, attract investments from transnational corporations into their territories.

- In the previous developmental project, the relations between the national and international levels in the definition of education policies assumed a twofold register: On the one hand, the **technical assistance** of international organizations was (is) actively sought by national authorities, especially as a form of legitimacy of the internal options assumed in the meantime; on the other, the constant initiatives (seminars, conferences, and workshops), studies, and publications of the international organizations play a decisive role normalizing national education policies, preparing an agenda that sets not only priorities but also how issues are presented and discussed and which constitute a way of establishing a **mandate**, more or less explicit depending on the countries' centrality.

- In the globalization project—and this is the hypothesis I have been arguing since 2001 (Teodoro, 2001, 2003, 2007)—these relations are especially established with their nerve centers in the *large international statistical projects*, and in particular the INES program of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) of the OECD. In these statistical projects, the *choice of indicators* constitutes the decisive issue in the setting of a global agenda for education, with significant impact on the education policies not only of the central countries but also of the countries located at the semi-periphery of the central spaces.

- At the outset, the INES program was marked by strong controversy and broad opposition from within the OCDE itself (Henry, Lingard, Rizvi, and Taylor, 2001). Its better-known public expression was to be the annual flagship publication of Education at a Glance. This OECD undertaking was decided following a **conference held in Washington in 1987**, by the initiative and at the invitation of the U.S. administration and the OECD secretary-general, a conference in which representatives of 22 countries participated as well as several guest experts and observers. The main item on the OECD agenda in the field of education at the time was the *quality of teaching*, which was used as starting point for launching INES, possibly this organization's most significant and important activity in all the 1990s.

- The practical effects of this project are well established in the education policies adopted in the different OECD member (or associated) states since the 1990s, in general belonging to central spaces or in the semi-periphery of those central spaces. This is an influence that manifests itself not by an explicit mandate but rather by the need to respond to a global agenda based on the comparison and, especially, on the competition of the performances of education systems. As Andy Green (2002, p. 7) states, the obsession with the measure of outputs and performances makes governments (and, I may add, other political actors, especially those who have preferential access to the mass media) hostage to a kind of “cross-national Olympics—ranking education systems in terms of their effectiveness.”

- In this context, the current power of international organizations goes beyond the already important role of setting the global agenda for education. Drawing on an analogy with the distinction that Basil Bernstein made between recognition and realization, Roger Dale argues that the influence of international organizations—from which I highlight the OECD because I believe it constitutes, at least in the education field, the main world think tank of hegemonic globalization—can be found not merely in Steven Lukes's second dimension of power—“power as setting agenda”—but, especially, in its third dimension—“the power to set and control the rules of the game, and to shape preferences” (Dale, 2008a, p. 3).<sup>19</sup> Hence there is also **Roger Dale's conviction that the role of international organizations has been changing, increasingly becoming problem definers rather than solution providers.**

- Prominent international studies such as TIMSS, PISA, PIRLS, or TALIS (and, in some countries, replicated at the national level), as well as their permanent comparison in international (as well as national) reports and studies, with little (or nothing) concerned with the socio-historical contexts that generated these results, have become one of the main technologies of governance. Their role is to supply the evidence for governing political action (evidence-based policy), relegating to the background the contextualization of the learning processes as well as all democratic participation and debate on the political dimensions of education.

- Such is the paradise of neoliberal governance: political action based on evidence presented by the expertise of technicians and scientists instead of the participation of social movements and movements from the organized civil society associated to the free and democratic assertion and competition of diversified political projects. This is, in short, the old conservative dream of developing policies without politics, of a government of sages that knows the paths and solutions to make the “people” happy.

# The Global Educational Reform Movement (GERM)

- Although the signs predate it, it was in the 1980s that a power process began that Finnish social scientist Pasi Sahlberg called GERM (Sahlberg, 2016). This process was based on the idea that schools had mediocre outcomes and that a global reform was required to achieve two aims. First, make schools more efficient and bring them closer to the needs of the technological development generated by the revolution of the new ICT; second, adapt them to the new configuration of the economic competition among states and regions as a result of global and regional integration processes (in Europe in particular but also in regions such as North America and Asia), which had in the creation of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) the starting point for the inception of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

- The process began in the (then) center of the world system with the large-scale reforms of the Reagan administration in the United States (A Nation at Risk, 1983) or of Margaret Thatcher's government in England (Education Reform Act, 1988) after they were tried out in a periphery that served as genuine laboratory for many of these solutions, namely, Chile of the after-coup led by General Pinochet. Many countries, located in various parts of the world system, began structural reforms in their school systems involving duration of schooling, curricular organization, evaluation mechanisms, school management and administration, teacher training, and career regulation. Such was the case of countries from southern and northern Europe (Spain, Portugal, and Sweden) but also of Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Brazil and from the Asian-Pacific region.

- This process of transferring education policies from the strictly national sphere to beyond the borders eventually became a **global movement** based on **four “common senses”** that Levin and Fullan (2008) systematized as follows:
  1. Competition among schools leads to better outcomes for students.
  2. School autonomy is the more adequate means to bring about this competition.
  3. Parents should be free to choose the school they want for their children.
  4. There should be a single national curriculum and a regular comparison system of outcomes among schools to allow informed choice.

Sahlberg (2016, pp. 133–136) identified five of the main common features of the education policies generated by this global movement from the 1990s onward, generally presented by national authorities as requirements to improve the quality of their respective school systems.

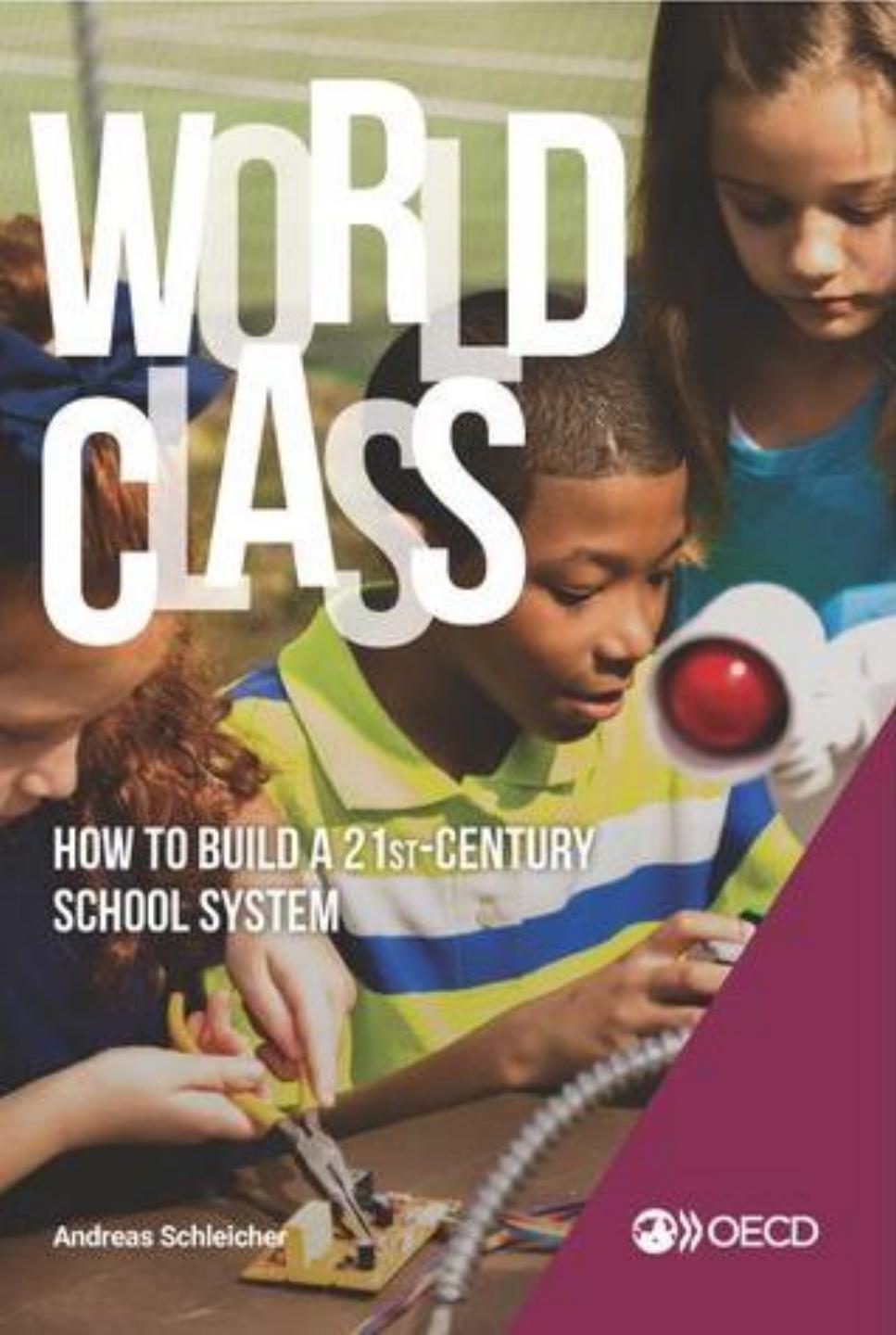
- The first, and arguably the most powerful, was the creation of competition mechanisms by student enrolment, allowing families to choose the school for the children.
- The second feature was the standardization of teaching and learning in schools. The definition of national standards, the rapid development of forms of external (standardized) evaluations of school learning.
- The third feature was the rise of a core curriculum, focusing on the emphasis on reading literacy, mathematics, and science from school knowledges.

- The fourth feature that was globally observable in educational reforms was the “borrowing of change models from the corporate world” as the main means of improvement (Sahlberg, 2016, p. 135). The development of this feature was facilitated by the generalization in the public administrations of the different countries of the *new public management approach*.
- The fifth and last feature (or trend) was the link between “test-based accountability policies” of schools and teachers and students’ achievements.

- The OECD progressively assumed a central role in this global reform movement, becoming its key think tank, especially after the launch of project INES in the 1990s (see previous chapter). How could such a small organization—which in 2019 merely had 36 member countries, created outside the United Nations system, take on such great ambition, overshadowing an organization like UNESCO, specifically created to intervene in the fields of education, science, and culture?

# The OECD and the Dream of a Global Governance

- **The interest of the OECD (previously Organization for European Economic Cooperation, OEEC) in education derived directly from the economic sphere.**
- In 1970, still under the impact of the launch of the first artificial satellite, Sputnik, by the USSR, the present-day Education Committee of the OECD was formed as a result of merging several bodies connected to science and training of scientific and technical staff. At the core of these decisions lay the conviction that science is the driving force of progress and that overcoming the squalor of qualified researchers and engineers would have long-term consequences in the education systems, producing considerable changes not only in higher education but especially in general education at basic and secondary levels (see, e.g., Teodoro, 2019).



# WORLD CLASS

## How to build a 21st-century school system

### Andreas Schleicher

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# Human Capital Theory

- The emergence within the OEEC/OECD of education as a priority and as a decisive issue for economic growth follows the emergence and later dissemination of the **human capital theory**, formulated by Theodore Schultz in 1960 and refined two years later in the supplement of the Journal of Political Economy, “Investment in Human Beings,” which already included other pioneering studies, namely, the one Gary Becker would publish in Human Capital (1964), which has since served as locus classicus for the topic. The theory of human capital became ubiquitous in the works of the OECD, assuming the role of scientific (and economic) legitimization of the climate of euphoria, to use Húsen’s term (Húsen, 1979), which shapes the expansion of the education systems in the 1960s and 1970s.

# Power of the theory: *from the Human Capital Theory to Knowledge Capital Theory.*

- The Knowledge Capital Theory argument is very simple (and appealing): *the cognitive development levels of a given country provide an approximate knowledge of the cognitive levels of the workforce of that same country; and it is the quality of that workforce which, in turn, determines the levels of economic growth.* And, one wonders, how to operationalise the knowledge of these cognitive levels of the workforce? Through an equally simple answer: *by knowing the results obtained by the students of that country in PISA (and TIMSS, in a first moment).*

- **The core of this OECD narrative is that education policies need to be informed by scientific knowledge.** And for Schleicher, who completely overlooks the historic contributions of scientific research in the fields of education (and of pedagogy), relevant knowledge is that which derives **from large statistical surveys** built on the basis of new indicators: “It was the idea to apply the rigours of scientific research to education policy that nudged the OECD to create PISA in the late 1990s” (Schleicher, 2018, p. 17). Andreas Schleicher, who in the book assumes the paternity of the PISA,<sup>4</sup> stresses that it was this survey that started a **new generation of education policies informed by scientific research**: “Of course, the OECD had already published numerous comparisons on education outcomes by that time, but they were mainly based of years of schooling, which isn’t always a good indicator of what people are actually able to do with the education they have acquired” (Schleicher, 2018, p. 18).

# Neoliberal cosmopolitanism

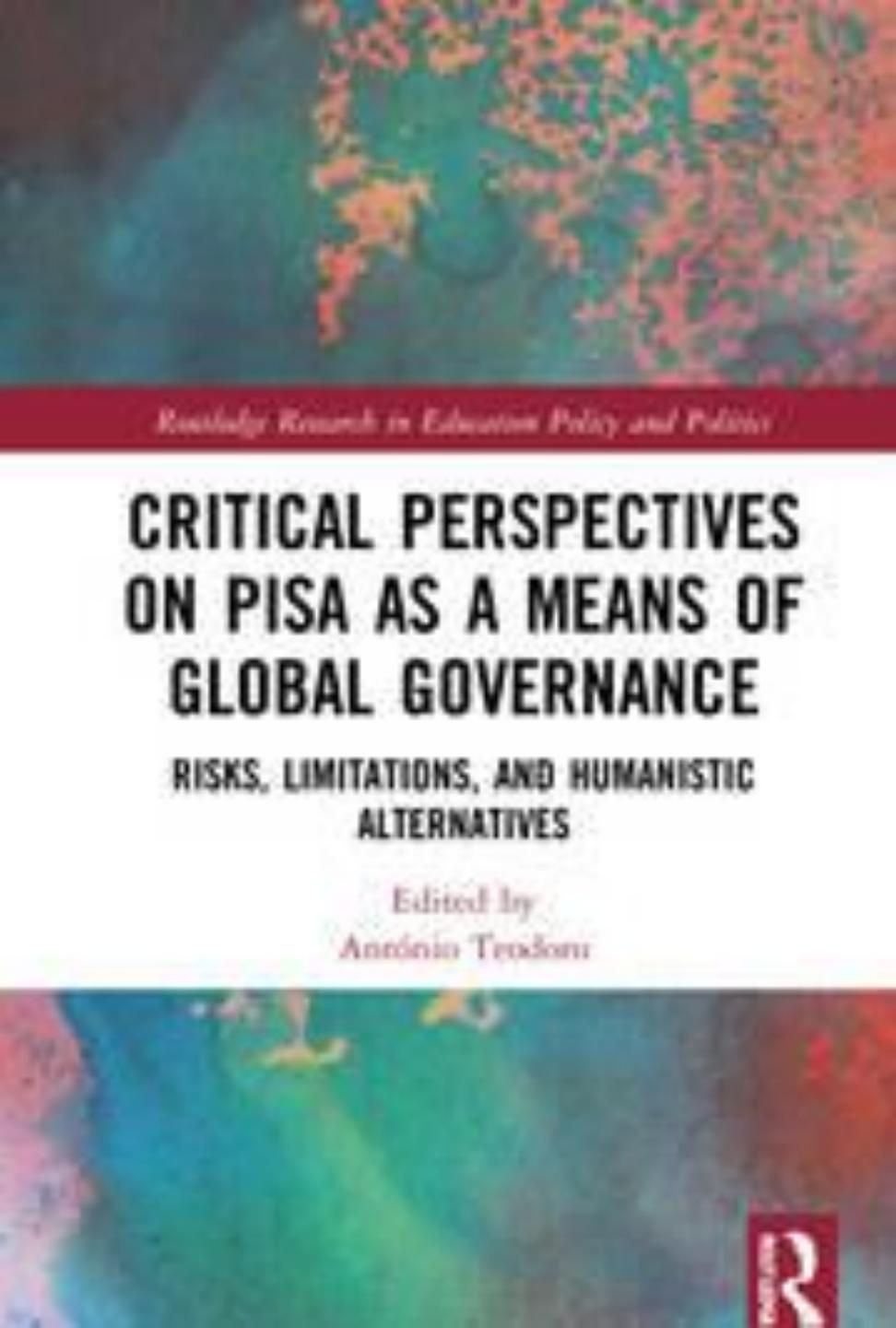
- The OECD's proposals, which are inscribed in what I have named **neoliberal cosmopolitanism**, have been strongly questioned by the rise of populist nationalism and authoritarian neofascist movements in different countries and regions of the world, some of them influential members of the OECD. To these movements, this type of organization derived from the international order created in the aftermath of the Second World War is unnecessary and counterproductive to the assertion of national sovereignty. In this framework, education can only be considered a question of unshared national sovereignty, where a cosmopolitan view of education policies (and practices) makes little sense or is even counterproductive to the assertion of the community superiority over the other, the foreigner, migrant, refugee, or simply believer in another religion or having a skin color different from the nationally dominant one.

- The OECD's proposals are questionable also from a humanistic and critical perspective of cosmopolitanism, which assumes the universality of the human condition and the equal dignity of human beings.<sup>11</sup> The OECD comes forward today as an international organization that works to build "better policies for better lives," "to shape policies that foster prosperity, equality, opportunity and well-being for all."<sup>12</sup> In the field of education, two new buzz phrases are added: "better skills" and "better jobs."

- The narrative developed in the OECD's rests on an individualistic view of the world, and of the economic and cultural relations that human beings establish among one another, in search of better jobs and a better life. It is a world of free consumers who fight for better jobs, accumulating better skills at school and throughout life, in an isolated journey, in constant competition for survival in a hostile world threatened by unemployment. In consumption, no solidarity is established; one competes for better prices and better social positions. It is in production, in labor, that the values of solidarity are consolidated as a starting point for the construction of societies guided by social justice and citizenship engaged with the dignity of all human beings. This dimension, with profound implications in the organization of schools and the modes of learning and teaching, clearly depicted in the history of modern pedagogy, by Adolphe Ferrière, Jean Piaget, John Dewey, Celestin Freinet, or Paulo Freire, falls regrettably outside the OECD's concerns and proposals.

- “In the dark, all schools and education systems look the same” is the title given by A. Schleicher (and Pablo Zoido) to a section of a chapter published on Global Education Policy Handbook (Schleicher and Zoido, 2016, p. 374). The question is not the commendable effort to want to “illuminate” education systems with relevant information. The key issue lies in considering that the manner in which one “illuminates” derives from options of a political nature that must be equated and debated in the public space. They are not technical issues, neutral indicators.

- **Social justice and polis are concepts that are absent from the new oecdism.** We need international organizations to be fully capable of confronting the challenges of the post-truth, radically sceptical world we live in today, which has led to the rise in atavistic, xenophobic neopopulist movements. This can be accomplished by (a) bridging knowledge production between universities (and research) and the public, (b) supporting the revitalization of the public spheres in old and new forms, (c) facilitating discourses that challenge the dominant ideologies of today, (d) training the next generation of public intellectuals, and (e) serving as public intellectuals ourselves, intervening in the public spheres to reaffirm our pursuit of social justice, democracy, and truth itself.



# Critical Perspectives on PISA as a Means of Global Governance. Risks, Limitations, and Humanistic Alternatives

*Edited By [António Teodoro](#)*

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This volume offers a critical examination of the Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA), focusing on its origins and implementation, relationship to other international large-scale assessments, and its impacts on educational policy and reform at national and cross-national levels.

Using empirical data gathered from a research project carried out by the CeiED at Lusofona University, Lisbon, the text highlights connections between PISA and emergent issues including the international circulation of big science, expertise and policy, and identifies its conceptual and methodological limits as a global governance project. The volume ultimately provides a novel framework for understanding how OECD priorities are manifested through a regulatory instrument based on Human and Knowledge Capital Theory, and so makes a powerful case to search for new humanistic approaches.

Grazie mille  
Obrigado

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