

Elites, think tanks and their influence on educational policies: the case of Inter-american Dialogue

Mauro Rafael Jarquín-Ramírez

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, México.

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0496-091X>

jarquinmauro@gmail.com

Enrique Javier Díez-Gutiérrez

Universidad de León, España

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3399-5318>

ejdieg@unileon.es

Eva Palomo-Cermeño

Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, España

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7433-4084>

eva.palomo@urjc.es

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the role of current think tanks in education policy based on the case study of the Inter-American Dialogue's education project, the most representative think tank at the educational level in Latin America, as well as the links that this organization has generated with other sectors to promote its education reform program in government policies and the direction in which it is heading. The research methodology used was Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), analysing the texts and documents produced by this think tank from 1995 to 2020. The findings show that the Inter-American Dialogue promotes global education policies in Latin America that underpin the neoliberal model of growth of the capitalist economy, increase the presence of private actors in education policy through so-called hybrid governance and open new market niches for companies in the "education business".

Keywords: *Think tanks*, educational policies, education governance, neoliberalism, Inter-American Dialogue.

Élites, think tanks y su influencia en las políticas educativas: el caso de Diálogo Interamericano

RESUMEN

Este trabajo analiza el papel de los think tanks actuales en las políticas educativas a partir del estudio de caso del proyecto educativo de Diálogo Interamericano, el más representativo a nivel

educativo en América Latina, así como los vínculos que esta organización ha generado con otros sectores para poder impulsar en las políticas de los gobiernos su programa de reforma educativa y en qué dirección se orienta la misma. La metodología de investigación utilizada ha sido el Análisis Crítico del Discurso (ACD) analizando los textos y documentos producidos por este think tank de 1995 a 2020. Los hallazgos reflejan que el Diálogo impulsa en América Latina políticas educativas globales que apuntalan el modelo neoliberal de crecimiento de la economía capitalista, incrementan la presencia de actores privados en la política educativa mediante la denominada gobernanza híbrida y abren nuevos nichos de mercado a las empresas en el “negocio educativo”.

Palabras clave: *Think tanks*, políticas educativas, gobernanza educativa, neoliberalismo, Diálogo Interamericano.

Elites, think tanks e a sua influência na política de educação: o caso do Diálogo Interamericano

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa o papel dos actuais grupos de reflexão na política educativa a partir do estudo de caso do projeto educativo do Diálogo Interamericano, o grupo de reflexão mais representativo a nível educativo na América Latina, bem como as ligações que esta organização gerou com outros sectores para promover o seu programa de reforma educativa nas políticas governamentais e a direção que está a seguir. A metodologia de investigação utilizada foi a Análise Crítica do Discurso (ACD), analisando os textos e documentos produzidos por este grupo de reflexão de 1995 a 2020. Os resultados mostram que o Diálogo promove políticas educativas globais na América Latina que sustentam o modelo neoliberal de crescimento da economia capitalista, aumentam a presença de atores privados na política educativa através da chamada governação híbrida e abrem novos nichos de mercado para as empresas do "negócio da educação".

Palavras-chave: *Think tanks*, política educativa, governação da educação, neoliberalismo, Diálogo Interamericano.

INTRODUCTION: ELITES, THINK TANKS AND EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

At the dawn of the 21st century, the study on the link between state policies and economic elites has gained renewed attention (Coronel et al., 2019). The "corporate capture of the State", as it has been called (Carpenter & Moss, 2014), by elites with power -large financial and economic consortiums- had its peak in the 1990s at the height of neoliberal hegemony. During that time

policies of liberalization and privatization, elimination of public protections and subsidies, privatization of state enterprises and weakening of the State's regulatory capacity, were implemented. All these measures strengthened the power of these elites (Codato & Espinoza, 2018).

Currently, think tanks (Salas, 2018) have become one of the most active agents in developing this 'corporate capture' of the State. They have an extraordinarily relevant role in the conformation, configuration and circulation of ideas and conceptions on how to solve and tackle the problems of complex societies (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2020). Research shows that this type of organization, progressively ascendant within public policy, uses its capacity for influence and impact worldwide to redesign political agendas (Tchubykalo et al., 2019). Especially conservative think tanks, which show a more influential network of connections to national governments, tend to be better funded and have more consistent policy activity (Ness & Gándara, 2014).

Since their historical appearance -at the end of the 19th century-, think tanks have been producing and disseminating policies often linked to the free market (Quintana, 2019). These think tanks are exerting a considerable influence on deliberative processes, constituting themselves as an important voice in mediatized debates, positioning themselves as referents of intellectual and academic production, and proving attractive for the generation of 'policy coalitions' with respect to business groups interested in education (Salas-Porras & Murray, 2017; Viseu & Carvalho, 2018). Their proposals, are presented as scientific knowledge, and evidence derived from the application of neutral epistemological criteria, and supported by technical criteria (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2020). This has turned them over time into organizations with great power, in the production of changes, in educational policy (Saura, 2015).

Bonds (2010), Williams (2013) and Domhoff (2014) analyze the processes developed by the elites of the corporate community through think tanks to control the public agenda and policies. These are called knowledge shaping processes: (a) they suppress information that may threaten their interests; (b) they organize and finance institutions, chairs, foundations, to produce and promote research that may be useful to ensure the achievement of their objectives; (c) they finance experts willing to attack and discredit research that may be harmful to their interests; and (d) they seek to exert influence on the administration and through the selection of which information can be considered as relevant knowledge and which cannot (Almiron, 2017). In addition, they make networks of relationships and influences, so that their demands are considered at the time of developing public policies, making decisions, or passing laws (Coronel et al., 2019; Royo-Bordonada, 2019).

In recent decades, particularly since the publication of the report *A nation at risk* in the United

States, at the beginning of the 1980s, it has been possible to see a growing interest on the part of think tanks regarding education in countries. This is linked to the dominant narrative of the close relationship between education and economic growth (Helguero, 2019). Thus, education is seen as a potential field of intervention for economic development.

Their intervention has also been particularly important in the debates on the future of education, and in the design of current educational policies (Viales-Hurtado et al., 2021). Therefore, they have managed to exert influence on the governance of education through public-private collaboration (Díez-Gutiérrez, 2021), where they have shaped an authentic 'knowledge industry'.

In the educational field, their proposals for change are linked to a progressive privatization of education, and its management following the managerial business model, often using the trendy vocabulary that is being implemented in the educational system itself: learning outcomes, standardized tests, educational rankings, employability, competencies, entrepreneurship, efficiency, excellence, etc. (Kvernbekk, 2013). The notion of 'evidence-based policy' (EBP) occupies a central place in the construction of political-pedagogical discourses and practices (Hammersley, 2001; Kvernbekk, 2013). For some experts, EBP is nothing more than a new managerialist strategy that facilitates or justifies political agendas that do not require democratic consensus for their implementation (Plehwe, 2015).

From this perspective, the narrative of 'evidence-based' education can generate undesirable effects in the educational arena, such as the exclusion of other forms of knowledge, while facilitating "think tanks to ideologically control what counts as valid public claims and, at the same time, present them as non-political professional claims" (Shalbak, 2015, p. 160).

Their influence and power are determined by their ability to generate direct effects on the process of generating educational policies by intervening in public debates regarding why to teach in schools, how to teach, and for what purpose. This is a guarantee for the elites regarding the production of knowledge in line with their interests or, at least, not in confrontation with them. It is also a way for interest groups to maintain a presence on the political agenda (Medvetz, 2012).

Despite being an initially Anglo-Saxon phenomenon, think tanks have occupied an increasingly important place in the world's societies, generating a geopolitical geography based on the linkage with the national agendas of their respective nation-states. Think tanks are also present in the development of more global ideological projects through transnational collaborative networks, such as Atlas Network at the global level (Atlas Network, 2022), the Latin American Liberal Network (Relial), the Hispan American Center for Economic Research (HACER), or the Latin American Network of Civil Society Organizations for Education (Reduca). These networks are often made up of influential and 'well-ranked' organizations at the international level (McGann,

2021).

The case in Latin America has been The Inter-American Dialogue -also called The Dialogue-, a think tank formed in Washington in 1982 by academics linked to President Carter's administration and the Ford Foundation. It has driven a dominant education reform agenda in the region since the mid-1990s. Curiously, it is an organization that has not been studied by academia, even though its collaborative networks have spread throughout the hemisphere. Its agenda for change in regional education comprises a package of global education policies (GEP's) (Verger, 2014) that cover educational standardization, promotion of public-private partnerships (PPP), accountability policies and management autonomy in schools.

This paper seeks to analyze the role of current think tanks in educational policies based on the case study of the educational project of the Inter-American Dialogue, one of the most representative and with the greatest educational repercussions in Latin America. The links this think tank has generated with other sectors in order to promote its educational reform program in government policies and the direction in which it is heading are also studied.

METHOD

Research in the field of social sciences has its own characteristics, given the complexity of the phenomena to be investigated. That is why we have chosen the qualitative methodology to develop this research and, specifically, the case study (Álvarez & San Fabián, 2012).

The case study stands out among qualitative designs. Its basic characteristic is the inquiry around an example in action in a heuristic way (Stake, 2005). Its potential lies in its capacity to gain knowledge of the particular, the idiosyncratic, without forgetting its holistic context and its interrelationships, and generating hypotheses and findings, and guide decision-making (Arnal et al., 1994; Stake, 2005). Its aim is a global vision of the phenomenon under study, i.e., the understanding of a system in action in its various interrelations with its contextual setting (Feagin et al., 1991).

The Inter-American Dialogue has been selected as a case study (Ortiz, 2022) because of its relevance among Latin American think tanks, and as an exponent of their influence on the educational policies of governments. Its relevance is such that -as exhibited by the think tank itself on its website www.thedialogue.org- it has been ranked by the University of Pennsylvania for six consecutive years among the leading U.S. political think tanks, also related to foreign policy. Prospect Magazine of London named it in 2014 as "Think Tank of the Year" and in 2017 as the "Think Tank to Watch".

The research instrument used for this case study was Critical Discourse Analysis (Van-Dijk, 2009), one of the epistemological perspectives and methodological tools that is currently contributing most to critical social research (Medina-Vicent, 2023; Varela & Mariño, 2023). This approach was selected for its usefulness in unveiling the ideological and political discourse underlying the political and educational project of this think tank, and analyzing the texts and documents it has produced during a period spanning from 1995 to 2020.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was applied to relevant reports produced by the Inter-American Dialogue, which present diagnoses and proposals on Latin American education. Specifically, 22 working documents, and 13 annual reports.

The analysis was carried out based on two time periods: a) PREAL, which covers a time span from 1995 to 2012, and b) Education Commission, which covers from 2014 to 2020, from which we will seek to develop elements related to its conformation and program. A study was also conducted of the structural conformation of its Education Commission and its relationship with think tanks, development banks, business organizations and 'edu-business'. The latter was aimed at the identification of relations that can explain especially interests, projects, and specific organizational practices that can link them with regional economic and political elites.

The phases of the process applied were as follows:

1. Reading and analysis of documents and reports.
2. Contextualization: (a) Analyzing who, how and for what purpose the documents were produced and (b) how they were disseminated, as well as (c) to whom they were directed.
3. Categorization: (a) Extracting key concepts and words, (b) determining the contextual thematic axes and networks in which they are imbricated, and (c) establishing the fundamental categories that appear in accordance with these concepts and thematic networks.
4. Deepening: (a) Formulating inferences about the ideology and approach of the texts; (b) Discovering the silences from the internal logic of each text, and (c) the contradictions that emerge, and that may not be clearly explicit (Contreras, 2020).

RESULTS

The results focus, in the first part, on discussing and contrasting the structure of the think tank The Dialogue, as well as its funding networks and political potential and the positioning of its educational policy agenda for Latin America. The discussion is focused on the two fundamental periods of The Dialogue's educational project: the Program for Educational Reform in Latin

America (PREAL) which runs from 1995 to the mid-2010s, and the Education Commission which began its activities in 2014 and whose activities are still in force.

Subsequently, in the second part of the results, we will present the think tank's intervention strategies in the educational systems of the region and the implications that it has generated regarding educational policy in Latin America throughout its history.

First Phase: PREAL

The Program for Educational Reform in Latin America (PREAL) was presented by The Dialogue in 1995, with the aim of building a regional consensus. It proposed a series of educational reforms necessary to shore up the region's open economies in a context of economic privatization. Since its origin, we have seen that it has promoted educational policies previously carried out in the U.S. context, linked to logics of accountability, standardization, and decentralization encouraged by corporate elites. The educational project was condensed into a series of key reports, in which the organization developed its educational proposal for the region, conditioning the entire regional educational debate on basic education from the mid-1990s onwards.

The three reports that had the greatest impact were:

- *The Future is at Stake*, launched in 1996. This organization recovered elements of the U.S. educational discourse and affirmed that education is responsible for poverty, inequality, and poor economic performance (PREAL, 1998). To solve this situation, the think tank recommended: a) establishing educational standards; b) decentralizing education and making schools accountable; c) changes in teaching careers; and d) changes in educational investment (PREAL, 1998).
- *Falling behind*, presented in 2001. The document makes a more nuanced analysis of the educational problems in Latin America, emphasizing the 'resistance to evaluations', particularly on the part of governments and teachers, which they consider 'a problem' (PREAL, 2001). The proposals for improving education do not vary.
- *Quantity without quality*, published in 2006. It had a great impact on business groups, politicians, and academia. The essential problem in regional education, it states, is "the absence of quality", and almost no progress, in learning levels (PREAL, 2006). In addition to proposing the same solutions as in the two previous reports, with this report the think tank builds a legitimizing narrative around the subjection of educational systems to global governance mechanisms for education, such as the PISA test, promoted by the OECD since 2000.

The Dialogue has simultaneously promoted PREAL's education agenda through its operating structure. In addition to an Advisory Council and Working Groups, this structure established a network of national alliances involving business organizations and other regional think tanks at the national level. All of these are dedicated to promoting educational reforms inspired by the management and operating principles of the private sector. This network operationalized the think tank's educational initiatives, thus ensuring a joint educational intervention across the region,

inspired by a reform agenda agreed upon by regional elites. By 2014, the organization's national alliances were as follows:

Table 1.

The Dialogue's national alliances.

Country	Entity
Argentina	Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales
Bolivia	Centro Boliviano de Investigación y Acción Educativa – CEBIAE
Brasil	Fundação Getulio Vargas (1995-2005)
	Centro de Estudos e Pesquisas em Educação, Cultura e Ação Comunitária -CENPEC
	Fundação Lemann
Chile	Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Educación - CIDE
	Corporación PARTICIPA
Colombia	Corporación para el Desarrollo de la Educación Básica - CORPOREDUCACIÓN
	Fundación Empresarios por la Educación – EXE
	Fundación CORONA
	Fundación DIS
Costa rica	Fundación Omar Dengo
Ecuador	Fundación Ecuador
	Grupo FARO
El Salvador	Centro Alfa, S.A.
	Fundación Empresarial para el Desarrollo Educativo – FEPADE
Guatemala	Asociación de Investigación y Estudios Sociales ASIES
	Centro de Investigaciones Económicas Nacionales – CIEN
	Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales
Honduras	Fundación para la Educación Ernesto Maduro Andreu - FEREMA
	Centro Hondureño de la Empresa Privada
Nicaragua	Foro Educativo Nicaragüense - EDUQUEMOS
	Universidad Centroamericana – UCA
Panamá	Consejo del Sector Privado para la Asistencia Educativa – CoSPAÉ
	Unión Nacional de Centros Educativos Particulares – UNCEP

Peru	Foro Educativo
	Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo – GRADE
Dominican Republic	Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales
	Acción para la Educación Básica - EDUCA
Venezuela	Instituto de Estudios Superiores de Administración – IESA
Uruguay	Universidad ORT
	Universidad Católica – Instituto de Evaluación Educativa

Note. Source: Uczak (2014, p. 137)

By the late 1990s, The Dialogue claimed that PREAL had become "the leading non-governmental voice on education in Latin America and a strong advocate for the participation of private sector leaders in educational initiatives" (The Dialogue, 1998, p. 4). Strictly speaking, it had already positioned itself as the educational battering ram par excellence of the regional elites. Towards the beginning of the 2010s, the program ceased to have the impact it had achieved for almost two decades, giving way to a new educational organization: the Education Commission.

The Education Commission

It is the fundamental instance in the construction of a regional educational project since 2014. Although it represents a continuation of the work of PREAL, it has had a less impacting media presence than its predecessor. The Commission recovers the educational interest of the last phase of PREAL, especially the results in standardized tests, as a way of measuring learning. The Commission proposed the following from its inception: a) to raise the deficient educational quality in the region; b) to argue for systemic change; c) to generate reports with policy and educational priorities; d) to contribute to the development of an accountability mechanism (The Dialogue, 2014).

The think tank presented its report *Building Quality Education* in 2016. This constitutes a 'grand synthesis' of the educational proposals promoted by The Dialogue over two decades. In addition to the continuity with respect to the reading presented on the education problems in the region, it proposes intervention in different areas: a) early childhood development; b) teaching excellence; c) learning assessment; d) educational technologies; e) relevant education (labor insertion), and f) financing (Anónimo, 2016; Inter-American Dialogue, 2016).

The Commission is made up of 15 people linked to Latin American elites at the political, economic, media and academic levels. Screening in 2021 shows us the following:

Table. 2. Composition of the Commission. Source: Jarquín (2022, p.164-169)

Name	Political field	Media field	Economic field	Academic field	Others (Foundations, organizations)
Epsy Campbell (Costa Rica)	-Vicepresident of Costa Rica -National Assembly.			-Studies in Costa Rica and Spain.	-Founded in 1996 the Women's Forum for Central American Integration.
Claudia Costin (Brasil)	-Executive Secretariat of Education Rio de Janeiro. -ILO member. -Executive Secretariat and Minister of the Cardoso government. -Director of Education. World Bank.	-Newspaper columnist in Folha Sao Paulo.	-President of Promon-Intelligens, e-learning. -Corporate Board Commercial Education Rio de Janeiro.	-Master's in economics at São Paulo (EAESP). -Visiting lecturer at Harvard Graduate School of Education.	- Board of directors of the 'Fundación Bunge y Born'. - Director of CEIPE- Center for Excellence and Innovation of Education Policies, a think tank - within Getulio Vargas Foundation -Vicepresident of 'Fundación Victor Civita'. -Linked to Ayrton Senna Institute. - Todos pela Educação.
Gerardo Della Paolera (Argentina)			-American Chamber of Commerce, France.	PhD Economics, University Chicago. -Exrector Universidad Torcuato di Tella.	-Executive director of Fundación Bunge y Born. Education (early childhood) -President of the Global Development Network-New Delhi.
Sergio Fajardo (Colombia)	-Ex-Governor of Antioquia and ex-Mayor of Medellin. -Presidential candidate.	-Deputy editor of 'El Colombiano'	-Close to Grupo Empresarial Antioqueño.	-PhD University of Wisconsin. -Academic at Universidad Andes (Private).	- Speaker with REDUCA and Empresarios por la Educación
Claudio X. González (Mexico)	-Presidential office, 1994-2000. -Coordinator of Undersecretaries.	-Televisa	-Board member of Genera. -Board member of Compartamos Banco.	-Doctorate in Law at Tufts University. -Member of the Patronato Colegio de México.	-President of 'Mexicanos contra la Corrupción'. -Founder of 'Mexicanos Primero'. -Expresident of Televisa Foundation. - Ex president of UNETE .
George Gray (Bolivia)	-Ex-economist for Latin America. UN Development		-Head of the economic think tank of the Ministry	-Graduate at University of Oxford, Harvard, and Cornell.	

Name	Political field	Media field	Economic field	Academic field	Others (Foundations, organizations)
	programme.		of the Presidency (Bolivia).		
Felipe Ortíz (Peru)	-Ex-ambassador of Peru in the US. -Coauthor of different works with Pedro Pablo Kuczynski.	-Winner of the Jerusalem Award of Journalism 1998.	-Member CEAL, CREDICOR P, Banco de Crédito, etc.	-Industrial engineer. -Master University Rochester, NY. -Rector of the Universidad del Pacífico (Private).	-Board of 'Enseña Perú'
Salvador Paiz (Guatemala)			-Co-President Grupo PDC - Vicepresident Walmart Centroamérica.	-Bachelor's degree, Wharton School, the University of Pennsylvania + MBA	-President of the Fundación Sergio Paiz Andrade (FUNSEPA), dedicated to the improvement of the quality of education in Guatemala through technology.
Viviane Senna (Brazil)			-Board of Directors, Banco Santander. -Editorial board. Ed. Confederação Nacional de Industrias.	-Psychologist. Pontificia Universidad Católica de São Paulo.	-President of the Ayrton Senna Institute. -Member of the Adult Friends group. -Founders' Council - Todos pela Educação.
Emiliana Vegas (Venezuela)	-Chief executive Division of Education) IDB. -Worked at World Bank			-PhD in Education. Harvard University.	
Elena Viyella (Dominican Republic)			President of Inter-Química	-APEC University	President of EDUCA, non-profit organization dedicated to the improvement of the quality of education.
José Weinstein	-Manager Centro de			-PhD in Sociology.	-Manager Centro de Innovación en Educación, Fundación Chile (2006-

Name	Political field	Media field	Economic field	Academic field	Others (Foundations, organizations)
(Chile)	Innovación en Educación, Fundación Chile (2006-2013). -Minister of Culture (2003-2006) -Subsecretary of Education (2000-2003).			Universidad Católica Lovaina. -Doctorate supervisor. doctorado Educación Universidad Diego Portales. -Consultant World Bank, IDB, UNESCO, ECLAC.	2013). -Fundación Andes, Manager of educational projects.
Ariel Fiszbein (Argentina)	-Worked at the World Bank.			-PhD in Economics (Berkeley).	
Ricardo Lagos (Chile)	-President of Chile (2000-2006) - UN envoy for climate change. -Ambassador of Chile in the USSR. -Minister of Education (1990-1994).			-PhD in Economics Duke University -Director of Political Sciences. Univ. Chile. -General Secretary FLACSO. -Professor Brown University.	-President of Fundación Democracia y Desarrollo.
Ernesto Zedillo (Mexico)	-President of Mexico (1994-2000) -United Nations High-level Advisory Board on Economic and Social Affairs		-Board of directors PRISA Group. -Executive director P&G, Alcoa, Union Pacific	-PhD Yale University -Dir. Yale Center for Study Globalization -Member of the American Philosophical Society	-Chair Rockefeller Foundation Economic Council on Planetary Health. -Member of 'Grupo de los 30'.

As can be seen in the table, the members of the Education Commission, are political actors linked to the hemispheric elites in the political arena (Campbell, Costin, Ortiz, Weinstein, Lagos, Zedillo and Fajardo), to the world of international organizations (Gray, Campbell, Costin, Vegas and

Fiszbein), to large regional capital (Costin, Fajardo, González, Villeya, Senna), civil society organizations with a strong presence in their countries of origin (González, Ortíz, Senna, Villeya, Costin), important foundations (Paíz, Della Paolera, González, Weinsten, Lagos), as well as the media and other think tanks and private institutes (Jarquín, 2022). The above makes it possible to clearly see the condition of this organization as a crystallization of regional elites. A space in which educational reforms and policies aimed at maximizing the investments of regional capital have been promoted, as well as policies of control over teachers, a mobilized sector that has historically represented a counterweight to the oligarchic policies of the region.

The role of The Inter-American Dialogue

In this second part, the results of the analysis are advanced so as to understand the implications that the think tank has generated with respect to education policy in Latin America throughout its history. To this end, it is essential to delve into its intervention strategies in the education systems of the region. These can be obtained from a critical reading of its documents and policy positions in the field of education. We can find three major strategic bets of the organization: a) networking, which has allowed it to establish useful links within the different regional elites; b) agenda setting, with which it has built a dominant narrative of educational reform in the region; and c) heterarchy in education, which refers to the promotion of a form of government that incorporates members of the private sector in the decision-making processes.

Agenda setting

One of the common functions of think tanks is the setting of a political agenda to guide the debate towards the achievement of a series of changes considered necessary. The formulated agenda is thus recovered by government agencies as priority elements for discussion, which allows the actors who have developed it to intervene not only in the public debate but also as interlocutors of different governing bodies, a growing trend in the region. Pinilla (2012) states that a key aspect in the functioning of think tanks lies in their relationship with the media and the construction of a public image. Linked to this, these organizations have developed strategies to disseminate their research and policy proposals.

The Dialogue has been successful in this regard thanks to the continuous dissemination campaigns it has carried out with respect to its proposals on educational policy. One of the most significant of these was the year-long campaign carried out by José Octavio Bordón -former presidential candidate in Argentina, senator and then governor of Mendoza- to promote the report *The Future is at Stake*, launched in 1996. During the 1999 tour, the Argentine politician met with heads of state and business leaders from Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Chile, the Dominican

Republic, El Salvador, and Peru. The reason was to disseminate the educational reform agenda based on standardization and decentralization policies in education systems to improve the quality of education. This agenda -linked to the narrative promoted at that time by multilateral and supranational institutions such as the World Bank- became dominant within the region's education systems. This would deepen years later with the launching of the next two PREAL Reports.

PREAL's meetings spread throughout Central America, the Southern Cone of the continent and the United States, with the presence of politicians, businessmen and other civil society actors with access to the media. Their purpose was to discuss and promote the education reform agenda with representatives of national governments, business groups and other civil society actors. As a result, the think tank managed to underpin an educational reform agenda that was discussed practically throughout the continent, as the product of in-depth academic reflection and not necessarily as the expression of a political project.

In this way, The Dialogue has become and affirmed itself as an instance that has managed to intervene in a relevant way in the formulation of educational policies in the region. Its activities to establish the regional debate agenda have been significant in areas such as the design of merit-based teaching careers, early childhood care programs, or the adoption of digital technology in schools. In all of them, a managerial principle of intervention on regional education has been maintained, albeit covered by a citizen discourse, based on the imperative of using evidence for decision making. The think tank itself recognizes that for more than two decades it has been a leading voice in educational policy debates, producing influential documents and articles and convening public meetings and private briefings, with the aim of promoting educational changes in the region.

Networking

The construction of collaborative networks can respond to the organization of different individuals and collectivities that seek to address a common problem. These differ from corporate relationships, as they are constituted in a more autonomous way with the capacity to go beyond the state logic itself. This presupposes greater operational flexibility, as well as a greater capacity to obtain relevant information regarding social problems and the changes needed to solve them (Caetano & Mendes, 2020).

Generally, the intervention of think tanks in political life has been linked to the generation of networks with individuals and institutions that provide useful links through which to access information and resources that are strategic for the achievement of results. Think tanks have developed operational networks in different spheres (Caetano & Mendes, 2020) which have allowed them to consolidate their position as policy-oriented knowledge-generating entities. The Dialogue is in line with this.

Networking with economic, political, academic, and media actors has been a fundamental part of

the think tank's history. Its educational project has been nurtured by this organizational commitment, which has allowed it to gain media coverage and the attention of high-level regional politicians. Its ability to build influential relationships is evident when considering the integration of its Education Commission, a 'high caliber' initiative that condenses the interest in education of different sectors of the regional, political, and economic elite.

The Commission includes representatives of large regional capital, interested in promoting an education that responds to the interests of labor markets, actors linked to the world of regional philanthropy (for which the promotion of their activities by the regional governments themselves is fundamental), politicians close to managerial administrative perspectives (these believe that the private sector has a greater capacity to solve social problems than the public sector) and, finally, strategic actors of Edu business in the region, that find in the education sector an attractive space for profit. The creation, of such instance, was recognized as a commitment to educational transformation by "political and business leaders, the media and civil society" throughout Latin America (The Dialogue, 2014, p. 19).

Heterarchy

Throughout its history, the think tank has promoted a form of government known as 'heterarchical governance' in the regional education sector. In this regard, Olmedo & Wilkins (2014, p. 108) suggest that heterarchies are made up of a "heterogeneous group of old and new actors with different backgrounds, profiles and interests, who share relationships, responsibilities and decision-making processes at different levels". This allows them to function is the development of flexible collaborative networks, which manage to develop forms of informal - and sometimes institutionalized - authority throughout the political process. In this way, the inclusion of private actors at different levels of education systems becomes an increasingly common process.

In a PREAL document (2012, p. 5), it is mentioned that

the recognition of the contribution the business sector can make in the construction of the public sector is based on the firm belief that the only way we have to build public, social, collective, private and state goods is through the articulation of the three sectors: public, private and social.

Part of this has been the systematic creation of alliances with regional business groups, as well as the recovery of an educational reform agenda linked to the U.S. corporate sphere. In line with the above mentioned, it is possible to identify two trends:

(a) positioning of different actors linked to The Dialogue in key spaces of regional education policy, either directly or through organizations created or chaired by them;

b) direct participation of the organization in the design and discussion of specific educational policies.

The first point can be illustrated by considering the examples of Gabriel Sánchez Zinny, linked to The Dialogue since the 1990s in educational issues, who recently served as Director General of Culture and Education of the province of Buenos Aires, Argentina; Claudio X. González Guajardo, founder of the organization Mexicanos Primero, who would become a protagonist in the conformation and start up of the Educational Reform promoted in Mexico in 2013 (Jarquín, 2021); and Vivianne Senna, who through the Ayrton Senna Institute has managed to form strategic public-private alliances with municipal governments in Brazil (Da Silva & Dos Santos, 2022).

Regarding the second point, two episodes analyzed are significant: the first, in 2008, when the Dominican Minister of Education invited Jeffrey Puryear, co-director of The Dialogue Education Program, to launch the first of the 12 regional forums on the Ten-Year Education Plan (Inter-American Dialogue, 2009); the second, when the Mexican government recently invited Ariel Fiszbein, director of The Dialogue Education Program to the Early Childhood Forum, where fundamental elements of the Federal Government's policy on Early Childhood were discussed.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The initial interest of this research was to analyze an organization representative of the new 'ideological elite' of think tanks created expressly to generate and influence educational policies in Latin America. The Inter-American Dialogue through its history, its documents, campaigns, and agenda... the specific functions it has sought to fulfill, the interests it has represented and the alliances it has established... have been analyzed.

Through a critical reading of its documents and organizational composition, it has been confirmed that The Dialogue is a fundamental think tank in the development of the regional educational debate. Moreover, in our opinion, it is the most important organization of its kind, considering its capacity to build an educational agenda that has covered practically all Latin America. Its network of strategic alliances has intertwined with different regional elites, something no other organization of its kind enjoys, and another factor being its capacity to intervene directly in processes of development and dissemination of educational policies in different countries. In this way, the organization has managed to underpin hybrid governance schemes (Lubienski et al., 2016) in national education, as well as to open new market niches for companies in the education business (Moschetti et al., 2020).

According to the documentation and information analyzed, the think tank The Dialogue has acted directly as a producer of educational discourses and narratives in the process of consolidation of the neoliberal project of education. This has taken the form of public policies that are determinant

through the networks of influence in which the think tank is inserted. It has been carried out through the provision of evidence-based policies, that have determined the political agenda in the education system, and the shaping of a 'public opinion', and a generalized 'common sense', about the goals and aims of education systems and the mechanisms to reach them.

In the context of new networks interwoven by the market and multiple new actors, the activity of think tanks is symptomatic of the new modes of relationship and power construction of capitalist elites, which have found in the process of developing public policies a relevant space to deploy political activities, particularly in the field of education. The influence of dominant sectors in education has found in the centers of thought an effective form of realization, due to the consensual capacity of the narrative of science, evidence, and the scientific approach as a way of solving common problems. The Dialogue has succeeded in establishing not only a broad network of collaboration in the hemisphere, but also an educational 'common sense', associated with an accumulation of technical solutions with managerial elements to complex problems.

The discussion we raise for future research is whether the interests, principles, values, and ideology of these elites are not being taken over by those who suffer them, as Gramsci (1971) thought, if the values of the ruling class are taken over by the dominated class, no occupation tanks are needed. What capitalism has realized in the neoliberal era, argues Han (2014), is that it does not need to be harsh, but seductive. There is nothing more to confirm that most of the transformations, that Latin American educational policies have undergone, coincide exactly with the approaches of the think tank studied. How the agendas of the various governments have incorporated as their own the arguments of these private corporations, becoming the spokespersons of their interests. Therefore, a future line of research is to delve into how these processes of 'ideological lobbying' are assumed 'from below' and what response and resistance is being promoted in Latin America.

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