



BASIC EDUCATION TEACHERS AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS ABOUT GENDER
DOCENTES DA EDUCAÇÃO BÁSICA E AS SUAS PERCEPÇÕES SOBRE GÊNERO
LOS DOCENTES DE EDUCACIÓN BÁSICA Y SUS PERCEPCIONES SOBRE EL GÉNERO

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ABSTRACT: This article aims to discuss the perceptions that teachers at a public school in the State of São Paulo have about gender issues. From the reading of references in gender and education, it was noticed that society has different expectations regarding the roles that men and women should play, and that they can be bullied when they move from the expected performances. In this research, it was used a focus group, the literature on gender and gender and diversity at school, as well as dialectical hermeneutics as a perspective for data interpretation. It was concluded that most of the teachers conceive gender as a biological characteristic and that the teachers themselves like to discuss the subject. Also, that there are ambivalent positions moving between traditional understandings about behavioral expectations for men and women. The presence of subjects who question the naturalization of differences considered traditional is evident: the younger teachers, with graduate degrees, tended to legitimize more flexible forms of performance and to recognize more emphatically the importance of greater gender equality.

KEYWORDS: Basic education. Gender. Teachers.

RESUMO: Este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar as percepções que docentes de uma escola pública do Estado de São Paulo têm sobre questões de gênero. A partir da leitura de referências na área de gênero e educação, notou-se que a sociedade possui expectativas diferentes em relação aos papéis que homens e mulheres devem manifestar, e que os sujeitos podem sofrer bullying quando se deslocam das performances esperadas. Nesta pesquisa, utilizou-se grupo focal, a literatura sobre gênero, gênero e diversidade na escola, bem como a hermenêutica-dialética como perspectiva de interpretação dos dados. Conclui-se que a maior parte dos sujeitos concebem gênero como característica biológica, gostam de discutir sobre o assunto e que há posicionamentos ambivalentes transitando entre compreensões mais ou menos tradicionais sobre as expectativas de comportamento para homens e mulheres. Evidencia-se a presença de sujeitos que questionam a naturalização das diferenças consideradas tradicionais: as professoras mais jovens, com pós-graduação, tenderam a legitimar formas mais flexíveis de performances e a reconhecerem mais enfaticamente a importância de maior igualdade de gênero.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação básica. Gênero. Docentes.

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RESUMEN: Este artículo tiene como objetivo discutir las percepciones que tienen los docentes de una escuela pública del Estado de São Paulo sobre la problemática de género. A partir de la lectura de referencias en el área de género y educación, se advirtió que la sociedad tiene expectativas diferentes en cuanto a los roles que deben desempeñar hombres y mujeres, y que pueden ser intimidados cuando se alejan de las actuaciones esperadas. En esta investigación se utilizó un grupo focal, la literatura sobre género y género y diversidad en la escuela, así como la dialéctica-hermenéutica como perspectiva para la interpretación de datos. Se concluyó que la mayoría de los docentes concibe el género como una característica biológica y que a los propios docentes les gusta discutir el tema. Además, existen posiciones ambivalentes que se mueven entre entendimientos más o menos tradicionales sobre las expectativas de comportamiento para hombres y mujeres. Es evidente la presencia de sujetos que cuestionan la naturalización de las diferencias consideradas tradicionales: los docentes más jóvenes, con títulos de posgrado, tendían a legitimar formas de actuación más flexibles y a reconocer más enfáticamente la importancia de una mayor igualdad de género.

PALABRAS-CLAVE: Educación básica. Género. Docentes.

Introduction

The reflection on gender and education is fundamental for the promotion of a school contrary to the inequalities between men and women, so commonly observed in society. According to Cíntia Tortato (2015), the relevance of studies on gender and education has to do with the fact that the school collaborates with the formation of specific models of students and students, besides not giving importance to the "issues related to violence against women, hierarchization of differences between men and women, human rights and diversity" (TORTATO, 2015, p. 107). Thus, it is possible to argue that in the school space there is a predisposition to reproduce inequalities outside its walls, since it emphasizes the expectations of society. Nascimento (2015, p. 2) states that there are expectations of behavior that boys and girls "should" manifest: they are educated to be strong, rational and dominating, while they receive incentives to exercise domestic activities and motherhood as a priority in their lives. In this same vein, Araldi (2017) adds that contemporary schools are spaces in which the production of differentiated bodies from a gender perspective is advocated, something that feminist authors had already been warning.

In the scenario described by feminist authors as hegemonic, we can, in fact, understand educational institutions as devices for the production of an instrumental, liberal and heteronormative rationality. Mattos and Bertol (2015) analyze how the school institution acts in the production of standardized bodies, through practices such as the isolation of children and young people from the broader social life, the constant framing and



surveillance and the production of gender through divisions of spaces that can be occupied by boys and girls (ARALDI, 2017, p. 177, our translation).

It is necessary to remember that these mentioned differences turn into inequality when we analyze who has more and who have less prestige in social life. By valuing female emotion and ridiculing the crying man, we have been reinforcing stereotypes that have been present in society for a long time. This attitude gives legitimacy to those who reproduce the patterns, but excludes and brings suffering to those who differentiate themselves.

Judith Butler (2017), one of the main references on gender, breaks with the feminist tradition by proposing that sex, as well as gender, is performative. This means thinking that the biological prop impels, from the mother's womb, a set of acts, expressions and practices that are understood as proper to the man and proper to the woman. People who dare to subvert these norms are often victims of verbal and even physical violence, just see the high number of trans students who drop out of school due to *bullying practices to which they are subjected and subjected*.

For Scott (1995), an American teacher who is located in the range of post-structuralist theorists, as well as for Butler, the story was told by men, and the concept of gender was an opportunity to question the male hegemony that prevails in historiography and society as a whole. In this sense, the Brazilian sociologist Heleieth Saffioti (1987, p. 16, our translation) corroborates Scott by explaining that "power has been concentrated in male hands for millennia, and [that] men fear losing privileges that ensure their supremacy over women."

Remembering that attending school is a legal obligation of Brazilians, whose non-compliance may lead to punitive sanctions (BRASIL, 1988), it is worth reflecting on how this institution participates in the process of strengthening inequalities between men and women. Pereira (2015), in an article entitled *Configuration of the profession of student - boys and girls at school*, whose objective, among others, was to understand how students perform the profession of student/student, demonstrated that it is recurrent to observe teachers, especially those of the initial years, praising the whim of girls in practical activities or their friend craft in interactions with people. As far as boys are concerned, warnings are common because they are moving in excess and because they have less zeal in dealing with materials. In other words, it was seen that gender perspective is an important influencer of how boys and girls are treated in the classroom. Even in everyday postures, such as asking them to help in the loading of heavy things or for them to collaborate in the cleaning of space, teachers show conceptions based on gender and that put the student body in a situation of inequality.



The action-reflection on gender issues also has to do with people's sexuality and how they see themselves in the world. And considering that the world was built on the opposite optics between male and female, transgressions are not very welcome. For the gender researchers Claudia Vianna and Daniela Finco, the transgression of socially accepted standards is usually ridiculed, resulting in a "confirmation" that each has to adapt to traditional gender standards and, mainly, to their place in society. "These are prejudices that resist reason and new times, and which we continue to consider untouchable truths, customs and inflexible rules" (VIANNA; FINCO, 2009, p. 281, our translation).

This is said to be the urgency of strengthening dialogues about gender in various spaces, so that people have the right to freedom to be and act as they please. Depriving society of the debate on gender and sexuality, as more conservative sectors crave, contributes to the naturalized daily injustices, such as the lower salary paid to women, the greater help of them in domestic tasks, the lower female presence in the spaces of power, among others.

It is worth noting that, historically, society is structured in such a way as to leave man in a position of greater comfort from an early age. Senkevics (2015) researched the influence of family socialization on the life trajectory of boys and girls, and found that in childhood, boys tend to have much more freedom than girls. They can play in the street until later and do not have to take responsibility for cleaning and tidying up the house. They are taught to lead the home, and, for safety reasons, are more forbidden to leave, although they want to attend the same spaces that boys attend and play the same games.

The researcher also explains that girls have less leisure time because they have a load of domestic service to perform, for which boys, often supported by their parents, are exempt due to laziness, lack of skill, or simply because they do not want to help. They also have a responsibility to care for sisters and younger brothers much more pronounced. That's why many prefer to be in school and not at home, since at school they have more freedom to play and do other things that are not associated with domestic service.

The points raised by Senkevics (2015) corroborate the thought that we live in an unfair society and that determines to people different social roles depending on the biological sex already from childhood. In this sense, Vianna and Finco (2009), in the article called *Girls and Boys in early childhood education*, explain that already in early childhood education there are efforts to distinguish distinctively bodies of boys and girls. According to the authors, in addition to marking bodies, they mark behaviors, skills, perspectives, etc.

In view of these situations, the school chosen as the research context belongs to the state public field and is located in the eastern region of the city of São Paulo. It is an



institution that comprised elementary levels II, high school, and youth and adult education (EJA). At the time this analysis was conducted, the institution operated from Monday to Friday, in three periods, totaling approximately 1000 enrollments and 40 teachers, in addition to a management team composed of a pedagogical coordinator, a director and a vice, not counting the members of the secretariat and the food and cleaning services.

Therefore, this article aims to discuss the teachers' views about gender understandings that hatch in the school space, taking into account how they approach, but also move away from what was selected as literature.

Methodological procedures

In order to gather the perceptions of teachers, the focus group was defined as a data collection instrument. Barbosa (1998) defines this strategy as an informal discussion group whose objective is to obtain qualitative information in depth. Thus, teachers who made ATPC (Collective Pedagogical Work Class) at the same time as the researcher, who also taught at the institution, were invited to participate. With the appropriate authorizations, the final twenty minutes of each weekly meeting were used, from 10:40 a.m. to 12:20 p.m., and served to discuss matters of internal organization of the school. During this period, the researcher asked questions about gender, whose answers given by the participants were recorded through an audio capture application and then manually transcribed into a word processing program.

The teachers of basic education who participated in this research taught several subjects and were identified with fictitious names, composing a group of 10 people besides the researcher. In total, 7 female teachers and 3 male teachers were attended, with the researcher. These professionals worked in the institution that hosted the research and in other schools, public and private. All had experience with elementary school II and high school, and some have already gone through the EJA modality, being in the locality where the research took place at least one year ago.

The focus group occurred through a general dynamic *followed by slides that presented specific* questions, which participants should answer sincerely, without worrying about moral judgments or whether their answers were right or wrong. The goal was for teachers to feel free to say what they think without fear of retaliation. In all, there were three weekly meetings, with about two hours each, to suit the times when the participants were available.

Once the focus group sections were closed, all the speeches in the Word program of the Office suite were *transcribed* and a careful reading process began there for an efficient



organization of the data. In follow-up, we chose to create categories a posteriori, and each question answered by the participants resulted in a specific category, which was analyzed individually and then aggregated in a specific dissertation chapter for this purpose.

With regard to the nature of the research, qualitative was selected, which, in agreement with Tatiana Gerhardt and Denise Silveira (2009), is defined with research that does not identify itself with a numerical representativeness, but with the actions of describing and understanding a given phenomenon. With regard to data analysis, hermeneutic-dialectic perspective (SCHLEIERMACHER, 1999) was adopted, which values the idea that understanding is constructed in the interaction between the researcher and the researched. This conception made it possible to interpret the data with great attention to the context in which they were obtained and to the contradictions sometimes expressed by the participants, whose analysis was based on conclusions from other studies already carried out on the theme studied.

In order to progress in the task of data analysis, we chose to organize tables that resume the teachers' understandings about gender. These understandings were obtained through the questions asked at the moments of data collection and also from the speech the teachers, whose transcription was thoroughly analyzed. Therefore, it is important to note that the process of creating the categories listed below took place before and after the three weekly meetings commented on above. We sought to operationalize the perspective of hermeneutics-dialectics, identifying meanings of the comments of the participating teachers, relating them to the literature and considering the interpretation of the researcher, so that it was possible to explain divergences immersed in a given context.

Table 1 - Categories summarizing teacher understandings

| Question | Category |
|--|---|
| What understanding have you shown about gender? | Gender understandings |
| Sees characteristic recurrent in boys and girls? | Women's dedication |
| Do you think it's appropriate to change the posture according to the gender of the students? | With them firmness, with them softness |
| Have you noticed a situation of gender inequality in the classroom? If already, which one? | Gender-permeated specific discourses and practices in the classroom |
| Have you ever acted to repair a situation of gender inequality in the classroom? | Difficulties in dealing with gender |
| He says treat students in a way that Equal? | Reciprocity in treatment |

Source: Prepared by the author based on Sousa (2020)



Gender understandings

This first category revolves around the fact that most teachers have demonstrated to understand the term gender as a strictly biological characteristic, thus indicating a specific understanding. That is, they use gender as a synonym for sex. For Faria and Nobre (1997), understanding gender as strictly biological sex is not enough, because gender corresponds to a social construction that occurs in sexual bodies, and that originates from what is given as feminine and masculine, and from the social roles performed by each one. In this sense, it can be said that the current society determines specific functions to people depending on the sexual organ they carry.

These functions are hierarchical and generally put man in a position of advantage. Although women today assume the role of family risk, men have been considered providers for decades, while the tasks performed by women assumed a complementary character, not very relevant. This thought is still strongly rooted in people's heads and back and forth appears in common phrases such as "woman at the wheel constant danger". Lucas Barbosa and Fábio dos Reis, academics from the Federal University of Lavras, explain that it is time to break these conceptions that associate a particular task with a specific gender, considering that we are "beings who move and build themselves indefinitely in multiple processes, (re)often meaning their own existence" (BARBOSA; REIS, 2018, p. 18, our translation).

It should also be noted that female teachers sometimes reproduce speeches seen as sexist, and this occurred in the matrix research when teachers commented that currently many women want privileges rather than rights. Therefore, Faria and Nobre (1997) are ratified when they explain that the reproduction of misogyny also happens among the female gender:

we must not forget that the dominant ideas in society are dominant precisely because they are at the head of most men and women as well. These ideas are repeated to exhaustion in the family, at school, in churches, in the media, and it is not surprising that many women are convinced of them. Women who think differently, especially those who organize themselves in women's movements, have to have a lot of courage to expose their ideas, because those who think like the majority do everything to ridicule them and diminish the importance of what they are saying (FARIA; NOBRE, 1997, p. 36, our translation).

Despite this occurrence, it is valid to demarcating a consensus among the majority of participating teachers: women are increasingly having the courage to present their ideas and are striving to fight for equality. Even charging for attitudes of the legislative power. They cited the 1988 Constitution that brought, in their visions, important achievements, such as the expansion of maternity license, from 90 to 120 days, paternity license, the right to daycare,



free family planning in terms of reproductive rights, and many others. They stated that it is possible to argue that a part of these rights does not exist in practice, only in law, but guaranteeing them on paper is, considered by them, an important step to effect them in everyday life. Even though much is still to be done, they considered there to be undeniable advances. They said that it would now be appropriate to strengthen the struggle so that all areas of society are committed to the dissolution of injustices.

Women's dedication

The nomenclature of this category hangs in the most recurrent stereotype about women, the one who says that she has to be delicate, sweet, and ready for the tasks of the home. Although there is no scientific evidence that correlates these characteristics to the female gender, biologically speaking, the speech of most teachers and teachers present here indicates a traditional gender conception that associates attention and zeal strictly with women.

The researcher and teacher Rosimeire dos Santos Brito, in an article entitled *Failure of boys in elementary school: the contributions of the gender category in the understanding of this picture*, explains that girls have been educated for passivity while boys "to be more assertive, which is why they would be more resistant to school discipline" (BRITO, 2008, p. 149, our translation).

This view actively runs through the social imaginary and can be found in the school, as added by the PhD professor in sociology Maria Lúcia da Silveira:

this vision is a heavy mortgage for all women in the world of work. But what is observed is that education still circulates these meanings, passing "between the lines", as a hidden message, that man creates culture and women reproduce the knowledge generated by man (SILVEIRA, 2003, p. 18, our translation).

For this teacher, such disparity can also be seen in the way men and women deal with work service on a daily basis. Many women are forced to double or even triple work days, especially when they have to face motherhood alone. According to the teacher, society convinced, in her view, to attribute domestic service, which is self-produced, to the woman, whose only reason to exist would be procreation. For men, salaried/professional work is attributed, which corroborates its function as provider. In this case, the teacher presents a critical view of this way of conditioning the behavior of men and women.



According to some of the participating teachers, their husbands do not read instruction manuals, always asking wives to read, because, according to them, women are more patient, indicating according to famous stereotypes mentioned earlier.

In this category, we have two visions that draw attention: it emphasizes the existence of gender stereotypes that put women in a situation of disprestige, although they are seen as more attentive and capricious; another, the conjuncture of caring for children falls with much more weight on women. Such scenarios demonstrate that there are women aware of gender injustices at school, but also that there are other women who normalize differences without taking a critical stance.

With the boys, firmness, with the girls, softness

This field is based on the occurrence of teachers fighting with all young people when they deem it necessary, but according to the students and the teachers themselves, this happens much more with boys than with girls.

According to some of the teachers, their boys' students say that they protect girls more, because with them they fight with a lighter tone and less often. For these participants themselves, misogyny is so rooted in society that they reproduce it, even without realizing it and unintentionally, and this can be observed with the event that the warnings are more focused on the boys' students. The perception of this speech as something that the teachers perceived during the research points to the relevance of the method used, when the knowledge produced is realized through the contradictions existing between real life and the perceptions that can be produced through reflections on this real life, also bringing to light the interaction between the researcher and those surveyed, as participants in a society in which meanings are shared.

As a justification for the scolding being more directed to boys, the teachers argue that girls give less work when compared to boys, and that when they are agitated, just speak once, different from what happens to boys. In an earlier part of this work, it has already been explained that the school employs efforts to model the bodies of students (VIANNA; FINCO, 2009), with the objective of promoting standardization regarding attitudes and behaviors. If we consider that the school seeks to correspond to the ideal of hegemonic gender in society, it is not surprising to see that the disciplinary practices adopted by teachers and teachers are sexual, in the sense of being different for boys and girls.



Foucault (2005), when talking about the power relations that occur in school, as well as in other institutions, explains that this space holds a hierarchy that goes from students to direction, and the way people in school express power is through rules to be fulfilled, such as the time of entry and exit, the use of uniform, permanence in the room, controlled frequency etc. Thus, it is worth commenting that the power, analyzed and appointed in the way Foucault (2005) understands, was defined as discipline or disciplinary power, whose characteristics are:

- 1) discipline is a type of space organization;
- 2) discipline is a control of time;
- 3) surveillance is one of its main control tools;
- 4) the discipline implies a continuous record of knowledge.

Such aspects are easily perceived in the school environment, but not only in it, but also in prisons, asylums, nursing homes and the like, according to Foucault (2005). Here it is not intended to understand the school as an environment of deprivation of liberty, but to consider that, for Foucault, the power expressed by rules of standardization makes man docile and useful. In school it is no different, the scolding against students and students aims to act directly in their and their posture. The warnings are given by the teachers depending on the gender of who will hear them, indicating that such scolding are also forms of standardization that fall on different bodies.

This distinction is so commonplace that teachers don't even realize that they are rebuking unevenly, being more affable to them than they are. This occurrence also appeared in a study developed by Moreira and Santos (2002), entitled *Indiscipline of the School: a gender issue?* When investigating the phenomenon of indiscipline from the occurrence book of a given school, thinking about the gender sections present there, the authors concluded that educators, in general,

seek to maintain a much more amiable and delicate relationship with girls than with boys. Even in a situation in which they give the norms of respect and good coexistence and do not correspond to the demands of study, in the classroom, what is reminded of them is the fact that they are women and, therefore, need to be delicate and studious, [...] reinforcing, in a tenuous tone, the dominant social patterns of male and female (MOREIRA; SANTOS, 2002, p. 149, our translation).

It is also worth noting another self-criticism made by a certain participant, who claimed to reproduce a sexist thought in order to charge more of the girls. For this teacher, society is more demanding with women than with men, since they are delegated the duty to care for children and to tidy up the house, and to them "only" to be a provider. This thought is



also echoed in the literature on gender at school, because as students are charged all the time to assume "disciplined behavior, including in this concept an asexual behavior, they also receive much more severe punishments than boys" (MOREIRA; SANTOS 2002, p. 149, our translation).

In this research, however, it was perceived the opposite: that boys have received most of the warnings for giving more work, according to the teachers. However, it should not be forgotten that, unlike the last authors mentioned, whose context was elementary school, this was focused on high school, which is the phase of the end of basic schooling. That is, it is possible to speculate that girls, because they are already saturated with severe punishments since the 1st year, had their attitudes and behaviors modeled by the school institution, resulting from the approval of teachers.

Gender-permeated specific discourses and practices in the classroom

The analysis of this category follows the same line as the previous one, and indicates how teachers act differently depending on the biological sex of the student. In it we have a common characteristic observed in the practice of two participants: asking students to help in loading the books, that is, support for something that requires greater physical effort, while girls are responsible for cleaning, a task socially seen as feminine.

Such occurrences demonstrate how the school can also reproduce the status quo, intensifying a scenario of inequality. In this sense, it is important to reflect on the extent to which the normalizing character assumed by the school institution is capable of converging on the "production and definition of certain patterns of behavior, as being specifically masculine or feminine" (MOREIRA; SANTOS, 2002, p. 149, our translation).

In the article named *O Corpo Educado: Pedagogias da sexualidade* (CARVALHO, 2000), the PhD in education and retired full professor of the graduate program in education of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, reveals that the school generates brands that remain for the rest of life, and that these brands have nothing to do with the programmatic contents or the skills and skills developed, it is with everyday situations, with the common experiences we live with classmates, teachers, teachers, and other members of the school team (CARVALHO, 2000, p. 127, our translation). These experiences are reflected in the way we stand before the world in what is up to gender and sexuality.



Thus, it is ratified once again how the school contributes to the production of very specific archetypes of boys and girls, as verified in the speech of Moreira and Santos (2002, p. 147, our translation):

the school helps to build models of masculinity and femininity, which are permeated by values that reproduce hierarchies and exclusions, that is, models that provide for a behavior that is much more responsible, educated, kind, studious and obedient, on the part of girls, and in which speaking profanity is not in accordance with expectations.

One of the main characteristics of this difference concerns the expectations nurtured by teachers regarding the youth model that the school insists on training: they must behave, measured, delicate and studious, while they have an obligation to express haughty, furor and virility. In this sense, it is not a surprise to verify what are the positions of teachers in relation to the fact that students like the funk musical rhythm, something that was raised by the participating teachers as a problematic situation. A certain portion of the teachers and the participating teachers demonstrated that girls liked *funk* because of the obscene lyrics and the sexy dances. This portion justifies the repudiation of the fact that girls dance funk because certain lyrics of this original musical genre of the peripheries of Rio de Janeiro, and today reproduced throughout the world, are derogatory and go against women's historical achievements, but this concern with morale can be questioned, since only they are forbidden to dance. At no point did the participants complain that the boys were dancing (and singing) as well. That is, here we are able to realize that teachers adopt specific discourses and practices depending on the sex of each student (a), hence the impending of discussing gender in school so that we can have an increasingly fair classroom for boys, girls and young people of any gender identity.

Difficulty in dealing with gender

The motivation for the existence of this category refers to the attitudes that teachers assume (when they assume) in view of the gender inequalities present in the classroom and in the school as a whole. According to Avila *et al.* (2011) who, in the doctorate, interviewed teachers of basic education in order to understand the views on gender and sexuality of students in school daily life, the school still highlights traditional postures that do little to promote plurality. In this sense, a teacher, as seen so far, stood out for having the ability to recognize herself as a producer of inequality and seek to modify her practice, reinforcing once



again the relevance of the method adopted for data analysis, which aimed to observe such changes during the research process.

In general, for Fleuri (2006), the public system involved in this deconstruction is under pressure from urgent demands imposed by contemporaneity, which, according to Seffner (2007), imply a growing need for the school system to review its own foundations (AVILA *et al.*, 2011, p. 290-291, our translation).

Some teachers, on the other hand, could not give examples of when they fought gender inequality in school, but recognize that it exists, so much so that in their home, according to the teachers themselves, the boys must help in the domestic service, because this is "the order of the sergeant here" (speaks of one of the teachers).

It is curious that one of these participants refers to herself as a sergeant, in the male, when she seeks to express authority for her own children. Further, she comments, with a certain tone of irony, not bothering with husbands having to bear the greatest financial expenses, confirming the view of the man as "provider", since the woman has the cleaning work. Therefore, the teacher demonstrates to be aware of the gender disparity that exists in the social space. Such circumstances, in addition to implying that the teacher thinks that man is the maximum representation of authority and discipline, dialogues with Madureira and Branco (2015) when the researchers explain that women themselves often occupy a strategic position in maintaining the status quo.

The episode of the teacher accumulating maternal work with the domestic and with the professional, as pointed out by one of the participants, confirms the speech of Hirata and Kergoat (2007), when the researchers explain that, within the concept of sexual division of work proposed by them, women are aware about the regime of abuse to which they are subjected:

it was with the awareness of a specific "oppression" that the women's movement began: it is then collectively "evident" that a huge mass of work is carried out free of charge by women, that this work is invisible, that it is performed not for themselves, but for others, and always in the name of nature, love and maternal duty (HIRATA; KERGOAT, 2007, p. 597, our translation).

One of the teachers brings a rather emphatic example about how machismo was reproduced in the family from the speech of her own father, who advised her to look for a rich husband so that she did not need to work, at least not formally. This episode remains marked in the awareness of how the world is disparate for those who are female, since, according to



the teacher herself, her brother did not receive the same "advice". This experience motivates the teacher to manifest himself before every sexist comment that resonates in the classroom, even when they appear in the form of "play".

A common factor observed in the focus group refers to the strategy observed by the participants in relation to dealing with these sexist games: rejecting such play publicly and drawing the attention of those who promoted it with a verbal warning with a high tone of voice. The fact that teachers use the same resource (a loud scolding) to deal with these issues of clash between boys and girls demonstrates that there is little variety in the arsenal of pedagogical strategies to deal with the gender issue. In this sense, the reason for many participants in this focus group prefer not to answer some questions. According to Madureira and Branco (2015), teachers and teachers have great difficulty in reflecting on gender issues, since it appears to be something abstract, outside their realities and exclusive to the academic environment. This thought is reflected in the lack of ability of teachers to deal with gender conflicts that are inherent in the school space, according to Avila *et al.* (2011, p. 291, our translation):

teachers are not yet prepared to deal with such controversial issues and assume in their daily professional life an ethical posture without being able to equate the tensions between their own ways of dealing with sexual education and the various expectations/evaluations that fall on their teaching practices, in particular, those of the person who performs the profession.

It is worth mentioning that a teacher, when commenting having been disrespected because of being a woman, decided to refer those responsible to the management, because at the moment it was the strategy, she was able to adopt. This circumstance dialogues with Madureira and Branco (2015) when the authors demonstrate that even when women have a professional position, they have to deal with traditional social expectations, which concern their role to be to be in a lower hierarchical position, and not to act professionally as equal.

Reciprocity in treatment

In the question "do you treat students and students equally?", half of the participants, including the two men, preferred not to answer, which was already to be imagined considering the difficulty of assuming their own limitations, something punctuated by Avila *et al.* (2011). The others said that they treat students with reciprocity, that is, that they treat students "in the same way they are treated." Although at first these quotes represent an apparent justice, since students and students will be treated in the same way they choose to



treat teachers, we must remember that we are faced with immature young people who experience daily various situations that are out of school knowledge, such as: family problems, hormonal changes, fights between classmates in the room, pressure for good grades and to enter the labor market etc. In this sense, it is difficult to expect that this being, which is bombarded by new information with each class that begins, will always be sensible in its considerations. That's where the teacher needs to perform his role as mediator.

In the article called *Reciprocity and welcoming in education - intentional actions in relation to knowledge* (LAFFIN, 2007), the researcher Maria Helena Laffin, although focused on the context of the EJA, explains that the "involvement of teaching work with the relational issue, as a first dimension of this work in mediation with knowledge" is fundamental to achieve success in the teaching-learning process. The work developed in the classroom, as in any other social interaction, is an essentially human process, and therefore marked by dialogues, conflicts, exchanges, negotiations, commitment and an affective relationship between students and teachers. Thus, the school's attitude of seeking only to build bonds only with those young people who dialogue with the "pattern of exemplary student", tends to strengthen learning inequalities if we think about the importance of affection for the construction of knowledge, as Laffin highlights (2007, p. 10, our translation):

thinking about a school that effectively considers young and adult subjects, a school that knows how to "teach considering the appreciation of individuality without constraining" is fundamental, especially when we see what teachers say about how young/adult subjects identify themselves when they are inserted in schooling processes.

It is worth noting that this situation of not treating any student differently, but rather the way one is treated, indicates that many attitudes of teachers in the context researched lack a deeper reflection, including attitudes that relate to the relationships of conviviality drawn with young people.

Affinity

This category was created from the unanimity among the teachers present on the day when the question "what criteria do you use to differentiate the treatment of young people?" was asked. The teachers said that they do not harm any students openly, but that they get closer and better treat those students with whom they can build a bond, either through contact on social networks, or through parallel conversations in the corridors, or through the proximity with which students and teachers are located on the classroom grounds.





Considering that a positive relationship between teacher-student is very important for the integral development of any student, because according to Barbosa *et al.* (2011), it is from the interaction with teachers that students acquire knowledge and that they strengthen psychosocial capacities that focus on strengthening self-esteem and the ability to make friends. Some teachers said they believe in the importance of bonding with students and even cite examples of how to do so. Such an occurrence, according to Barbosa *et al.* (2011), can have a positive impact on student learning and teachers' health:

a positive relationship with students can prevent disciplinary problems in the school environment and also *teacher stress* and *burnout*, as well as foster the professional development of teachers (Fraser & Walberg, 2005; Wubbels, 2005). When negative, the teacher-student relationship may be associated with academic and social poverty, school dropout, less cooperation in the classroom, negative school attitudes, less self-directed behavior, social isolation, feelings of loneliness and less engagement (Baker, 2006; Birch; Ladd, 1997) (BARBOSA *et al.*, 2011, p. 454, our translation).

In the research of Barbosa *et al.* (2011), which aimed to identify the perceptions of teachers regarding the teacher-student relationship, it was found that, with regard to gender, according to several studies, "the relationships between teachers and students are more conflicting and less positive when it comes to male students" (BARBOSA *et al.*, 2011, p. 454, our translation) while, as far as girls are, they "have more positive attitudes in the classroom and are more cooperative than boys" (BARBOSA *et al.*, 2011, p. 455, our translation). This scenario has already been presented here in this article through research conducted by Carvalho in 2000.

According to the articles that refer to this work, it is the girls who most meet the ideal student profile designed by the teachers. In this text, it has already been commented on teachers believe that girls give less work than boys, and that therefore they need to fight less with them.

Scolding, scolding and more scolding

The curious name of this category comes from an issue already raised in this summary part of the analysis: teachers use, as a resource, the use of drills to deal with conflicts that relate to gender issues. Even with the scolding, the discussions in the focus group denote that the situations of machismo seem to be recurrent, which should motivate teachers to think of a different way of dealing with the problem. Here, there are limits in the methodology used, because the discussions were not able to generate critical reflections of the participants. In this



sense, the speech of Madureira and Branco (2015), about the importance of embracing the reflection on gender issues, however difficult it may be, is rescued.

We observed great difficulty in most teachers in reflecting on gender issues. The concept of gender seems far from its reality, and remains restricted to the academic universe. While academic discussions about gender reach an increasingly sophisticated theoretical-conceptual level, in schools the conception that masculinities and femininities are cultural constructions is still a distant conception. Therefore, thinking about gender issues in a more abstract way becomes a complicated task for many teachers (MADUREIRA; BRANCO, 2015, p. 581, our translation).

Aware of the urgency of discussing gender and diversity at school, the State Department of Education of São Paulo formulated, in October 2014, a guiding document called *Sexual and Gender Diversities: a guide to methodologies and activities for the family school program*, which provides explanations about what gender identity is, what is biological sex, what sexual orientation, in addition to proposing educational practices, through conversation wheels, film screening, shared readings about diversity, human rights and awareness about the risks of *bullying*. This is a 73-page digital archive available to public school teachers through the "Intranet"³ portal, a kind of social network only for teachers in the State of São Paulo.

Of the teachers participating in this research, however, none of them knew this document. Considering the scarcity of pedagogical strategies that the participants of this research demonstrated to have when dealing with machismo, it is a pity that the São Paulo Department of Education does not invest in the dissemination of this file to education professionals throughout the state network, because it

assumes that the school lives with multiplicity of subjects with different ideas and elements, such as class, gender, color/race, ages, sexualities, ethnicities, nationalities, among others. In this sense, educational practice should be guided by coping with all forms of discrimination including homophobia, machismo and sexism. At first, the guide presents a brief theoretical introduction addressing some concepts and reflections on sexual and gender diversity. Then, a series of practical activities that can facilitate the understanding of diversity from vulnerabilities in the area of rights and health. We present suggestions for playful and participatory activities, favoring the reflection and deconstruction of prejudices and discriminations with regard to people who experience gender and sexuality differently from the normative perspectives (SÃO PAULO, 2014, p. 7, our translation).

Thus, it is extremely important to strengthen the debate about gender in school and society as a whole, including when conducting research, to combat machismo that, in

³ Available: <https://www.intranet.educacao.sp.gov.br/>. Access: 02 Jul. 2021.



harmony with the speeches of the teachers participating in this research, has been present since school age, and ends up building hierarchies that place women in a position of vulnerability, even when she is a teacher, as happened with a participant who claimed to have been disrespected because of her gender.

It was observed that most participants demonstrated to see gender as something strictly biological, although some also relate it to cultural and social characteristics. The conclusions show that among the participants there is no single and generalized explanation about what comes to be gender, whose meaning, even in the literature, has shown to be changing over time (BUTLER, 2017).

The analysis indicated that the teachers liked and wanted to continue discussing gender, especially when they found that it is a component that is expressed in our life from childhood to old age, and whose expressions and meanings are articulated with race, with class, with regionality, with religion, and with other cultural characteristics. Remembering that in recent times there was the rise of projects such as Escola Sem Partido, which made possible any discussion about gender and sexuality, it is interesting to show that there are many professionals who stand up against censorship.

Even in the face of specificities, many common statements were perceived. There are teachers who think that girls are naturally more mature and more behaved than boys, while there are others who argue that it is not possible to generalize, because behavioral characteristics vary between the sexes. There are professionals who defend the idea that society is organized in a way that puts women in a situation of disprestige before men, while some think just the opposite. The research ratifies, therefore, Tortato (2015) with regard to the relevance of the school as a space for establishing or constructing hierarchies related to gender.

What also happened was that the characteristics shared by some profiles may represent certain practices and worldviews. Women teachers who are younger and graduated tended to demonstrate more progressive attitudes in order to position themselves as combative people to inequalities between men and women, and who are articulated by an equitable society, whereas male teachers, who were older and who had a lower level of education, they did not demonstrate combative practices to episodes of machismo or inequality in favor of one of the genders. On the contrary, they occasionally naturalized stereotypes, such as finding the most fragile girls and the strongest boys, and informed the adoption of controversial acts, such as asking only for girls to clean the room or just for the boys to carry the books. These findings



dialogue with Scott (1995), since women teachers expressed more intensely the desire to focus on power relations that are disadvantageous to them.

However, not all data may be interpreted as mentioned above. A teacher who, according to the focus group, had traditional customs, such as considering girls "naturally" more mature, is the same who, at another time, played practices considered innovative, such as rejecting sexist comments in the classroom and seeking to approach each student affectively, investigating their personal dramas and family issues. This paradox denotes that the teaching subjects' express contradictions: they can sometimes assume a more combative attitude towards machismo and, at another moment, reinforce gender stereotypes.

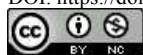
The master's thesis (SOUSA, 2020) that gave rise to this article indicates that it is opportune to think of study offers on the floor of each school. In this sense, continuing education courses on gender and diversity in school would be interesting to determine the eyes of teachers in the face of an issue that many neglect or do not know how to deal with.

During the focus group, a teacher commented that she was verbally disrespected because of her gender, just as a teacher claimed to have had to separate a boy and a girl who were physically assaulting each other. Thinking about these occasions, which any teacher with experience in basic education could report, guidelines for the discussion of gender in schools would strengthen initiatives, observed in this research, which teachers seek to establish in order to combat misogyny and inequality in establishments that, we remember, are the responsibility of the State.

The information obtained by the research attests that the gender understandings expressed by the participating teachers often find their roots in the family. A teacher even gives as an example a close relative to say that the goal of a woman's life has to be a good marriage, not a professional career. Such visions are passed from father to son and are present in contemporary times, as seen in an account of a student who complained about having to clean the house alone since the brother, being a man, should not help.

Therefore, when we think that the school is a place that society has determined as the occurrence of learning, it is possible to imagine its potential in the task of raising reflections about the gender roles that are valued as propitious. To the extent that schools, and other social institutions, are unable to consolidate spaces in which our visions can be (un)constructed and (re)constructed, the tendency is that we continue thinking with past generations did.

This research allowed us to understand that the school harbors an intense discursive dispute about the roots of gender inequalities and favored some reflections on the positions of





teachers. The school can be both an environment that ratifies gender inequality and can question the traditional way of conceiving it, confirming the literature that expresses the existence of distinct social groups that plead to understandings about gender inequalities. Those who advocate a break in the traditional way of facing cultural differences between men and women need to work together with those who prefer to maintain what is traditionally established and, in this interaction, a plurality of views, sometimes antagonistic, occurs, which are characteristic of an institution that is also diverse. Other research is needed to better understand this diversity and what kind of subject it can build. This condition seems to contradict a little the literature used here: the school seems not only to be a reproductive of gender inequality, there are subjects in it and situations that contradict it.

Final considerations

This article aims to discuss perceptions that teachers of a public school in the State of São Paulo have about gender issues. From the reading of references in the area of gender and education, it was noticed that society has different expectations in relation to the roles that men and women should manifest, and that *subjects may be bullied* when moving from the expected performances.

In this research, a focus group was used for data collection and hermeneutics-dialectics was used as a perspective of data interpretation. Due to this perspective, it was possible to observe, in the data, moments of reflection and questioning of the subjects regarding their positions, and also allowed the researcher to explore the contradictions expressed in the views of subjects historically situated, in a social space riddled with conflicts between social groups with different expectations of what is expected of the behavior of men and women.

During the period of interaction with the pedagogical team of the school where the research took place, it was possible to live with a very plural group regarding age, time of experience, level of training and pedagogical postures. Some teachers have shown to be more rigid and others more permissive in the way of dealing with situations of indiscipline, regardless of whether they come from boys or girls.

From what was determined in the transcription of the focus group, it can be said that the school is a space where the views on gender are expressed and confronted, even among the students, who, although they were not the focus of this research, have their voices reflecting in the teachers' speech.





With regard to the positions of teachers, sometimes contradictory, sometimes ratifying a naturalized and biological perspective, sometimes denoting desire to break with patterns that they consider to be inappropriate and unfair, it is not misleading to say that they seem to be situated in a context of tensions, marked by the presence of flags and references of both more traditional postures of understanding the differences between man and woman, as well as postures that question the naturalization of such differences from more conservative social groups. It was also observed that older male teachers were inclined to more traditional positions, and that younger and graduate women were given the fairest positions regarding the recognition of gender equality.

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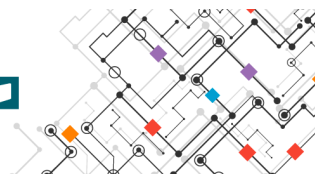
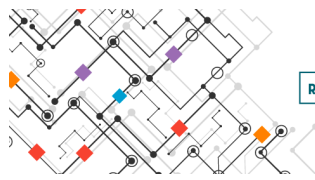
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