

**Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial education: conceptual tools for the training of creative and innovative people****Empreendedorismo e educação empreendedora: ferramentas conceituais para a formação de pessoas criativas e inovadoras**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article analyses the concepts of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial education from a historical-critical perspective motivated by the widespread use of these terms in the mass media, in political speeches and in different training spaces. Under the argument of the existence of a strong connection between a one-dimensional idea of entrepreneurship and neoclassical economic conceptions, it is stated that, today, there is a trivialization of the use of the term, which contributes to a growing confusion regarding its original meaning. The reflections contained in this work result from a bibliographic review and point to the need to rescue the concept of entrepreneurship from its multidimensional perspective. In other words, this means thinking about it as a means for the search for the students' autonomy. It is argued that true entrepreneurial education must be anti-systemic and non-conformed in order to become truly creative and innovative.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial education. Creativity.

**RESUMO**

Este artigo analisa os conceitos de empreendedorismo e educação empresarial a partir de uma perspectiva histórico-crítica motivada pelo uso generalizado destes termos nos meios de comunicação de massa, em discursos políticos e em diferentes espaços de treinamento. Sob o argumento da existência de uma forte conexão entre uma idéia unidimensional de empreendedorismo e concepções econômicas neoclássicas, afirma-se que, hoje, existe uma banalização do uso do termo, o que contribui para uma crescente confusão em relação ao seu significado original. As reflexões contidas neste trabalho resultam de uma revisão bibliográfica e apontam para a necessidade de resgatar o conceito de empreendedorismo a partir de sua

perspectiva multidimensional. Em outras palavras, isto significa pensar nele como um meio para a busca da autonomia dos estudantes. Argumenta-se que a verdadeira educação empresarial deve ser anti-sistêmica e não-conforme, a fim de tornar-se verdadeiramente criativa e inovadora.

**Palavras-chave:** Empreendedorismo. Educação empreendedora. Criatividade.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In the last two or three decades, given the constant presence of the term entrepreneurship in the mass media, in political speeches and in the most varied training spaces, a confused concept of this important conceptual tool has spread. In the teaching environment itself, there are controversies about the most adequate understanding for what would be a truly entrepreneurial education. In general, the notion of entrepreneurship started to be identified with autonomous work initiatives, opening small businesses, proactive postures and some other forms of manifestation, which, instead of contributing to a greater conceptual clarification, ended up confusing the new researchers who begin to venture into this field of investigation.

The complex etymology of the term combined with the different forms assumed over time also contributes to this conceptual confusion. Its oldest Latin roots refer to the word *imprehendere* and the notion of taking control or embarking on something to try to perform a task. In its modern origin, the French version of the term, *entrepreneur*, sought to mean one who takes charge of something, one who understands, who organizes and executes a certain process or product. In his translation into Portuguese, Houaiss (2001) recognizes entrepreneurship as the act of deciding to perform a difficult and laborious task, by executing and carrying it out. In direct association, the entrepreneur presents himself as one who undertakes to make something and entrepreneurship as a social movement that derives from this term.

In this sense, one of the researches that has been carried out within the scope of the Master's program in Management, Planning and Teaching, from the Vale do Rio Verde University, seeks to understand the conceptual origins of the term and its use in the current school universe. Thus, this text is a compilation of some partial results of an ongoing investigation that seeks to answer two main questions, which deal, on the one hand, with the origin of the idea of entrepreneurship and the ways in which it has been related to the development history of social thinking in the modern era and, on the other hand, of understanding about what an entrepreneurial school is and how to deal with the concept of entrepreneurship in education. This way, the sequence of this text is subdivided into three more parts, beginning with the modern conceptual bases of the term,

passing through its evolution throughout the 20th century and its association with contemporary teaching practices in schools.

## **2 CONCEPTUAL BASES OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

In the 18th century, Richard Cantillon (1680-1734), who is generally responsible for recovering and disseminating the term entrepreneur in the modern era, highlighted the role of uncertainty in dealing with the entrepreneur. According to his perspective, the inhabitants of a country could be divided between independents - princes and landowners - and dependents. Among those considered dependents, Cantillon distinguished those who had a certain and an uncertain salary. The latter were seen as entrepreneurs.

For all these considerations and for countless others that could be made in a matter that has as object all the inhabitants of a country, it can be concluded that all these inhabitants, except the prince and the landowners, are dependent; that they can be divided into two classes, that is, entrepreneurs and those who live off a salary; that entrepreneurs live as if they receive an uncertain salary and everyone else as if they receive certain salaries, at least during the time they receive them, even though their functions and social positions are extremely disproportionate (CANTILLON, 2002:46)<sup>1</sup>

Cantillon associates the idea of entrepreneurship with that of taking risks and working with uncertainties. According to him, whoever assumes such risks, whether the entrepreneur who orders the production or the craftsman himself, must be willing to submit to the uncertainties in relation to the volume of consumption and the time necessary until his customers acquire all his products. He therefore argues that the origin of entrepreneurship lay in the absence of predictability. As uncertainties are inherent in everyday economic life, in his view, those who are continuously engaged in economic decision-making could be considered entrepreneurs.

Considering Cantillon's contributions as a symbolic and conceptual landmark of the initial emergence and evolution of the idea of entrepreneurship in the modern era, we have that this debate is launched under a context marked by the development of an increasingly systematic knowledge, in an age of profound transformations in the western man's worldview. With the breakdown of Christian unity and the consequent implosion of the supranational authority of the Catholic Church in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, there was a real intellectual revolution triggered by the reformist movement. As the climate of skepticism of authors such as the French Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) spread, new horizons and Eurocentric world views were constructed and

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<sup>1</sup> In the Portuguese translation, the French term entrepreneur was translated as businessman, which denotes a much more closed perception, centered on the legal status of an individual who registers a company in his name.

legitimized by the discourse of the affirmation of a supposedly correct and universal method for the exercise of scientific activity.

In this sense, two methodological orientations start to stand out at this time as great exponents of Western thought, forming the epistemological bases of the so-called European universalism (WALLERSTEIN, 2006). On the one hand, Francis Bacon's (1561-1626) English empiricism, for whom observation and experimentation would lead to universal generalizations that should govern society and, on the other hand, modern rationalism with the Rene Descartes' (1596-1650) search for the objective value of scientific knowledge. According to Descartes, the only truth that should really matter would be that any individual, educated or not, could achieve on their own if they used his discourse on method to properly conduct reason and seek the truth.

A few decades later, Isaac Newton (1643-1727) would play the role in history as responsible for synthesizing these two methodological lines of thought, uniting and overcoming Bacon's empiricism and Descartes' rationalism. Newton's celestial physics and mechanics represent an effort to show how the methodological rigor applied to certain particular cases, such as the movement of bodies in free fall and the orbit of the planets, would allow the enunciation of natural laws applicable to the entire universe. Thus, the dominant classical view in science was built on the basic premises of the Newtonian model, which affirmed a symmetry between past and future observable from the existence of natural laws, and Cartesian rationalism, which proposed the existence of a dualism between the world physical and the social or spiritual world.

As of the Newtonian conceptions, immortalized in its "Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy", an increasingly movement of disciplinarization of social thought has been in place. This is what the American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein has called the triumph of "universalizing-sectorizing" way of thinking in the middle of the 19th century (WALLERSTEIN, 1989). If, on the one hand, nineteenth-century thinking is characterized as universalizing because it is based on the description of empirical reality with the aim of reaching, via induction, the formulation of abstract laws that were assumed to be absolute truths for all times and places, on the other hand, thought is also identified as sectorial because it was believed that knowledge would be the result of an effort of specialization, as a result of the fragmentation of knowledge in different disciplines.

As a direct development of this Enlightenment movement, academic disciplines are multiplying in order to cover the most diverse areas of knowledge, from the natural sciences to the humanities. This intellectual diversity was manifested through the creation of multiple disciplinary structures that started to occupy an increasing space within the main European universities. This

diversification of disciplines was part of an effort undertaken to generate and develop supposedly objective knowledge about social reality, which led to interpretations that understood social phenomena as the result of a historical process triggered and maintained essentially by natural causes.

In this context, the Frenchman Jean-Baptiste Say (1767-1832), retook the concept of entrepreneurship describing entrepreneurial activity as someone's effort to reconcile the use of production factors with the management of associated risks. Hence, the terminology evolved in a way linked to the business context, generally to refer to those people who buy and resell goods. It was the development of the idea of the rational economic man, seen by Enlightenment thinkers as the result of the dawn of knowledge. They believed that the convergence of economic and political decisions was a direct result of rational human choices.

In the 19th century, therefore, there was a perception that if men acted as rational human beings, the results of their political choices would reinforce the results produced by the market mechanisms. This, obviously, under the condition that the choices were not left to everyone, but were reserved only for a select group of men endowed with reason. In this group, women were excluded, because they were supposed to be guided by emotion, and slaves, the poor and the destitute, who were supposedly driven by instinct. Thus, even if slowly and without much emphasis, the idea of entrepreneurship evolves in parallel with the neoclassical economic conceptions, which defended the existence of a tendency towards balance in the market of factors as a result of the operation of supply and demand natural laws. In other words, markets would be self-regulating and the success of entrepreneurial activities, which were seen as an almost natural development of rational human choices, could be explained based on the laws that governed the functioning of the economy.

Thus, amid a context of naturalization of social and economic phenomena, the concept of entrepreneurship was treated with less importance in academic debates. The great turnaround, however, would take place at the time of the works of Joseph Schumpeter (1883-1950), who, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, began to point to the centrality of entrepreneurs as agents responsible for socioeconomic changes. He then starts to present the central figure of the innovative entrepreneur as an economic agent, who brings new products to the market through more efficient combinations of production factors, or through the practical application of some intervention or technological innovation (SCHUMPETER, 1997).

### 3 WIDESPREADING THE CONCEPT

Schumpeter uses the concept of entrepreneur from the context of the debate on the idea of development, which is, in his conception, a dynamic process that unbalances the basic parameters of the economic system. In his view, economic development was not understood as a simple development of orthodox economic theory. For him, economic development was the basis for reinterpreting a vital social process that had been neglected by neoclassical economic analyzes when insisting on his static approach to general equilibrium. In Schumpeter's view, the entrepreneur gains centrality precisely because he is the persona cause of economic development.

Combining ideas from thinkers as different as Marx, Weber, Walras and Menger, Schumpeter proposes a perspective of social change based on the action of entrepreneurial agents in a dynamic economy. By distancing himself from orthodox economic theory, he protects himself from the Enlightenment determinism of rational choices and suggests a greater complexity to the perception of the role of the entrepreneur in the economy and society. As Hébert and Link (1989) suggest, Schumpeter admitted that the essential role of the entrepreneur was found in a set of actions related to work, management, decision making, innovation and new combinations in the productive sphere. Thus, it laid the foundations for a new and significant approach in relation to economic progress and development, centered, fundamentally, on the entrepreneurial action of individuals, who exercised direct influence on the processes of social change.

Schumpeterian thinking triggered the resumption of the academic debate on entrepreneurship and the consequent publication of a series of new works with different focuses on the subject in the mid-20th century. Among them, the work of Arthur Cole, who defended the idea that Entrepreneurs were productive agents who took advantage of the factors of production to create goods and were forced to make decisions in an atmosphere of uncertainty. More specifically, Cole defines entrepreneurship as the activity of an individual or group with the purpose of starting, maintaining or expanding a business unit for the production or distribution of economic goods and services to obtain financial advantages. In this case, as noted by Hébert and Link (2009), activity with a purpose must be understood as an activity aimed at a specific end, presumably the maximization of profits.

In a context of synthesis of neoclassical thinking, after the revolution of economic ideas caused by the works of John Maynard Keynes in the 1930s, many of the conceptual definitions related to entrepreneurship began to approach an apparently safe harbor, which was the association of the term with the business idea. Thus, the figure of the entrepreneur lost its multidimensional essence as it became more and more mixed with the image of the individual economic agent. As a

result, the concepts of entrepreneur and businessman began to become confused. This confusion even goes so far as to appear in the translation of Schumpeter's masterpiece into Portuguese. In the translation of "Theory of Economic Development", widely disseminated in Brazil, the term entrepreneur is translated as businessman, which in Portuguese means exactly the one who owns a company or firm.

When the concept of entrepreneurship is associated with the business idea, the multidimensional essence of the entrepreneurial being is lost and the unidimensional idea of the entrepreneurial agent is valued. This more closed perception of the term gained space from the middle of the 20th century on research agendas of several universities, mainly in the departments of administration and business, but not only. The image of the entrepreneurial agent was quickly linked to the idea of successful, highly motivated, creative and independent individuals. For Elizabeth Eldrich (1986), the entrepreneurial agent incorporated a romantic vision of capitalism and assumed the mythical condition of the true *self-made man*<sup>2</sup>. In the analysis of Antônia Colbari,

the traditional conception of the entrepreneur establishes a romantic and mythical image of an individual with exceptional qualities and skills that foster the growth and development of society, but presented unconnected with socioeconomic and cultural contexts. (COLBARI, 2007:81)

The hero businessman, seen as the true promoter - savior - of economic progress, started to collect attributes that, in the popular imagination, started to be seen as inherent to his own condition. What, however, was not very well explained was precisely the reasons that led this select group of individuals to be, in its majority, composed of white men, in their thirties, with complete higher education, usually firstborn and more willing to take risks than others. It is also important to highlight that this romantic view of the entrepreneurial individual gains strength from the mid-1960s, when the intensification of international economic competition and the gradual decrease of the American current account surpluses led to an apparent decline of the United States' hegemony in the international context.

This period marked the end of the so-called Golden Age of capitalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The increase in economic competition combined with the intensification of political rivalries intensified the instability of the international system as the management of capitalist wealth was progressively displaced towards the accumulation of financial assets (bonds and shares). This

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<sup>2</sup> This is an expression rooted in American culture, usually associated with Benjamin Franklin, one of the nation's founding fathers and one of the first to use the term. It refers to the idea of an individual who achieves success on his own, without depending on the help of others or the government. It is related to the romantic idea of meritocratic capitalism.

particular condition of crisis, aggravated by the non-existent prospects of resuming economic growth and generating new jobs, made the idea of entrepreneurship even more prominent. A clear example is the speech of American President Ronald Reagan, from 1985, in which he states that the 1980s were the Age of the Entrepreneur. Delivered in the White House Oval Office, among other points, his speech highlights that:

We begin with a basic recognition: The greatest innovations for new jobs, technologies, and economic vigor today come from a small but growing circle of heroes, the small business people, American entrepreneurs, the men and women of faith, intellect, and daring who take great risks to invest in and invent our future. The majority of the 8 million new jobs created over the last 2\1/2\ years were created by small enterprises -- enterprises often born in the dream of one human heart. To young Americans wondering tonight, where will I go, what will I do with my future, I have a suggestion: Why not set out with your friends on the path of adventure and try to start up your own business? Follow in the footsteps of those two college students who launched one of America's great computer firms from the garage behind their house. You, too, can help us unlock the doors to a golden future. You, too, can become leaders in this great new era of progress -- the age of the entrepreneur. (REAGAN, 1985)

During the 1980s there was a real explosion in financial transactions that ended up depressing the international trade in real goods. Productive growth has stalled as a result of the growing financial liberalization that created a unified global market for money and financial assets under the command of the American financial system, which would inaugurate a new monetary standard based only on the American currency. This credit and capital market on a global scale fulfills the objective of appropriating wealth without necessarily having to go through the expansion of production and therefore attracts a large part of investments at the cost of generating unemployment. In the fragment highlighted from the Address to the Nation on Tax Reform, in addition to considering the 1980s as the Era of the Entrepreneur, Reagan also shifts the responsibility for fostering economic growth and creating news jobs from the state to the entrepreneurial citizens, treated by him as heroes.

In a context of neoliberal ascension, this direction of the entrepreneurial discourse contributed to emphasize a unidimensional notion of the concept of entrepreneurship. According to Colbari,

The resignification movement of the notion of entrepreneurship is confused with the strategies to affirm its condition as a legitimate alternative to formal employment, as an occupational horizon and as a professional project, both for those who were excluded from salaried work and for those who failed to be included. It is less due to the rescue of the dream of being a boss and much more to the difficulties of fulfilling the dream of a formal contract. (COLBARI, 2007:84)



Thus, the question remains about the appropriation of the term in order to strengthen a rhetoric of the emergence of a new productive paradigm and of new workers, supposedly more dynamic, independent and active.

In this sense, it is evident that the conceptual discourse on entrepreneurship that has been widely disseminated in recent decades does not sustain itself on solid bases. The history of the last two thousand years reveals the existence of a huge set of social groups in multiple historical systems that have demonstrated an attitude and inclination towards capitalist enterprises, such as producers, merchants and financiers. Thus, the very idea that the current moment can be called the era of entrepreneurship, as Dornelas (2017, p.10) and others are stating, is an ahistorical misunderstanding. First, as noted earlier, because the systemic expansion triggered by entrepreneurial initiatives is not exclusive to the current era, and secondly, because individual entrepreneurs do not transform the world alone. The group of entrepreneurs, which we can identify here as participants of the market, maintains relations with the State that are much more intertwined than many can even imagine.

For this reason, we insist on the argument that entrepreneurship, in the sense commonly used today, is nothing new and only makes sense if treated in a comprehensive way, referring more to the idea of process, movement and transformation than to the business idea. Unfortunately, this is not the most widespread idea today, particularly because when it comes to entrepreneurship, the common belief thinks more about business, firms and making money than about transformation, process or social change. Thus, it is necessary to recover the point at which entrepreneurship was treated as a chain of events and activities that unfold in new events and activities over time. Only when analyzed from a perspective of permanent transformation will the concept make sense in an educational context. Otherwise, it will be treated only as developing financial skills and running business techniques.

#### **4 NON-CONVENTIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

Controversies on the matter of the conceptual entrepreneurship analysis are led by heterodox approaches, which can be defined as non-conventional perspectives. Beside the dominant perspective associated with neoclassical economic postulates, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century a movement of epistemological rupture has raised from a growing number of critical authors who challenged the worldview of Eurocentric and universalist intellectual thought. According to this non-conventional perspective, science as a whole is so dynamic and unstable that its basic postulates would need to be permanently revised. Despite countless controversies, the legacy of

this new approach method contributed – albeit in a limited way at first – to new developments in the concept of entrepreneurship itself.

Although the contribution of this analytical perspective to the establishment of new research paradigms is slow and gradual, its impact on academic circles cannot be denied. The French historian Fernand Braudel, who was one of the main exponents of the second generation of the Annales School<sup>3</sup>, once affirmed that the great originality of the intellectual movement represented by him and his colleagues was to propose a collective work between the disciplines, a work in which each discipline could practice its legitimate specialization without foregoing other topics of research (Braudel, 2009). The rupture proposed by this new approach contributes to recover the conceptual complexity that had been neglected by positivist social analysis, considered almost as exact sciences.

Thus, in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at the same time that the idea of entrepreneurship tends to the side of unidimensional analysis – generally associated with the neoclassical synthesis<sup>4</sup> – and the meaning of making money gained space in the debate, an epistemological divergence emerged with more heterodox perspectives. It is precisely based on this wider and interdisciplinary perspective that the notion of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial education will find its most fertile field for the conception of ideas. Then, the term entrepreneur moves away from the narrow notion of making money and re-approaches itself to the original Latin idea of *imprehendere*, a sensitive human processes or activity.

Referring to a perception of permanent transformation, this non-conventional perspective rescues its broader and more uncertain temporal dimension. To undertake, in this sense, means to think and act in a dialectic-historical environment. Particularly because, as highlighted by Marx (2011: 25) in the opening part of his *Luís Bonaparte's 18 of Brumaire*, men make their own history, but they do not do it as they wish; they do not do so under circumstances of their own choice, but under those they face directly, bequeathed and transmitted by the past.

For Boava and Macedo (2009), meaning the full realization of social beings, the transdisciplinary and teleological basis of entrepreneurship endorse an interpretation which defines the term as a set of activities that aim to provide the entrepreneur, in the course of his action, full freedom. The entrepreneur, in this sense, is the individual executing an action capable of producing a break with what provides him with security and stability in the most varied dimensions of social

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<sup>3</sup> The Annales School can be shortly defined as a group of critical historians associated with a revolutionary style of historiography developed to stress long-term social history.

<sup>4</sup> In economics the neoclassical synthesis is an academic movement which has tried to reaffirm the validity of theories and economic models deconstructed by Keynesians thinkers.

life, such as politics, sports, culture and business, for example (BOAVA and MACEDO, 2009). This conception seeks precisely to emphasize the multifaceted dimension of human entrepreneurial action, which, although not exactly free in its possibilities of choice, is endowed with knowledge and experience that provide it with increasingly advanced levels of capacity for analyzing complex problems and making decisions. Therefore, the main objective of an entrepreneurial education should be to provide specific conditions that give more and more autonomy to the students. As Paulo Freire points out, teaching is not about transferring knowledge, but creating the possibilities for its production or construction (FREIRE, 1996:25).

For practical purposes, an entrepreneurial education is one that is based on the dialectical principle of social transformation fueled by the permanent reciprocity of the teaching and learning movement. Pedagogical practice is, therefore, not limited to training specific technical skills. It must foster curiosity and the ability to elaborate increasingly complex issues in order to prepare individuals not only for understanding problems, but also for propositional action aimed at minimizing them. In the words of Hamilton Werneck (2007), knowing that the world is complex, chaotic, structured, intense and dialectical, complexity should be always the first choice of the entrepreneurial school, instead of linearity. Still according to Werneck, “the basic assumption of an entrepreneurial school is that this educational act with a view to transformations changes the person, changes the environment and is open to unpredictable differences that appear during the process” (WERNECK, 2007:24).

A basic condition, in this sense, is highlighted by Paulo Freire when stating that individuals must not be too sure of their certainties, as well as be aware of their own unfinished or inconclusive condition. Recognizing oneself as an unfinished social being makes man search for what he lacks and places him as the subject of his own education. In this regard, all education that intends to be entrepreneurial must have a permanent character and must be open to overcoming its own accumulated understandings in an exercise of constant production and reproduction of knowledge. For this reason, the romantic and limited vision of the entrepreneurial individual as a hero of progress and economic development is a contradiction in terms. True entrepreneurial education must, in this sense, be anti-systemic, rebellious and easy to become truly creative and innovative.

An entrepreneurial school should be able to transcend the limits imposed by the disciplines themselves without waiving their legal obligations. It must teach creativity through the total integration of its curricular integration and foster the overcoming of the consolidated knowledge. As Werneck points out, a school of this type, which prepares its students for the future, must be

able to meet the curricular requirements provided for in the teaching legislation while at the same time finding security in the ambiguity of the content itself, and not in its certainties.

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