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## ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATION: PATHS AND CHALLENGES

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In the last two decades, the terms entrepreneur and entrepreneurship have become common jargon in the most diverse environments: from the traditional academic debates between economists and administrators to being part of political agendas and citizens' life projects. The varied dissemination of this notion of the individual as an economic actor, with a willingness and innovative initiative, inserted the notion of entrepreneurship as an expression for life projects and even as an instrument for economic and social development.

Given the growing social demand for both greater knowledge and encouragement for the development of entrepreneurial projects, entrepreneurial education initiatives have emerged in recent years. By associating this demand with the environment of reformulation of Brazilian education in the elementary, secondary, and technical stages, entrepreneurial education became part of the current agenda, as an option to promote innovative themes and methodologies in the classroom.

In this sense, entrepreneurial education is part of the debate on educational reform, both in the character of the new themes required by society and in the sense of incorporating modern teaching and learning practices, in which the student must take a greater role in the learning process. According to the justification of Entrepreneurial Education Plan of the State of São Paulo:

The beginning of the 21st century features by the challenges of formation for citizens engaged in social, economic and technological contexts, which require new attitudes and values in the face of scenarios for students of basic education. The society dynamism requires that these students should have proficiency in entrepreneurship-related skills, innovative attitudes and behaviors, identification and use of

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opportunities, teamwork, project design and attitudes and behaviors that contribute to the development of society (PEEE, 2018, p.11).

This brief paper intends not only to present the recent development of entrepreneurial education in Brazil, paying special attention to the initiatives established in the State of São Paulo, but also to raise some questions about the contemporary challenges that should guide the development of entrepreneurial education in the coming years.

### **Entrepreneurial Education: Initiatives and Recent Achievements**

In 2015, the State of São Paulo took a concrete step toward establishing an entrepreneurial education plan in its educational system. Through Law 15.693/2015 was created the Government Plan for Entrepreneurial Education (PEEE), aiming to introduce the theme of entrepreneurship in elementary schools, high schools, and technical schools in the State of São Paulo.

The law was the result of previous experiences of entrepreneurial education projects in some municipalities of the State of São Paulo, as well as the work of the Parliamentary Group of Entrepreneurship, which benefited from the support and activities of partner institutions such as the State Center of Technological Education Paula Souza and the Sebrae-SP (the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service).

The Paula Souza Center has become a fundamental institution for the dissemination of the theme through the inclusion of entrepreneurship disciplines in the curriculum of most of its courses. Another fundamental step towards spreading entrepreneurs' actions was the establishment, in 2010, of the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Agency, the Inova Paula Souza. This institution is responsible for programs to encourage innovation culture and entrepreneurship. Among its objectives, it is possible to highlight, for example, the expansion of the Paula Souza Center's interaction with companies; the dissemination of the culture of innovation and new business models, such as startups; and, above all, the concern to increase the impact of the institution on the economic and social development of the municipalities of the State of São Paulo.



On the other hand, since 1972, Sebrae has been focused on economic development, as a training and promotion institution that drives efforts toward small and medium businesses. At present, the institution is not only responsible for the development of numerous initiatives aimed at entrepreneurship, such as the Entrepreneur Fair and the Higher School of Entrepreneurship, but also for the Entrepreneurial Education Sebrae that produces research, studies, tools, methodologies, and teaching materials fundamental to the dissemination of teaching experiences on entrepreneurship in various municipalities of the State of São Paulo.

In 2019, Sebrae-SP partnered with FEA/USP in the planning and installation of the Pioneers & Entrepreneurs Exhibition at the Palace of Campos Elíseos, focusing on the life and example of 24 pioneers in the national development saga and women who were distinguished by their innovative role in Brazilian society. The large display of objects, photos, and documents and the timeline added an educational component about entrepreneurship for public school students.

Of the pioneering educational initiatives that implemented entrepreneurship programs for elementary and high school, those developed in the municipalities of São José dos Campos and Santa Fé do Sul can be mentioned.

In São José dos Campos, a city that stands out for being one of the most important technological centers in Brazil, during the mandates of Mayors Emanuel Fernandes (1999-2004) and Eduardo Cury (2005-2012), initiatives were developed with relevant efforts toward entrepreneurial education. Seeking to implement new curriculum components in municipal schools, the two administrations disseminated Sebrae's methodology, the so-called "entrepreneurial dream pedagogy," as well as the Junior Achievement program. As a result, the programs were able to generate broad environments to bring together initiatives developed within schools such as the Young Entrepreneur Joseense Fair, which was held annually, as well as the construction of the Entrepreneurial Education Center - CEDEMP, which has already served more than 100,000 young people.

In the tourist resort of Santa Fé do Sul, Mayor Itamar Borges—currently state deputy and president of the parliamentary group of entrepreneurship—



was responsible for the introduction of the Young Entrepreneurs First Steps (Jepp) program, using a methodology developed by Sebrae for elementary schools. With the program and the slogan “business learns at school,” the municipality implemented new pedagogical content, activities, and games, prioritizing the appreciation of students’ autonomy through playful activities, decision-making and skills development, and entrepreneurial behaviors. The educational indicators after the implementation of the program were extremely positive, due to both the reduction in school dropouts and the school being 1st place in the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) among the 1st- to 4th-grade public schools in Brazil in 2007.

With the approval of Law 15.963/2015, a technical commission was created to be responsible for the creation of the guidelines of the State Entrepreneurial Education Plan. The commission sought to develop proposals that could confront the reality of the state education system and were in line with both the State of São Paulo curriculum and the guiding principles of the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education, number 9.394/1996. The booklet of the Legislative Assembly of the State of São Paulo that discloses the State Entrepreneurial Education Plan also provides synthetic support material for the implementation of the plan in the basic education curricula, detailing its six objectives and the fifty skills that should be developed in the students.

According to the document, the general objective of the plan is as follows: “To train students with entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and attitudes capable of transforming ideas into innovative solutions that can generate benefits and prosperity for themselves and society, in order to decide on the professional future and the location where it is inserted” (PEEE, 2018, p.12).

From this general objective, six other specific objectives are drawn (PEEE, 2018, p.12):

1. Sensitize the student to entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial careers.
2. Develop entrepreneurial attitudes, skills and behaviors.
3. Identify and explore business and labor market opportunities.
4. Create innovative venture projects.
5. Learn to work in a team.
6. Contribute to the development of society.



As detailed in the plan, by confronting the objectives and skills that make up the plan, the concern of managers to act in two directions is visible. If, on the one hand, the State Entrepreneurial Education Plan becomes an instrument for the dissemination of entrepreneurship-related themes and problems, on the other hand, there is a fundamental focus on building skills and student education. In this second sense, entrepreneurship is less a dream of self-realization, of achieving individual success trajectories, but more of becoming an instrument for the expansion of young people's perspectives, placing them as protagonists, as beings with social responsibility.

Pursuing this second meaning, the Faculty of Economics, Administration and Accounting of the University of São Paulo started to offer the refresher course "Pioneering and entrepreneurial education." Taking into account the parameters established by Law 15.693/2015, which created the State Entrepreneurial Education Plan, the course is offered for 30 hours, of which 15 hours are presential and 15 at a distance, aiming to contribute to the formation of teachers and educators. In 2017, the course was approved by the Secretariat of Education of the State of São Paulo, thus being recognized as a training course by the secretary.

Based on the trilogy *Pioneers & Entrepreneurs: The Development Saga in Brazil*, the course explores cases of recognized entrepreneurs in Brazilian history, emphasizing how these Brazilian entrepreneurs faced and overcame adversity environments to build relevant legacies for building the future of the whole society. As a final activity of the course, participants present projects that enable the dissemination of entrepreneurial education, either as a methodological strategy or as a way to put into practice the theme of entrepreneurship, always keeping in mind the reality of the school, students, or community (MARCOVITCH e SAES, 2018).

Therefore, the topic of entrepreneurial education has been widely explored, resulting in a myriad of initiatives. It is worth remembering, however, that the State of São Paulo has approximately three and a half million students in the basic education system, distributed among fifty-one thousand schools. Thus, there is still much work ahead to reach this immense number of young people, as well as to ensure a reflection on entrepreneurship that not only



attracts students to the learning process but causes them to think about the contemporary challenges of our society.

## **Entrepreneurial Education and 21st-Century Challenges**

Entrepreneurial education, therefore, notwithstanding a significant amount of effort and initiative, is still a theme that is only taking its first steps toward actually incorporating the reality of basic education. But even though entrepreneurial education is still only a seed that is beginning to take root, there is no doubt that the power of mobilization and attraction that entrepreneurship has today, as experience has shown, has great potential for implementation of new teaching practices.

Thus, it is valid to problematize the concept of entrepreneurship—as it is now widespread among our society—as well as to comment on the challenges facing entrepreneurs and future entrepreneurs (as well as society as a whole) in this context of economic crisis and contemporary international politics.

On the one hand, when problematizing the concept of entrepreneurship, we need to insert the entrepreneur in his or her environment, as part of the society and conjuncture that created opportunities for him or her and also developed him or her historically. Entrepreneurs are therefore part of national projects built and rebuilt throughout our history, parts of pacts signed throughout society from generation to generation. Thus, by removing the focus of the individual, but not denying the individual's importance as an actor in development, it became possible to understand how each historical moment—through technological changes, political aspects, the structure of society, economic cycles —opened up. Through these opportunities, some individuals were able to respond in an innovative way, assuming the position of entrepreneurs.

Today we are living a new conjuncture, nationally of deconstruction of the last great pact signed around the Brazilian Constitution of 1988 and internationally of profound transformations in the field of technology and the organization of the world economy itself. In this new scenario, we need to understand how the future possibilities are designed, because of both the



challenges envisioned and the possible opportunities that will open up. What are our new expectation horizons?

Moving forward into the 21st century, it seems that unfortunately, the challenges are growing and future projects are almost nonexistent. We must urgently seek the construction of a new development project that is expressed collectively. To do so, to be a pioneer and entrepreneur today is to deny the most common sense. An entrepreneur cannot be an individual who seeks only solutions for his or her self-fulfillment. Entrepreneurship in this sense has become a myth from the case of unicorns and startups, and it does not fit in both with a society in which unemployment is rising and must be aggravated by the impact of the digital revolution and artificial intelligence, and with the crisis of political parties, the weakening of the national state, and the weakening of social policies that will leave large segments of the population even more unassisted.

In short, today's entrepreneurs need to see history as a process that is socially constructed, in which the future is open and dependent on their commitment; there is no end to history, as the economist Francis Fukuyama stated in the 1990s, nor is there an unhistorical notion of the progress of society as a result of the maximization of individual interests mediated by the market. The future is open and depends on relations between men, political projects, and their construction. We have deep dilemmas to face in the coming years: How do we produce and preserve the environment at the same time? How do we ensure the spread of clean energy use? How do we use great technological innovations without destroying the labor market? How can we reduce the sense of social anomie, in which individualism erodes the feeling that we share the project of the same nation and that we are part of the same community?

Today, more than ever, it is not possible to think about growing, innovating, and generating new entrepreneurs without trying to reduce the existing political and social fractures. We need to get away from the plan of economic emergency, of immediacy, to think again of a truly collective project, in which all social actors must assume their roles and responsibilities. Entrepreneurs in the 21st century will increasingly take advantage of opportunities but above all act in favor of activities that promote the collective benefit, a minimum material welfare for the entire population, but respect, for



example, the limits of the environment and social cohesion, valuing aspects of national culture and science.

In this sense, entrepreneurial education must train students with innovative skills and attitudes, not as a professional instrument and business opportunity, but above all with collective values, action for the development of society. To take up the stories of our businessmen is to seek inspiration from those who were committed to thinking and building a country, a task that is more than urgent for our current generation.

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