

***Follow me, the good ones:* trouble and sorrow in confronting heteronormativity in the school environment¹**

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Abstract

This paper addresses the challenges one faces when attempting to change the basis of inequality in school associated with attributes of gender and sexuality. Ethnographic procedures are utilized to describe school scenes in three public schools in the city Porto Alegre, which are the stage where actions self-rated as intended to “fight homophobia”, “respect towards diversity” and “inclusion of all”. The aim is not evaluate public policies, since there is little span of field work, instead the reflection on what has been observed and reported is important as an input for monitoring and assessing actions, as well as to stimulate theoretical thinking about the conceptual categories on which such actions are based. The text is structured in three units. The first one deals with the complex conceptual and political discussion that currently involves categories such as difference, diversity, inclusion, equality and inequality, in articulation with the specific field categories: genders, sexuality and masculinities in the school environment. The second unit brings the ethnographic method for school scenes, assigning the context of the schools and groups of students. The third unit narrates some scenes and articulates their contents with theoretical issues and guidelines of the public policies currently in force for the subject. The main hypothesis developed herein is that school actions seem to praise diversity without touching the status of heteronormativity, which adversely affects its outreach.

Keywords

School – Heteronormativity – Gender diversity – Sexual diversity – Public policies.

I- I thank the teachers and students from the schools involved in the research, as well as the interns from the bachelor's course on History at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, always available to talk with the researcher.

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Sigam-me os bons: apuros e aflições nos enfrentamentos ao regime da heteronormatividade no espaço escolar¹

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Resumo

Este artigo aborda os desafios enfrentados quando se busca modificar os regimes de desigualdade na escola envolvendo atributos de gênero e sexualidade. Utiliza-se a etnografia de cenas escolares em três escolas públicas de Porto Alegre, as quais são palco de ações autoclassificadas como de “combate à homofobia”, “respeito pela diversidade” e “inclusão para todos”. Não se trata de fazer uma avaliação das políticas públicas, uma vez que há pouca envergadura do trabalho de campo, mas a reflexão sobre o que foi observado e relatado tem importância como insumo de monitoramento e avaliação das ações, bem como para estimular a reflexão teórica acerca das categorias conceituais em que tais ações se baseiam. O texto está estruturado em três unidades. Na primeira, percorre-se parte da complexa discussão conceitual e política que hoje envolve categorias como diferença, diversidade, inclusão, igualdade e desigualdade, em articulação com as categorias do campo específico: gênero, sexualidade e masculinidades no espaço escolar. Na segunda unidade, explicita-se o método de etnografia de cenas escolares, situando o contexto das escolas e dos grupos de alunos. A terceira narra algumas cenas, articulando seu conteúdo com questões de ordem teórica e com diretrizes de políticas públicas vigentes na área. A principal hipótese aqui desenvolvida é de que as ações escolares parecem querer valorizar a diversidade sem tocar no estatuto da heteronormatividade, o que compromete seu alcance.

Palavras-chave

Escola – Heteronormatividade – Diversidade de gênero – Diversidade sexual – Políticas públicas.

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That's it, that's it!

This paper analyzes the challenges one finds when seeking to change the basis of inequality in the school regarding attributes of gender and sexuality. For such, snapshots were taken of reactions to programs implemented in the educational scenario, based on an ethnographic approach to school scenes in three public schools in the city of Porto Alegre. These institutions serve as the stage where actions intended to “fight homophobia”, “respect towards diversity” or, also, “inclusion of all”¹ take place. My aim is not to evaluate public policies, since the field work has had so far little span and, mainly, because I do not examine the direct connection between the actions performed in the schools and the students’ speeches captured by the ethnography. But reflecting about these issues can be valuable as an input to monitor and assess the actions, as well as to stimulate theoretical thinking about the conceptual categories and strategies on which such actions are based. The text presents elements making up the path of recent research by the author, in search of certain themes as triggered by the ethnographic method used to portray school scenes, as one may see in Seffner (2011a, 2011b), Ferrari and Seffner (2010) and Seffner (2010b).

Consistent with the research tradition I’m involved with in PPGEDU/UFRGS,² the discussion focuses on the cultural processes of production, maintenance and modification of masculinities, with a special emphasis on the relationship between masculinity, body, and sexuality. The ethnographically-described scenes address mainly the speech and attitudes of boys in the school, directly narrated to the researcher by the boys themselves or by teachers, having in mind the aspects that are necessarily relational in the issues of gender and sexuality. The boys, when talking about their masculinity, are also

1- The use of double quotation marks indicates terms, expressions and speeches by informants or by the media orally collected or written down from placards or written materials found in the schools researched.

2- Post-Graduate Program in Education of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, research line: Education, Sexuality, and Gender Relations.

constructing attributes of femininity in relation to which, in general, they want to show a distance or superiority. This research did not aim at checking the veracity of the sexual orientations mentioned. The statements by the students were taken as ways of saying something about themselves fully valid, so the self-assigned identity of each person was taken into consideration.

The approach is structured in three units. The first one goes along with part of the conceptual and political debate involving difference, diversity and inclusiveness, in articulation with the specific field categories: gender and sexuality in the school environment. The second unit brings the ethnographic method of school scenes, describing the context of the schools. The third unit narrates schools scenes and articulates their contents with theoretical issues and with the guidelines of public policies currently in force for the subject. As title and subhead of the text, I utilize phrases of Mexican TV character *Chapolín Colorado*.³ The reason to use the famous expressions of this character reveals the origin of misunderstandings and troubles which, as I see it, surround many actions intended to fight inequality and homophobia in the school environment: even though they are performed with excellent intentions, sometimes they lead to gawky results, and this may result from the fact that the good intentions contain in themselves something naïf towards the mechanisms of heteronormativity.

And what do the eyes look like?

They are blue, a little greenish, maybe a little grayish, but in fact they are rather black

In structuring the actions intended to fight homophobia in the school environment, a conceptual network is articulated which involves categories such as difference, diversity, inclusiveness, equality, inequality, and visibility, in association with the specific field categories:

3- Hero in a Mexican TV series, well-known in Brazil, interpreted by actor Roberto Gómez Bolaños.

gender, sexuality and masculinities in the school environment. Such environment, such actions come up as an interface with other concepts: curriculum, learning, assessment, disciplines, pedagogical projects, teachers, students,⁴ public school, citizenship, progression, retention, lay nature of the State etc. Beyond concepts taken from the humanities, identity, diversity, difference, and inclusiveness are political battle-flags of a number of social movements, and they also have recently become key words in the design of public policies in education. Gender and sexuality issues – in the last years, mainly those related to male homosexuality – have been heavily politicized and lead to debates which oppose organized groups, political leaders, United Nations guidelines and public policies, resulting in a variety of impacts onto the public school system. Such inflation in the use of these words raises many analytical challenges, especially in the field of education, where political demands are a major stake. Universal access to basic schooling, as a result of a mandatory constitutional clause set forth in 1988, also contributed to increase visibility of new audiences in the school, such as male and female students that claim to be homosexual, male and female teachers who disclose the fact that they are transvestite and transexual,⁵ triggering new loggerheads. This is the guideline of the republican school: a public place where differences must be negotiated.

The conversion of these concepts in political battle flags causes a crisis of meanings, inflamed refusals or enthusiastic endorsements. For many, inclusiveness is a goal to be reached at any cost; for others, it is a terrible trap of normalization, which makes differences disappear together with the originality of each social actor. For some, the affirmative statement of diversity is a trap and a sign that the struggles are weakening; for others, it means that social

agents are free and independent, that they want to speak up and they no longer take the attributed dictated by those looking down upon them. For some, highly heterogeneous classrooms in the public schools adversely affect quality; for others, only heterogeneity will be able to be the grounds for an inclusive reference of quality. Historically, schools has been molded by principles of homogeneousness, and many believe that one can only teach productively in a homogeneous class, where children are the same age, they share the same cultural background, they have the same religion, they are all heterosexual, from the same social class, come from families with the same “structure” and, therefore, they would all learn “in the same pace” and “in the same manner”.

For most teachers, diversity in the classroom is a huge challenge: students of different ages (as it is often the case in classes intended for the education of youth and adults); students from a variety of religious backgrounds (who not necessarily identify themselves with the crucifix above the blackboard); male and female students who are not all of them heterosexual (therefore, they do not necessarily express affection and desires in the same way); students who do not necessarily have the same color of skin (and who, for example, might have quite different opinion about affirmative actions in the access to higher education); students who do not necessarily come from families with the same profile (and who perhaps would not draw a family according to commercial TV advertisements, as they might have siblings from a different mother or father, all of them living together in the same family); students who do not necessarily belong to the same juvenile cultures (they may be sitting next to each other with different musical tastes such as funk, rock, samba, being either worshippers or enemies of Lady Gaga, drug users and members of the “health generation”).

All this would be simple if they were merely concepts, but as I have already stressed above,

4- Gender declension was not utilized in an intensive manner along this paper. This is done in some parts of the text, as a periodical warning to the male and female reader that it is reference to teachers and students of both sexes.

5- I recommend the research note presented in Reidel (2012).

talking about diversity (“respect towards diversity” or “reducing diversity”) is also talking about battle flags, and one should not forget that behind the idea of inclusiveness there is a whole world of possibilities: must everyone be included? But some seem to “deserve more” inclusiveness than others. Will it not be necessary that everyone shows an “effort” to be included? Or does it suffice to be a child and be entitled to go to school? Some seem to make “an effort to be excluded”; would it not be the case of withdrawing them from school, after all, they do not want to study and they are in the classroom just to “mess up”? All the previous questions become quite more complicated when checked against gender and sexuality issues. One thing it to talk about inclusiveness and respect toward differences when disabled people are at stake, those who have special needs, wheelchair users, students who are deaf or visually impaired, students with some cognitive problems. In these cases, even when one acknowledges the challenges in learning and permanence at school, the general and unanimous opinion stands for the inclusiveness of all. After all, those students cannot be “blamed” for the aspect that makes them different.

But when you deal with a boy who wants to dress like a girl and who does not like football in the physical education class, or when you handle a girl who clearly expresses her affection for other girls, the belief in inclusiveness is shaken and two standpoints may come up: there is either an effort to exclude these different students because they cause of a lot disturb in the school environment or a demand that they must “fit in” and “make an effort to have an adequate behavior” so that they can enjoy the “benefits” of inclusiveness, which is perceived as a meritorious act, but not as a right. Issues associated with the diversity in gender and sexuality walk hand in hand in the school – as well as in society at large – with the moral and religious values, and this explains why there are situations which I consider of almost moral panic: if Robert, someday in a kindergarten class, when picking up a costume, got himself into a dress, the teacher sees in this scene the

first step towards homosexuality, and panic settles in. There is a feeling that something must be done, because everyone knows that “as the twig is bent, so grows the tree”. If a first-grade girl insists in playing football or, even worse, if she plays football very well, nobody seems to remember that there might be a future Marta,⁶ but only thing one sees is “truck-driver type, big dyke, lesbian” who will soon after hug and grab the other girls, perhaps even the female teachers!

The concepts that structure the actions taken by the program intended to appreciate diversity and fight homophobia are located in a battlefield. Within the scope of this paper, it is not possible to give precise definitions of all the concepts aforementioned,⁷ but an approach to its essential aspects is provided as follows. The concept of identity is usually utilized in its cultural dimension, that is, as an identity culturally constructed within a frame of power relations, in reference to gay men, lesbian women, transgender, bisexual or intersex people. However, the way this concept circulates in the speech and in the documents makes it more favorably utilized with more essentialist attributes, either because it is linked to a biological identity (in statements such as “homosexuals have a peculiar brain design”, “homosexuals are born this way” or “homosexuality is present in all animal groups”), or because it is linked to a psychological identity (in statements such as “homosexuals are the fruit of specific family configurations”), or because there is a cultural essentialism which, although mentioning cultural (and, therefore, historical) constructions, states things such as “homosexuality exists since the Ancient Greece” or “we have records showing that Indians practiced homosexuality before Brazil was discovered by Cabral”.

Notably in the discourse of activists, some sort of strategic essentialism is claimed

6- Marta Vieira da Silva, Brazilian football player, several times ranked as the best female footballer in the world.

7- To have this discussion enlarged upon, see the works of Junqueira (2009) and Ribeiro and Santos (2011).

(MISKOLCI, 2010): at the same time that one acknowledges that identity is cultural, transitory, historically situated and results from interpellations, there is an appeal to a certain essentiality in homosexuality, with the purpose of unifying under this battle flag a variety of individuals (women, men, black, white, rich, poor, atheist, evangelical, afro-religious, young, old, thin, fat, good-looking, ugly, top, bottom, flexible, etc.) so that the claim becomes stronger and leaves the obvious divergences in the background as they may exist between young and old gay men, poor or rich, etc. Part of the concepts which form the grounds of fighting homophobia in the schools has a close relation with the LGBT struggle in Brazil and, as a result, it may be enhancing contingent political logics, experiencing a lability that makes possible that one same word is called blue, green, red, black or golden, which explains the title of this topic.

Intertwined with the notion of identity, we have the concept of difference. It is understood as a cultural process of assigning power – by mobilizing the divisions of race, class, skin color, generation, gender, sexuality, religious background, among others – depending on the context under analysis, where some differences may have a stronger meaning than others. In Brazil, we seldom need to indicate where we belong in terms of Brazilian nationality, but this may become important when we are in another country. Marking the difference in sexual orientation – straight or gay – may emerge as something relevant depending on the context, as we will be able to see in the scenes analyzed as follows. Identity and difference are connected with the status of heteronormativity, understood as the rule that articulates the notions of gender and sexuality by establishing as natural certain coherence between sex (born male, born female), gender (became a man, became a woman) and sexual orientation (if a man, he will express emotional and sexual interest towards women and vice-versa). Such binary and dichotomous model is seen as natural and for many it seems to

be inscribed in the “order of things”, and that is why individuals who do not recognize themselves in it are perceived as sick, deviant, disturbed, confused, sinner, etc.

Examining the structural frame of the public policies intended for inclusiveness in education, we may distinguish three movements (PINTO, 1999): naming, acknowledging, including. In compliance with that, when composing many school programs, we find naming efforts (define or clarify what is homosexuality, where it comes from, its origin, what is to be a lesbian, what being a transgender person is about etc.), a set of acknowledgment strategies (what they do, what they are like, what their problems are, how they organize themselves, what are their needs) and inclusiveness mechanisms (acceptance, appreciation, respect, adherence to human rights, let them live, including them in the benefits already granted to the rest of population, protection against assaults, secure their permanence in school, guarantee the right to learn, etc.). Inclusiveness policies obviously include procedure of finding, policing and controlling, even when conducted with good intentions. And this generates a number of effects, it is perceived by students and teachers and causes unusual situations, what is captured in scenes ethnographically described.

All my movements are coldly calculated.

Considerations are due here about the ethnographic method to register school scenes and about the context of the schools and groups of students. Observing, describing and reflecting about school scenes are tasks that positively impact the construction of the teaching experience. We may think experience not as what happens but as what we do with what happens to us. Thus, teaching for many years may not add to the teaching experience. Experience arises from reflecting about the events of such trajectory. Part of these events is made of scenes that the teacher watches in the

school environment and which may be good to think over in regard of some issues, as well as to establish some kind of comprehension about his/her own practice. Scenes are the data that feed the research and, for such, they need to be adequately written down, discussed, analyzed and placed in connection with the academic readings and debates. The classroom may be seen as a laboratory where the teacher proceeds to collect scenes, situations, which he or she writes down in a field journal for future review. Scenes may be of all types: disciplinary, associated with learning issues, connected with sociability among students, involving political opinions of students about current topics, etc. This paper is an effort to provide an account of and analyze scenes where negotiations of gender and sexuality attributes are involved.

The method of observing, sorting out and recording in a descriptive manner the scenes is supported by discussions whose reference can be found in cultural ethnography and is given with more details in Seffner (2010a). In short, observing and writing down the adequate record for further review require some procedures, including the following: developing the notion of estrangement toward the schools events; establishing the directions of observation (in the case of this paper, gender and sexuality issues); maintaining an observation routine and a field journal; descriptions of the context and of the major actors involved in the scene; attention to the recurring elements in the scenes, as well as to unexpected events, novelties or surprises; attention to delimiting the scenes, since their very beginning until they are finalized.

Deeming the teacher as an attentive observer of school scenes is an attempt to add value to the teaching knowledge and the emergence of a researching teacher. Teaching knowledge, in agreement with Tardif (2003), means the set of learned elements that the everyday routine of teaching provides and which, in general, are not systematized or appreciated because they are associated with the practical dimension of various sectors

of knowledge such as: the management of a class of students; strategic pedagogical and assessment procedures (or those that the teacher perceives as the most productive in the classroom); the always complicated negotiation of discipline and how school duties are to be performed; learning slangs, musical tastes, cultural references from students. In summary, it is a set of knowledge that make up a teacher know-how, which help to find practical solutions and on which there might (or might not) be printed the strong mark of authorship (in the case, for example, of teachers who are in search of their own teaching style).

Unfortunately, high-school teachers seldom convert what happens to them into a reason to think over. In general, everything that happens in the school and, especially, in the classroom cooperates, to feed the circuit of complaint, and this takes over the room meant for thought (FERNANDEZ, 1994). As a result, most teachers simply go on “suffering” the year of teaching, never converting what happens to them into experience. A teaching career with a minimum of professional and personal quality should involve the training of a researching teacher capable of reflecting about his/her own practice. If the teacher does not feel that he or she produces knowledge, he or she will never be able to generate a good teaching experience (as well as the teacher who does not like reading will never be able to effectively contribute to encourage his/her students to read). Concisely, I perform my role of researcher by opening up my eyes and ears whenever I go to the schools and I experience moments of supervision of teaching internships, and I collect every kind of scene selected from some specific theme of interest.⁸

8- I am a professor in the Bachelor's course of History and I work in disciplines where guidance for teaching internship is provided. Every semester, I have the opportunity of supervising students directly by attending one or two of their classes. Thus, I go to the school in a previously scheduled time, I sit down in the bottom of the classroom and I observe the intern student in his/her teaching work. Such visits also give me the opportunity to wander about the school building, talk with teachers, observe school rituals, moments of break, students going in and out of the school, etc. All the scenes described in this paper were directly watched by me and written down in my field journal.

The scenes I mentioned in this paper were collected in three public schools in the city of Porto Alegre, two of them located in the central area and the third one located in a distant neighborhood. All of them have students from lower middle class. One school provides only the senior (three last) years of high-school, another has only the first eight grades and the third school is a complete high-school institution. The three schools implement actions to fight homophobia, to appreciate gender and sexual diversity and respect for human rights, all of them in compliance with the guidelines set forth by the federal *Program Brazil without Homophobia*.⁹ Along the years, the work developed in the schools went through several interruptions, due to the transfer of teachers, interest or lack of interest by teachers, occasional partnerships with LGBT non-governmental organizations, adherence to projects by the State or Federal government and availability of funds and instructional materials. Anyway, one may say that in the last five years the three schools have always witnessed some actions and campaigns associated with the topic. Thus, posters, lectures given by guests and activities involving issues of gender, sexuality and human rights have been present in the everyday life of these three institutions, affecting the classes of students. The account of scenes provided here does not indicate the specific school where they took place, and the title is meant to emphasize the subject that is being dealt with. All student names are fictional. The language that describes the scenes is rather colloquial, as they follow from field journal.

I end this section by stressing its title, which discusses the methodology adopted in the research: “all my movements are coldly calculated”. Although writing down the scenes was thought of as methodology of ethnographic inspiration which operates with objectivity,

9- *Brazil without Homophobia: Program to Fight Violence and Discrimination against GLTB people and Promote Homosexual Citizenship*. Consists of a program devised by the federal government, under the Special Department of Human Rights. Information available (in Portuguese) at: <<http://www.sedh.gov.br/clientes/sedh/sedh/brasilem>>. Accessed on 12 June 2012

strictness and accuracy, the unforeseen events in a classroom have the flavor of the unexpected and surprise, and often drag the very researcher who, caught in the wake of contingencies, acts “more with luck than with judgment”, as puts it Chapolín Colorado, the TV character.

My wits have surely surprised you!

First scene: how the categories utilized in the instructional materials are re-processed by students and acquire new meanings to them, so that they might be adjusted to other logics. It was an agitated eighth-grade class, Monday morning. Yesterday we had a *GRENAL*¹⁰ match, which ended in a tie. Almost all boys and many girls wear T-shirts of either soccer team. Jokes, teases and the use of dirty words to link attributes of the game to sexual issues. The boys, especially, make use of sexual metaphors (*screw, stick, eat*) when mentioning what they intend to do with the adversaries, due to the fact that a new *GRENAL* match will happen in the next few days in order to decide the championship. A boy clearly more delicate and quiet – Diogo –, sitting exactly in front of the teacher’s desk, watches the whole scene without saying a word, and seems not to find an appropriate match in the classroom, particularly at this time, in which everyone making noise. It all happens while the intern teacher has his back to the class, writes a few instructions on the blackboard and does the roll call, and at the same time he talks to one or two students complaining about assignment grades. The class is a little “on its own”. I am sitting in the bottom of the classroom, surrounded by such turbulence. In a certain moment, a male student says: “we are going to do to with *Grêmio* rooters what Diogo likes to be done with him”. Everybody laughs, in complicity. Diogo most likely did not hear the comment, as he is sitting in the front row. Another student replies by saying “*Grêmio* rooters are going to

10- Classical soccer match in the State of Rio Grande do Sul, between *Grêmio* and *Internacional* (soccer teams).

be sexual minority in the next match”, referring to the fact that the next game will happen in *Internacional* stadium and, then, Grêmio supporters will be in the minority. Another boy says: “they do not stand for minorities there”. And everybody laughs. Another student adds a comment and says that “being the majority is awesome”, and still another says that “the good thing is being majority, always, and *Inter* is majority”, maybe referring to the fact that *Internacional* is a club with has more members than *Grêmio*. The intern teacher faces the class and starts talking about the subject he will address; the conversation is interrupted and is not resumed till the end of the class.

The notions of *majority* and *minority* are warlike metaphor, understood in the geopolitical perspective of attack and defense. Unlike what human rights programs insists on saying in the schools, this language is seized under a logic that values the belonging to a majority in order to oppress the minority. Another element present in this situation is the distance between what one says, what one does and what is appreciated within the school, and what prevails “in life out there”. As already largely addressed in educational literature – it is worth recalling classical works inspired by the thoughts of Paulo Freire, such as Ceccon (1991) –, a significant part of what is learned in school is seen as having no value in world “out there”, as well as an enormous part of knowledge and issues from the “world out there” does not gets in and is not problematized in the school. It might be the case, as show other scenes in the collection, that in the school environment these boys respect peers such as Diogo. But the minute they get out of the school building, another rule prevails. Part of what I have already seen in activities dedicated to appreciate respect for difference and attention to human rights brings a certain color of “politically correctness” and this prevents what is learned in the classroom to be taken outside of the school scenario, which likewise is not seen as a laboratory for the issues of life. Two

considerations may help modify this situation: highlight for analysis situations of the “world out there” which involve the majority, so that one is not a hostage of analyses about minority problems and showing the connections between the majority and the minority. In this scene, the category of minority – associated in a positive way to the notion of appreciating diversity in the majority of discourses and actions under the *Program Brazil without Homophobia* – has a new meaning assigned by the students, and it received a negative signal in opposition to the notion of majority, which was then seized positively.

Second scene: surprising strategies adopted to “contain” difference. I get earlier to observe my female intern teacher and so I am talking to two female teachers who, in the institution, are involved with actions to fight homophobia and who have already participated in seminars on gender and sexuality organized by the School of Education. One of them tells me about a “case” that happened with first-graders. The teacher in charge of the class called the mother of Felipe to talk about certain aggressive behaviors that were taking place in the relationship between her son and his classmates. Felipe quarreled a lot, attacked his mates, often called names, and disobeyed the teacher. In the same class there is another boy, Paulo, who likes to play with dolls together with the girls. As a surprise to the teacher, Felipe’s mother said her son was aggressive because of the presence of Paulo and his behavior deemed as feminine, since such situation makes her son very “upset and nervous”. This was comprehensible for her, as Paulo’s behavior was not normal. It is important to highlight that the situations of conflict involving Felipe did not occur in an exclusive or persecuting manner in relation to Paulo neither were they justified by Felipe in response to any behavior of Paulo. The two teachers who told me the case concluded that who in fact seemed to get “upset and nervous” was Felipe’s mother, due to the presence of Paulo in the classroom. Going further, Felipe’s mother insinuated that Paulo’s

delicate behavior was been “stimulated” in the school, due to posters mentioning the need to respect differences, appreciate diversity, human rights, etc. At this time in the conversation, the teacher in charge of the class entered the teachers’ room and was welcome in our chat. She added something we did not know. Months earlier, Paulo’s parents had talked to her and asked her help in stimulating Paulo to do “boys’ things”, thus preventing him to play so much with dolls and the conviviality with the girls. According to Paulo’s parents, it was the boy’s therapist who had asked to stimulate him toward male attitudes, and they were counting on the school’s help. At this time, the bell rang announcing the beginning of classes and we had to end the conversation.

The school has the custody of children during the period of classes. Teachers are reference adults who educate according to the guidelines of public policies. No matter they are often called “aunts” or “uncles”*, they are not part of the family and what is learned at school is not a mere continuation of what is taught at home. When topics involving moral issues are addressed, the collision with family morality is always there. Moreover, school is surrounded by other moral agents: priests and ministers, psychologists, politicians of all kinds, physicians, community leaders, journalists and reporters, etc. Many students experience a great deal of their emotional life in the school or in related activities, such as tours and parties. The school is a place where one tries on experimental basis what it is to be a man and to be a woman, and increasingly is the place where one expresses the diversity of sexual orientation. In a situation as in the case narrated above, we realize that surveillance is exerted onto school actions in the field of gender and sexuality, and how teachers are fenced both by the family and by other professionals, who wish they (the teachers) will

* Translation note: in the Brazilian culture, it is usual that teachers are affectionately called “aunt” or “uncle” especially by small children. There has been a lot of criticism about this.

adhere in “reinforcing” the orientation that is considered “correct” for the children, which is always heteronormativity. The school’s traditional role involves more refraining than stimulating such experimentation in terms of gender and sexuality. There is no way to establish programs to fight homophobia without bringing the families together, which is an outstanding challenge and, most of the time, this is not done. As a result, the outreach of school actions weakens as such actions are questioned by a number of social actors.

Third scene: talking about sexuality may cause visibility, and visibility may add personal vulnerability. After observing the class given by a female intern teacher, two teachers asked to talk to me. They had already invited some gay leaders to chat with and hand out materials to students. They said they felt quite awkward with certain results achieved with the actions they had conducted. In particular, they recalled that what had stimulated them to get involved with the topics was a history of name-calling and assaults occurring in the school, suffered both by some boys who had delicate manners and by some girls who had expressed the wish of dating other girls and who were widely criticized, mainly by the teachers, giving rise to situations which were very complicated and embarrassing in the school. According to these two teachers, such boys and girls who went through problems should be the ones mostly benefitting from all the actions that they, the teachers, had promoted in the school. As it were, they realize things do not happen quite this way. More than once, these assumedly “victims” of aggressions expressed they were uneasy with being so visible and reported facts that made the teachers sad. A student called Renato complained that in two situations, when the teachers invited a gay leader for a collective interview and they showed some videos with anti-homophobia campaigns, the classmates – both boys and girls – claimed that the event was happening “just because of Renato”. A friend of Renato’s told she would

“rather attend a math class than talk about stuff like that”, because, “after all, all that should be done was to punish the dudes who perpetrated the assaults, and that was it, and the teachers, instead of doing so, kept taking the students out the classes for lectures like this”, and this evidently embarrassed Renato very much. Moreover, the teachers showed the letter by another boy, Pedro, in which he talked about a series of problems he had to face in order to come out as a gay person; from the letter, the teachers highlighted a part of it in which they had talked with Pedro, which read as follows:

a scene that was really strong to me before I turned 17 years was when I had met a dude and he wanted something else and I said no, he threatened me and said he would tell everybody, I did not believe and didn't care about it so on another day I was going to school and yelled in the middle of the street and I felt terrible, I felt like digging a big hole on the ground to bury myself in it.

Very well, talking with Pedro about this scene in which his mate had yelled some insults to him, calling publicly a “homo, faggot, queer”, Pedro eventually told that, after some school activities about homosexuality, both boys and girls who were his classmates now brought up the subject in a scornful manner, even when mixed up with something friendly, as for example to learn details about his sexual life, “if he was a top, a bottom, if he sucked [penis], if he had already done this or that”. Thus, he said that he just wanted to sit quietly in a corner, so that no one would ask him anything, and that the talks were drowning him in a sea of questions.

Programs intended to fight homophobia do not manage to work separately from promoting the visibility of the homosexual identity. As a result, sometimes they capture individuals living under such identity. In other words, they may reduce one person to his/her sexual orientation. They cause a feeling that the individual must come out of the closet, and at

the same time they reiterate the invisibility of heterosexuals who remain in the shadow. One of the astuces of the norm is in the fact that it does not announce itself. So those who must explain and unveil themselves and answer the questions are those who “breach the norm”. Consequently, such individual is more and more captured by the attribute that makes him/her get away from the norm – in this case, the sexuality. We hardly can address the theme in a way that shows that the exception is part of the norm, that it is something “outside” that institutes the norm. We throw more light onto individuals who until then were often in a limbo, because they were weakly named. Due to the lectures and the presence of gay leaders in the school, what was foreseen becomes reinforced, and the subject is entirely captured by the discourse of sexuality. All his/her acts are now judged through this lens, and he or she is someone who more questions are thrown at, emphasizing his/her social standing. Clearly, the teachers were very upset as they realized that their work reinforced the difficulties faced by some boys in the school, although paradoxically they were no longer physically assaulted but they were always referred to by the others.

Fourth scene: masculinity trembles for little. I am in the bottom of the classroom, while the intern teacher projects slides and talks with self-assurance about the Spartan army, its organization and achievements. The class is mostly female, but at this moment they are silent. Reversely, the boys participate intensely, they talk about the movie *300*,¹¹ they ask questions, they say all kinds of things about wars, weapons, killings, they have fun with the pictures and the presentation, and the relative darkness in the classroom make them more comfortable and confident to make comments. Clearly, the subject causes a strong adherence by the boys and the passivity of the girls is remarkable. This great enthusiasm suffers a complete setback in less than fifteen seconds.

11- *300*. Directed by Zack Snyder. United States, 2007. The movie grants great highlight to the Battle of Thermopyles.

The intern teacher projects a gravure showing two Spartan soldiers hugging, holding their shields lying on the floor in front of them, with their helmets in hand, wearing just trunks, a broad cloak and sandals of war. The picture being projected, in loud and clear voice, he starts to talk about companionship in the Greek army and how the affection of a soldier for another helped win the battles. For the first time since the beginning of the class, one of girls say something and asks what was the difference between affection and love, because she thought the two soldiers were sweethearts. The intern teacher did not have the opportunity to answer the question because he was knocked down by several cries coming from the boys, now taking the opposite direction, that is, criticizing everything that was being shown. One student started saying that the entire Roman army was gay, and that was why Rome had fallen (and we should not forget that the class was about the Greeks but he misunderstood the whole point). Another student said that Obama had allowed gays to serve in the army, what he considered a joke. Other boys spoke all at the same time calling names, laughing, disdaining the soldiers, saying they were all “fags, queers, they swallow a dick”. In short, it was a real storm of scornful comments. When the wave of mockery finally cooled down, the girls who had asked the questions said: “but a minute ago were you not so fond of the Spartan army?” At this time, a number of other girls laughed in revelry. One of them went further: “the most handsome boys who study in this school in the evening are gay”. The boys were now in defense and clearly they did not know what to say, choosing to go on with the mockery, saying things that cannot be transcribed in here. The poor intern teacher, standing in front of the class, was completely at a loss of words until one of the girls said “please, continue the class, teacher, the boys were very agitated, now they will be very quiet”. Of course this caused a new wave of hissing, laughing, hands clapping in the desk. But as it came, everything cooled down, the

intern teacher went forward to present the next slide, which luckily displayed a map with places of battles and the distribution of the Greek cities, which allowed him to take the subject to another direction. Until the end of the class, several girls and boys asked questions, that is, the participation came to a balance in terms of gender. When the bell rang for the change of classes, one of the boys stood up, got his school bag was leaving when a classmate asked him: “aren’t you going to stay for the math class?” The boy then replied “I can’t stand these girls no more”, and went out through the door.

Confrontation between boys and girls in class happens all the time and everything can be a reason for that. That is, almost everything gets gendered (LOURO, 1999) in a classroom, which proves the statement by Scott (1995, p. 86) that the gender approach allows to perceive the social relations based on the differences perceived between the sexes, and this is an integral element of power relations. Heterosexual masculinity, which seems to be something in the order of nature, so solid, reveals evident weaknesses. In the case aforementioned, the attributes of boldness and virility that excited the male students had their signal inverted in less than one minute, and the boys defended themselves with what seems to be their most frequent strategy: mockery and uproar, through which they avoid bringing the debate to a rational level. Anyway, the strategy utilized by the girls ended up being more effective: the class became more democratically participative and the boys lost the lead in the comments, even in jokes they were making. The study of gender issues cannot leave aside what is discussed by Scott (1995): “gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power”. Much of what is found in manuals and workshops on gender in the school environment are long exercises to identify the male and female codes, which eventually emphasize the equality that should prevail in such relationships. Perhaps, it would be more efficient to start with gender and power relations that take shape all the time in a classroom and which trigger a number of confrontations.

Fifth scene: how the difference becomes an attribute, a “thing”, and is not understood in a relational perspective. Upon completing the observation of a class given by an intern teacher, I bumped into a teacher in the hall who often participates in the courses on gender and sexuality offered by our research group. She rushed to tell me an episode. After conducting activities in 9th-grade class with materials produced in one of the homophobia-fighting programs, a student named Arthur, who is clearly abused by others because he is more delicate, came to talk to her and complained that, once the activities are over, his classmates in addition to the jokes they already played on him, had added an extra one. Utilizing the slogan in one of the posters (“appreciate the difference”), they would repeatedly say in the class “appreciate Arthur”. The teacher also mentioned that the situation ended up involving one of the literature teachers, who is also the object of jests by some students because is openly gay, and who is now the target of jokes such as “appreciate the literature teacher”.

A tangible outcome of the lengthy period of affirmation of the identity policy we are now living in Brazil is in the fact that the difference has just the intent of building a new identity. I am a man who likes other men, then this difference acts quickly to produce another identity, which is then catalogued, is assigned a name and attributes, it becomes something “naturalized”. The notion that identity is relational remains in the background, it is not problematized. Certainly, identity is marked by difference, but is cannot be reduced to it, since identity is the position of an individual which results from interpellations (WOODWARD, 2000). The game of power which involves norm, identity and difference ends up hidden. The new identity is put in an intense visibility, together with its attributes, its characteristics, its ways of being. One must resume here the astuce of the norm in not expressing itself. The heterosexual individual is not seen as different, but it simply utilizes the difference of the “other” as a synonym

of identity, impoverishing the possibilities of involving all stakeholders in the discussion that produces positions of the self.

As a conclusion, some aspects must be highlighted. The first one has to do with the strong component - appreciation of diversity - that one can see in the scenes in terms of what students and teachers say and, likewise, in materials produced under programs such as *Brazil without Homophobia*. Although there are encouraging data, we realize (in connection with post-identity theories and with the productivity of actions) that including new contents and new characters in the school is not enough. The acceptance of plurality is an important step, but it is necessary to discuss how the difference is articulated and maintained from the perspective power, as it is through power that situations of inequality are created and maintained. In general, what arises from the school scenes, which in part characterize the discourses operating with the concept of diversity, is the fact that the discussion does not go “further” than appreciating the multiple, the diverse, the plural dimensions, thus avoiding to go beyond a defense on behalf of accepting diversity, of demonstrating the wealth contained in diversity and of deepening what has been called the policy of identities. What the scenes and documents reveal to be poor are the strategies to fight the basis of heteronormativity or compulsory heterosexuality.

Heteronormativity is perceived because it articulates disciplinary and control devices upon the body of individuals and upon the populations (FOUCAULT, 1977, 1985). Those who allegedly “escape” the norm are necessary in order to outline its limits, its possibilities and penalties. Nobody is outside the norm, although one may be in confrontation with the norm, as one can only establish what is normal and desirable (for example, the heterosexual student) if we keep in mind what is not normal and desirable (the homosexual student). We realize that most of the actions undertaken do not cooperate to make the norm explicit. The invisibility of the norm is an important

condition for its effectiveness because, being invisible, the norm is silent about the mechanisms that make us assume some identities (the heterosexual gender identity, for example) as behaviors that need not speak of themselves, they need not to be problematized. Heteronormativity is not challenged and, as a result, the discourse that praises diversity seems to intend to coexist with this norm, and this explains some situations that are rather paradoxical as accounted for in the scenes. There is a ceaseless worry in finding the “explanation” of why people live by this or that gender or sexual orientation, and this worry never turns out to be an attempt to explain heteronormativity, a concept which, moreover, is hardly found in the proposals of action, in the

materials produced and the in the accounts of the people involved in the scenes. Most of the time, those who are “different” are called on to speak about themselves, to express their desires, or are narrated by the lecturer especially invited by the school. On the other hand, those who are “normal” do not need to speak, and few are the ones who care to problematize the gender norm, that is, heteronormativity. The purpose of this paper is not to devalue the actions that are currently developed in the schools with the aim of fighting homophobia. My intention was to raise questions to think over and the main question is: the actions cannot remain captured by the astuce of the norm which says nothing about itself, the action must incite the norm speak of itself.

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