

School conflicts involving sexual and gender diversity based on the experience of undergraduate students in Pedagogy

Conflitos escolares envolvendo a diversidade sexual e de gênero com base na experiência de graduandos/as em Pedagogia

Conflictos escolares que involucran diversidad sexual y de género a partir de la experiencia de estudiantes de Pedagogía

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ABSTRACT

Our objective was to identify and map school conflicts involving sexual and gender diversity reported by undergraduate students in pedagogy at a public university in São Paulo. Two sessions of the focus group technique were applied in two classes (A and B) of the third year of the participant pedagogy course, with one session in each class. In the sessions, the undergraduates reported conflicts involving sexual and gender diversity that they experienced or witnessed in the university internship or in their own schooling. To identify and distinguish the conflicts, the feminist literature of gender studies was used. There were 15 different types of conflicts reported. The conflicts supported previous findings about gender and sexuality conflicts at school. We suggest, from as early as the university internship, supervision work that can guide the undergraduates regarding the conflicts experienced in this period of initial formation.

Keywords: Gender. Sexuality. Initial Teacher Formation. pedagogy. Sexual and Gender Diversity.

RESUMO

Objetivou-se identificar e mapear conflitos escolares envolvendo a diversidade sexual e de gênero relatados por graduandos/as em pedagogia de uma universidade pública paulista. Recorreu-se à aplicação de duas sessões de grupo focal em duas turmas (A e B) do terceiro ano do curso de pedagogia participante, sendo uma sessão em cada turma. Nas sessões, os/as graduandos/as relataram conflitos envolvendo a diversidade sexual e de gênero que experienciaram ou testemunharam no estágio escolar universitário obrigatório e/ou remunerado ou em sua própria escolarização. Para a identificação e distinção dos conflitos, apoiou-se na literatura feminista dos estudos de gênero. Foram 14 diferentes tipos de conflitos relatados. Os conflitos apoiaram constatações precedentes sobre conflitos de gênero e sexualidade emergidos na escola. Sugere-se, desde o estágio universitário, um trabalho de supervisão que possa orientar os/as graduandos/as quanto aos conflitos experienciados nesse período de formação inicial.

Palavras-chave: Gênero. Sexualidade. Formação Inicial Docente. Pedagogia. Diversidade Sexual e de Gênero.

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RESUMEN

El objetivo es identificar y mapear los conflictos escolares relacionados con la diversidad sexual y de género denunciados por estudiantes de pregrado en Pedagogía de una universidad pública de São Paulo. Se aplicaron dos sesiones de grupos focales en dos clases (A y B) del tercer año del curso de Pedagogía participante, una sesión en cada clase. Los estudiantes relataron conflictos relacionados con la diversidad sexual y de género que vivieron o presenciaron en la pasantía universitaria o en su propia escuela. Para identificar y distinguir los conflictos se apoyó en la literatura feminista de Estudios de Género. Se reportaron 15 tipos diferentes de conflictos. Los conflictos apoyaron hallazgos previos sobre conflictos de género y sexualidad. Se sugiere, desde la pasantía universitaria, un trabajo de supervisión que pueda orientar los estudiantes de pregrado sobre los conflictos vividos en este período de formación inicial.

Palabras clave: Género. Sexualidad. Formación Inicial del Profesorado. Pedagogía. Diversidad Sexual y de Género.

INTRODUCTION

It is a consensus in the literature on the subject — which intersects gender, sexuality, and education — (Vianna, 2010; Bortolini, 2011; Castro, 2016; Lins, Machado and Escoura, 2016; Silva and Brabo, 2016; Silva and Souza, 2020) that the school is one of the social institutions that most brings together diversity within its environment, particularly so-called *sexual and gender diversity*. In other words, the school is one of the first public spaces, outside the family environment, where a child comes into contact with and learns how to coexist with difference, and this extends to the different ways of experiencing their own sexuality and gender, and exploring/discovering their own body.

According to Silva and Brabo (2016, p. 128), cultural and historical hierarchies and social power relations have been established among individuals based on their differences, “resulting, therefore, in inequalities, prejudices, and the construction of stereotypes” regarding ways of *being a man or a woman* and expressing sexual desire. In agreement with Vianna (2010, p. 154), the concept of gender, as appropriated and developed by feminist theories since the 1970s, “can allow us to perceive the sociological nature of the construction of meanings and interpretations related to masculinities and femininities.”

From this perspective, gender initially emerged as a distinction between sex (biological) and gender (social), with the former referring to the biological aspects of the body and the latter to the social aspects constructed around these biological characteristics, that is, based on sexual differences. Later, as understood in this text, gender was conceived by the American philosopher Judith Butler (2003, p. 33) as “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being.” Therefore, gender refers to power discourses inscribed in bodies through gestures and artifacts, highlighting its performative nature, discursively constructed in relationships.

Likewise, sexuality also permeates this process of social construction and the production of power relations, through which *heteronormativity* prevails (Butler, 2003; Lins, Machado and Escoura, 2016; Silva and Brabo, 2016), a social norm that demands the invariable manifestation of a gender according to a sex — the male/masculine and female/feminine gender binary —, a regulation that

was called by Gayle Rubin (1975) the *sex/gender system*. However, Butler (2003) updates this system to *sex/gender/desire*, considering the intersection of sexuality, as heteronormativity also requires the expression of a specific sexual desire regarded as the only “healthy” form of sexual expression: heterosexuality. Sexual and gender diversity, therefore, encompasses the group of people who do not conform to this heteronormative logic, namely the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transvestite, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual individuals, etc. (LGBTQIA+)¹ population.

The issue of the social construction of how men and women should be/live and express their sexual desire, as summarized by Silva and Souza (2020, p. 279), “is a constitutive part of culture and our life in society. These social constructions, from which the mentioned ideals of masculinity and femininity originate, are reaffirmed almost constantly by power discourses disseminated by knowledge institutions.” Among these institutions is the school.

Regarding the school as a social institution that disciplines gender and sexuality relations, Vianna (2010, p. 155-156) emphasizes that “the school has always been part of this process, at times denying the presence or expressions of sexuality within its environment, [...] it is far from neutral and reflects how social gender relations are produced and socially configured.”

Accordingly, being a space that facilitates encounters with difference and, consequently, with the diversity of possible gender and sexuality expressions, the school can both reinforce this framework of inequalities and power relations or seek to overcome it and, in its place, promote understanding and coexistence with diversity. As Vianna (2010, p. 154) also points out,

it is possible to change the way we name ourselves, how we establish hierarchies, and how we often reproduce a domination that is fundamentally male. Education can play an important role in disseminating, encouraging, and fostering new values — ones that are not traditionally linked to hegemonic masculinity and the femininity subordinated to it. This may be the greatest contribution of school education from the perspective of gender relations.

Among the main actors in daily school life, teacher training stands out, as teachers will have to take on a leading role in this educational process of promoting coexistence with diversity.

In a review of public policies on gender and sexuality aimed at teacher training, Unbehaum (2014) highlighted a relative achievement in the field of continuing education, with programs related to diversity issues implemented in recent decades for the training of teachers working in Brazil’s public education system. Despite evident limitations in covering and reaching all continuing teacher education programs in the country, the following initiatives proposed by the Federal Government in partnership with non-governmental organizations and universities can be highlighted: the *Programa de Formação de Profissionais da Educação para a Cidadania e a Diversidade Sexual* [Education Workers Training Program for Citizenship and Sexual Diversity] (Vianna, 2010), the *Gênero e Diversidade na Escola* (GDE) [Gender and Diversity in School] project (Bortolini, 2011), and the *Escola sem Homofobia* [School without Homophobia] project, proposed as part of the *Programa Brasil sem Homofobia*² [Brazil without Homophobia Program] (Unbehaum, 2014). However, the same cannot be said regarding initial teacher education.

The same authors (Bortolini, 2011; Vianna, 2010; Unbehaum, 2014) highlight that this continuing education can assume a “compensatory” character given the lack of knowledge on these topics, knowledge that should be provided during initial teacher training. For example, Unbehaum’s

1 In this article, the acronym LGBTQIA+ is used to refer to sexual and gender diversity, a population fully referred to by the acronym LGBTQIAPF2K+.

2 Program to Combat Violence and Discrimination against GLTB and Promote the Citizenship of Homosexuals “*Brasil sem Homofobia*.”

(2014) study, which investigated the curricula of pedagogy and teaching degree programs at public universities, found that these topics hold only a secondary status, with little or no presence in the courses, either within a mandatory subject or as transversal themes.

Like Vianna (2010) and Unbehaum (2014), we understand gender as a concept capable of capturing various aspects of teacher education. The need for these topics to be present from the initial training stage arises from the fact that these professionals will have to assess and intervene in situations involving gender and sexuality issues, particularly regarding the sexual and gender diversity public. Additionally, they are responsible for developing work that addresses both themes. Considering that the understanding of gender and sexuality varies across cultures and that discussing these topics in schools often sparks controversy and resistance, even among teachers, it is important to question whether their judgments and interventions in such situations will align with their professional social and legal responsibilities or will stem from a normative perspective, merely hedonistic in relation to their personal beliefs.

The research underlying this article focused on teachers' work with gender and sexuality issues in schools. Conducted between 2017 and 2018, this study³ aimed to investigate the gender and sexuality education of pedagogy undergraduates and relate it to their ethical training, from the perspective of moral development in Kohlbergian and neo-Kohlbergian approaches (Kohlberg, 1992; Rest *et al.*, 1999).

In this study, gender and sexuality were addressed as issues within human rights education (HRE), a public policy in place in the country since 2006 (Brasil, 2007; 2012; 2013), which aims to overcome historical inequalities in the nation, characterized as "ethnic-racial, religious, cultural, generational, territorial, physical-individual, of gender, sexual orientation, nationality, political choice intolerance, among others" (Brasil, 2013, p. 21). Therefore, beyond the core theme of human rights, the work from an HRE perspective in schools should also cover other topics that equally contribute to defending and protecting human dignity, such as gender and sexuality.

However, one of the study's hypotheses, confirmed through empirical research, was that when HRE is accompanied by these two diversity-related themes, its implementation is even less likely. This is because addressing these topics in educational institutions depends on teachers' knowledge and their willingness to engage with the themes and the diverse population they represent. This finding was further supported by the literature, where reports of educational experiences that, from the teachers' perspective, enable this education are scarce.

Given the role of teaching in basic education schools, our research focused on the training of pedagogy professionals because the levels of education assigned to them, that is, early childhood education and elementary school, serve as the first collective socialization agents of diversity outside the family environment, as previously mentioned: "if education is hindered or distorted from the outset, the principles envisioned by this education will ultimately not be established" (Silva, Brabo and Morais, 2017, p. 1279).

Regarding pedagogy training, Castro (2016, p. 208, emphasis ours) presents the following account from one of the interviewees in her doctoral research, describing teachers' reactions to a student's gender expression in the school setting of the study:

I was in an early childhood education school, and as I was heading to the teachers' lounge, I came across the following scene: a group of teachers making derogatory

³ The study was entitled *Educação em direitos humanos, gênero e sexualidades, e desenvolvimento moral na formação docente: conhecimentos, concepções e condutas de graduandos(as) em Pedagogia de uma universidade pública do estado de São Paulo*. It was funded by the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) under process No. 2017/01381-9, with a duration from May 1st, 2017, to December 31st, 2018.

comments about a student they referred to as a 'little fag.' The 'educators' [...] were laughing as they said that the *boy acted like a 'sissy' in the entrance line and that, when he grew up, he would inevitably be gay.* I was embarrassed even to hear their words about the student.

If these teachers, the authors of the derogatory comments, hold such attitudes toward their students, it demonstrates their limited ability to effectively engage in HRE, and even more so in education on gender and sexuality.

To engage with the literature discussing both topics in initial teacher education and professional practice in pedagogy, we conducted a literature review in the Journal Portal of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) and Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO) databases. Some materials (articles) were found, and some of them, by sharing the same object (pedagogy education) and research proposal (their experiences with gender and sexuality topics and with the sexual and gender diversity public), proved relevant and consequently supported this study.

Using the descriptors gender and pedagogy, with the search limited to materials in Portuguese, the CAPES Journal Portal yielded 26 results sharing these descriptors in the title, while SciELO yielded eight results. However, among the articles found and gathered through these searches, only five (Dinis and Cavalcante, 2008; Costa and Ribeiro, 2011; Ferreira and Barzano, 2013; Rios, Cardoso and Dias, 2018; Castro and Ferrari, 2021) had pedagogy education as their object, and, of these five articles, only one (Negrão and Santos, 2020) also aimed to investigate the experiences of undergraduate students concerning the topic and the diversity public. When using the descriptors sexuality and pedagogy with the same language and title restrictions, the CAPES Journal Portal yielded six results and SciELO four results, which were the same articles found in the previous searches using the gender descriptor.

In their article, Dinis and Cavalcante (2008) discuss the conceptions of pedagogy undergraduate students at the Universidade Federal do Paraná (UFPR) regarding homosexuality and gender topics. Costa and Ribeiro (2011) investigated the conceptions of gender relations among a group of students in the pedagogy program at Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP), Araraquara campus. Ferreira and Barzano (2013) researched the presence of gender and sexuality topics in a pedagogy program through interviews with faculty members. Rios, Cardoso, and Dias (2018) examined the conceptions of faculty members in the pedagogy program at the Universidade Federal de Sergipe (UFS), Itabaiana campus, regarding gender, body, and sexuality topics. Castro and Ferrari (2021) described the approach to gender and sexuality relations in the training and curriculum of a federal public university's pedagogy program. Silva, Brabo, and Moraes (2021) investigated the conceptions of pedagogy undergraduate students at a public university in São Paulo regarding the concept of gender; this article, a work authored by us, is also derived from the research that led to the present article. Negrão and Santos (2020) analyzed the gender and sexuality conceptions of pedagogy students at a private university in Manaus, being the only one among all the mentioned studies that also encompassed these students' experiences — at least on a personal level, not as school interns — with gender and sexuality topics and with the diversity public.

Considering that research production on gender and sexuality in teacher education has spanned decades of study and research, as shown by Vianna *et al.* (2011) in a state-of-the-art review, it is necessary to develop more research involving these topics specifically in pedagogy education and training. Our own review, as mentioned earlier, found a limited number of articles that focus on teacher education as a research subject. In other words, the production on gender and sexuality in teacher education, identified by Vianna *et al.* (2011) as well-established in Brazilian research, should — based on our 'focused' review — pay greater attention to the specificities of pedagogy education

and to the period when these professionals are still in their initial training stage, meaning while they are still university students.

Furthermore, more studies should investigate not only the conceptions of students and faculty regarding these topics and their presence in their respective programs but also their experiences with these topics and the diversity public — especially conflicting experiences — since only one published article (Negrão and Santos, 2020) was found, and even so, it did not have this investigative proposal as its focus.

Given this, this article identifies and maps school conflicts involving sexual and gender diversity reported by pedagogy undergraduate students at a public university in São Paulo. As demonstrated by the review conducted, the present article appears to be unprecedented, as it represents the first investigation in the national literature, at least in the form of an article, that contributes to the field by highlighting the experiences of these future teachers. Unlike Negrão and Santos (2020), who treat this topic peripherally, here we present it as the main investigative focus.

METHODOLOGY

Initially, it is important to highlight that the research from which this article originates employed different data collection instruments regarding initial pedagogy education: focus groups, a qualitative research technique (Gatti, 2012); a questionnaire, a quantitative instrument composed of open-ended questions and moral dilemmas in the Kohlbergian framework (Kohlberg, 1992); and the Defining Issues Test 2 (DIT-2), a closed and validated quantitative instrument for measuring moral judgment (Rest *et al.*, 1999). Given the impossibility of producing a discussion that encompasses all the results obtained with all these instruments, this article has been delimited to presenting the results found through focus groups. The remaining results, obtained using the other instruments, have been published (Silva, Brabo and Morais, 2021; Silva, Morais and Brabo, 2024) or are in the process of publication.

Regarding the concept and characteristics of focus groups, Gatti (2012) identifies them as a research technique for data collection conducted through group interactions when discussing a proposed topic, initiated by a guiding question that generates voluntary discussions and spontaneous expressions by the participants. Additionally, successful experiences with this technique were referenced, such as the study by Morais *et al.* (2017), which also used it with pedagogy undergraduates.

The name of the university whose pedagogy program was investigated in this research has been omitted for ethical reasons; it suffices to note that it is a public university located in the state of São Paulo. The selection criterion for this program's participation was convenience sampling. Lastly, it is important to highlight the understanding of *school conflicts* adopted in this study, which differs from the concept commonly found in gender studies literature, sometimes designated by other terms, such as *school scenes* (Seffner and Picchetti, 2016; Hundertmarck, 2021).

Considering that another foundation of this research was the Kohlbergian approach to moral development (as reflected in the use of the DIT-2), the concept of cognitive conflict as understood by Kohlberg (1992) was instrumental in identifying the aspects we aimed to evaluate through the focus group technique. Kohlberg (1992) conceptualizes cognitive conflict as the process through which human development occurs, and, to achieve this, he employed moral dilemmas, difficult situations in which a character must make an almost impossible decision due to the implications of the situation.

Consequently, the intended aim of the focus groups was the reporting of participants' dilemma-based experiences in which they were involved or merely witnessed, within the school context and within the scope of a pedagogue's role. As dilemmas, these experiences represented cognitive conflicts these individuals encountered regarding gender and sexuality issues or sexual and gender diversity — instances where they hesitated, saw others hesitate, or questioned what should be done, whether to act or not, and so on, in such situations.

Although most reports concerned dilemma-based experiences, some did not fully qualify as such. Consequently, in this article, they are referred to simply as school conflicts. Nonetheless, this concept differs from the notion of *school scenes*, more frequently found in the literature, such as in Seffner and Picchetti (2016), who highlight school scenes related to boys' and girls' gender expression, and Hundertmarck (2021), who describes school scenes concerning the formation of hegemonic gender and sexuality models. These scenes, although often involving conflict, do not necessarily constitute cognitive conflicts.

SAMPLE

The application of the focus group technique was the first stage of the empirical investigation in this research. This application took place in two classes, designated A and B, of the third year of the evening period of the course, with one focus group session applied to each class. In total, 32 undergraduates ($N=32$) accepted to participate in the activity, distributed into two groups according to their respective classes: group A ($n1=18$) and group B ($n2=14$).⁴ In each class, there was an average of 30 students, so approximately 50% of the students present on the day of the activity participated. In group A, 16 cisgender women and two cisgender men were participants, while in group B, 12 cisgender women and two cisgender men were participants.

It is important to emphasize that the present proposal for analysis does not treat gender and sexuality as a *perspective* (Lemos de Souza, 2017). As discussed by Lemos de Souza (2017), gender and sexuality as a perspective refers to how these themes are embedded in life and intersect with people's bodies, which can be affected by gender (such as women, men, non-binary individuals, etc.) and sexuality (such as homosexuals, heterosexuals, bisexuals, etc.⁵). Therefore, the aim here was to understand the conflicts experienced by undergraduate students and whether these conflicts were addressed and resolved appropriately, including those experienced by women, men (there were no transgender individuals in the participating groups), homosexuals, heterosexuals, etc. This proposal is part of a broader production.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

For the focus group sessions, part of the class period of both participating groups was reserved, with the consent of the responsible faculty member on the day and the participating students. Given the intention to explore and bring to light the dilemma-based experiences of the undergraduates, either witnessed during their schooling or in their university internships, third-year classes were chosen because this is the year when students focus on mandatory and/or paid internships in public or private early childhood and primary education schools, with the latter being optional.

As suggested by Gatti (2012), each session, one in each class, began with the presentation of the session's objectives and a general initial question: "What are your experiences, among the everyday situations you remember, regarding gender and sexuality encountered during your mandatory and/or paid internship in the pedagogy course or in your own schooling in basic education?" From this question, interactions and discussions began among the participants, which were complemented by other questions that emerged during the circumstances of each session to gather more information and clarification on the reported experiences.

Here, as in Castro (2016, p. 207-208),

4 N being the abbreviation for sample size in statistics, here $n1$ and $n2$ respectively refer to the groups participating in the focus group, as well as the number that follows, which indicates the total number of participants comprising the sample.

5 We use this nomenclature aware of its insufficiency in encompassing the countless expressions of gender identity and sexual orientation, as discussed by Silva (2008).

memory is taken as a subjective temporal dimension, that is, the restoration of experience intimately related to subjectivity. The experiences of the pedagogy students are inscribed in the present through memories, considering that forgetfulness and recollections shape us. Therefore, it is not a mere repetition of facts, but a narrative of oneself as an exercise in self-constitution.

The two sessions lasted approximately one and a half hour, recorded with the consent of the participants before the activity began and with the signature of the consent form, using a voice recorder and a video camera. The research and its entire execution received the appropriate authorization from the course council and was approved by the Research Ethics Committee, Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Appreciation (CAAE) protocol No. 70227717.3.0000.5406.

ANALYSIS METHOD

For the analysis of the participants' reports, the full transcriptions of the focal group sessions from the obtained media files, audio, and video, were initially performed. The transcriptions were made into a Microsoft Word document, where the content was analyzed. After successive readings, the reported conflicts were identified and mapped, followed by the calculation of their frequency of evocation.

For identification and mapping, and to make preliminary contact with the collected data, an initial analysis involved qualitative inferences made from the content after reading the transcribed material, based on the theoretical references from the consulted literature on gender and sexualities (Silva, 2008; Vianna, 2010; Bortolini, 2011; Castro, 2016; Lins, Machado and Escoura, 2016; Silva and Brabo, 2016; Silva and Souza, 2020). A second analysis, based on this first one, focused on the identification and mapping of the conflicts, now quantitative, utilizing statistical analysis along with the relevant literature. The analysis involved identifying the conflicts, classifying them into *types of conflicts* (identification), and organizing them according to their *record* and *frequency* (mapping), analyses that are presented below.

RESULTS

In the focal group session with class A ($n1=18$), the majority of the reported experiences were conflicts recently experienced by the participating students, that is, those encountered during their university internship. The reports encompassed experiences that sometimes involved both themes, gender and sexuality, and sometimes only one of them. As proposed by the initial question, these experiences mainly referred to conflictual situations, i.e., situations that in some way disturbed (Silva, 2008; Bortolini, 2011) the individuals who were involved in or who witnessed them in the school environment, preferably experiences involving sexual and gender diversity.

As Silva (2008, p. 9) emphasizes, this disturbance occurs because these are situations in which "the transgression is clear, visual, and therefore affronts heteronormative power," thus challenging the norm that governs the order of bodies and desires of people, also challenging the agents who legitimize it and, consequently, surveil those who transgress it. Even so, experiences that did not involve them in a conflictual way were also reported, though in smaller numbers.

For a brief visualization of the interactions and discussions among the participants of the activity, a fragment of the report from one of the students in class A ($n1=18$), referred to as student 2, is provided below. This fragment is representative of a considerable portion of the reports from the other students:

In my internship, there is a student who has two mothers. Actually, one of the mothers is the aunt; he was adopted by them, and I was really upset by some

comments in the teachers' room. I felt embarrassed and even had to leave the room. They were laughing and saying things like, "Oh, I don't know what to say, I don't know if it's mother and mother, if I call both of them 'mom,' if one is a mother and the other is a father." There was even a teacher saying it's an abomination, that according to the Bible this is an abomination. I thought, "Wow! The aunt took him in and he's living better than if he were with his biological parents," and to think that these people are opinion leaders (Student 2, excerpt from the transcript of the focal group with class A).

In this account, Student 2 expresses dissatisfaction with the attitudes of teachers at an early childhood education school where she was interning, who mocked the parental relationships of a student at the school who had two mothers. Not only were the teachers unaware of how to correctly refer to the relationship between the two mothers, but they also made value judgments condemning this relationship — calling it an abomination — based on their religious beliefs, specifically Judeo-Christian beliefs, as also found by Castro (2016) and Negrão and Santos (2020) in their research regarding the influence of religion on the perceptions of educators about gender and sexuality.

In the session with class B ($n=14$), most of the accounts also revolved around experiences from the participants' work during their university internship, and these mostly involved both topics or just one of them, the majority being conflictual experiences. From the experiences originating in the participants' own schooling period, the following account from Student 7 is shared from the session with class B:

I remember something that happened, I think it was in my fifth or sixth grade... The boys in my class, they used to try to make that deep, macho voice, and then suddenly A. [name of student] entered, and A. always had a higher voice, since he was a little kid, [...] then when he entered the class, none of the boys would get close to him or talk to him because they said he was a sissy and that, if they touched the sissy, they would turn into a sissy too, and the worst part was that the teachers, especially the male teachers, supported it. They said, "Don't touch him, or you'll turn into a sissy," and no one ever became friends with A (Student 7, taken from the focus group transcript with class B).⁶

In this account, Student 7 recalls a situation experienced during her elementary education, involving a student who was not accepted in the social group of his class because his voice was not as deep as the other boys' voices, and he was discriminated against for it, even with the support of teachers. The construction of masculinity in adolescence, according to Silva and Brabo (2016) and Vasconcelos *et al.* (2016, p. 190), is "related to the concreteness and visibility of the transformations of the child's body into a 'man's' body," as demonstrated by the boys in this account, who altered their voices to appear "more manly." Therefore, the student with the less deep voice posed a threat to the consolidation of masculinity in that social group, resulting in his exclusion and discrimination.

The focus of the analysis here, however, is different. After making inferences from the reading of the transcription of the two sessions, the next step was the identification and mapping of the reported conflicts, in order to differentiate and record them according to their incidence in the accounts. The conflicts were classified based on the theme involved, the number of times they were evoked, and the frequency in percentage that this evocation represented in each participating group, as shown in the Chart 1.

⁶ The meaning of the word *relar*, used by Undergraduate 7, primarily concerns a possible physical contact between Student A and other male students, bringing the connotation of 'contamination' and 'contagion' to the gender-dissident expression of Student A, which would be transmitted to others through physical contact.

Chart 1 – Mapping of the conflicts reported in the two focus group sessions held with Classes A and B of the third year of the participating pedagogy course.

Types of conflicting experiences	Theme involved	Number of times evoked	Frequency (%)
1. Same-sex family of student	Sexuality	01 (Class A) 02 (Class B)	1.85 (Class A) 3.63 (Class B)
2. Teacher who reproduces hate speech, discriminatory practices, or prejudices	Gender and Sexuality	10 (Class A) 03 (Class B)	18.51 (Class A) 5.45 (Class B)
3. Using religiosity to justify discriminatory practices	Gender and Sexuality	01 (Class A) 00 (Class B)	1.85 (Class A) 0.00 (Class B)
4. Gendered toys	Gender	08 (Class A) 01 (Class B)	14.81 (Class A) 1.81 (Class B)
5. Discriminatory practices of students among their peers or towards teachers	Gender and Sexuality	05 (Class A) 11 (Class B)	9.25 (Class A) 20.00 (Class B)
6. Gendered colors	Gender	02 (Class A) 01 (Class B)	3.70 (Class A) 1.81 (Class B)
7. Student who expresses gender identities or lives dissident sexuality	Gender and Sexuality	09 (Class A) 17 (Class B)	16.66 (Class A) 30.90 (Class B)
8. Family member of students who reproduce hate speech, discriminatory practices, and prejudices	Gender and Sexuality	04 (Class A) 05 (Class B)	7.40 (Class A) 9.09 (Class B)
9. Male teacher in early childhood education and in the pedagogy course	Gender	05 (Class A) 03 (Class B)	9.25 (Class A) 5.45 (Class B)
10. Homosexual teacher	Sexuality	03 (Class A) 03 (Class B)	5.55 (Class A) 5.45 (Class B)
11. Harassment by teacher	Sexuality	00 (Class A) 03 (Class B)	0.00 (Class A) 5.45 (Class B)
12. School administrator who reproduces hate speech, discriminatory practices, or prejudices	Gender and Sexuality	04 (Class A) 02 (Class B)	7.40 (Class A) 3.63 (Class B)
13. School staff member who reproduces hate speech, discriminatory practices, or prejudices	Gender and Sexuality	02 (Class A) 01 (Class B)	3.70 (Class A) 1.81 (Class B)
14. Discovery and exploration of one's own body and sexuality	Sexuality	00 (Class A) 03 (Class B)	0.00 (Class A) 5.45 (Class B)
Total	10 (Gender) 11 (Sexuality)	54 (Class A) 55 (Class B)	100 (Class A) 100 (Class B)

Source: Research data

In total, 14 types of conflicting experiences were identified, seven of them involving both themes, while the other seven involved only one of the themes. As expected, these experiences mostly related to aspects of sexual and gender diversity in the school context, primarily the discrimination of this group (conflicts 2, 3, 5, 8, 12, and 13), but also their presence (conflicts 1 and 7), the gendering of colors and toys (conflicts 4 and 6), and other related aspects, such as teacher harassment (conflict 11), the presence of male teachers in the education of children (conflict 9), the presence of homosexual teachers (conflict 10), and the discovery of one's body and sexuality (conflict 14). In other words, of the many possible conflicts involving gender and sexuality, there was a greater tendency for participants to report those specifically involving sexual and gender diversity groups, which was also the focus of the activity.

Only conflicts 11 and 14 occurred in just one of the classes, while the others were present in both. In class A, 54 reported conflicts were registered, the most frequently evoked being: 2) teacher who reproduces hate speech, discriminatory practices, or prejudices, evoked ten times, accounting for 18.51% of these 54 conflicts; 4) gendered toys, evoked eight times, accounting for 14.81%; and 7) student who expresses gender identities or lives dissident sexuality, evoked nine times, accounting for 16.66%. In class B, out of a total of 55 conflicts, those most evoked were: 5) discriminatory practices of students among their peers or towards teachers, evoked 11 times, 20.00% of these 55 conflicts; 7) student who expresses gender identities or lives dissident sexualities, evoked 17 times, accounting for 30.90%; and 8) family member of students who reproduce hate speech, discriminatory practices, and prejudices, evoked five times, or 9.09%.

All these conflicts align with what has been discussed in the literature regarding the theme in teacher education and professional practice in pedagogy, as reported by Dinis and Cavalcante (2008), Costa and Ribeiro (2011), Ferreira and Barzano (2013), Rios, Cardoso, and Dias (2018), Negrão and Santos (2020), Castro and Ferrari (2021), and Silva, Brabo, and Morais (2021) in the results of their respective empirical studies in the context of initial and continuing education in pedagogy. In general, as Ferreira and Barzano (2013, p. 248) summarize from these results, the

studies conducted in recent years indicate that when we consider the school as a locus of analysis, it becomes evident that, in many instances, cases of ethnic-racial, religious, social, sexual, and gender intolerance, among others, are reported in our public and private schools. When referring to the issue of non-heterosexual orientation, the prejudice encountered becomes discrimination. In addition to violence, there are also cases of transfer, expulsion, denial of enrollment, and offenses to the morality of children, adolescents, and even adults.

The table above presents a systematized analysis of these cases reported in the literature, now from the experiences of those who are daily on the ground in schools and who are preparing to assume the profession of pedagogue, and, therefore, who will often have to judge and intervene in these situations.

In this regard, Seffner and Picchetti (2016, p. 66) emphasize that, in the educational context "marked by diversity and the demands for respect and inclusion, the teacher is both the individual who masters knowledge and the one who acts as the reference adult for issues related to the values that guide life in the public space." In other words, the teacher is assigned the role of mediator in these situations where ideas surrounding gender and sexuality will conflict, requiring them to "build agreements between individuals and groups whose opinions differ" (Seffner and Picchetti, 2016, p. 67).

Regarding the conflicts related to sexual and gender diversity, conflicts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, and 13, together they totaled 46 reports in group A and 43 reports in group B, accounting for 85.19 and 78.18% of the total reports, respectively, for each sample. The fact that these were the

most frequently reported conflicts by the participants alluded to the disturbance mentioned by Silva (2008) and Bortolini (2011) caused by identity dissent to the gender binary and heterosexuality. That is, the manifestation of any characteristic or identity practice divergent from those historically constructed and affirmed in the heteronormative matrix, as conceptualized by Rubin (1975) and Butler (2003).

From this, it can be inferred that the destabilization caused by these episodes stands out as one of the most impactful issues in the participants' performance in school, whether in their memories as students in basic education, as some of the conflicts referred to, or as interns in pedagogy. This impact, in the sense of having marked the participants, will certainly have implications and remain frequent in their future roles as practicing teachers.

In these conflicts, gender binarism, however, was not limited to the configurations and models of behaviors exclusive to the bodies of the individuals involved, as it also extends to inanimate objects, language, and any constitutive element of the human universe when manipulated by men and women (Silva and Brabo, 2016; Silva and Souza, 2020), as seen, for example, in the conflicts related to gendered colors and toys.

As already emphasized, gender, as an identity, was constituted in the female-male opposition in many cultures, under the influence of what, in each time and place, was conventionally established regarding the roles to be played by all those who make up the social environment (Lins, Machado and Escoura, 2016). Taking Western culture as an example, the attribution of gender, as a previously established identity, begins with the identification of the baby's sex, sometimes still in the mother's womb, with the preparation of a pink trousseau for girls and a blue one for boys, and the later determination of which toys, clothes, and activities each sex should engage in: "boys with cars, dinosaurs, and toy soldiers, preparing for and assimilating autonomy, leadership, and aggressiveness; girls with miniature household items, dolls, and ponies, adjusting to the domestic and resigned sphere, to 'nature,' simulating motherhood" (Silva and Brabo, 2016, p. 133).

The other reported conflicts, which focused on other aspects related to the themes, however, revealed that it is not only the sexual and gender diversity group attended to in schools that triggers conflict situations and, therefore, disrupts the *status quo* of the school regarding gender and sexuality norms. Among these, as shown in the table, are: the presence of male teachers in children's education (conflict 9), which had five mentions in group A (9.25%) and three mentions in group B (5.45%); homosexual teachers (conflict 10), which had three mentions in both group A (5.55%) and group B (5.45%); teacher harassment (conflict 11), which had three mentions only in group B (5.45%); and the discovery of the body and sexuality (conflict 14), which had three reports also only in group B (5.45%).

Regarding the first conflict, the presence of male teachers refers to a historical phenomenon known as the feminization of teaching, dated at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. This was one of the first research objects in gender studies in Brazil, contemporary with the formation of this field of study (Bruschini and Amado, 1988; Demartini and Antunes, 1993; Costa and Ribeiro, 2011). In summary, this phenomenon consisted of "educating children in school being associated with motherhood, that is, as women biologically give birth, it is also assumed that they are the best subjects for caring for children" (Costa and Ribeiro, 2011, p. 483), while men abandoned teaching and sought professions that allowed for greater economic ascension.

Ramos (2017, p. 135) emphasizes that, in today's reality, with the incorporation of men in early childhood education, "there are two factors that explain the resistance to the presence of men in daycare: the fact that caring for children is considered a feminine function and the conceptions of early childhood education, based on a tradition of assistance from daycare centers as substitutes for mothers." Similarly, Bello, Zanette, and Felipe (2020, p. 558) argue that "the strangeness of

the presence of the male teacher in early childhood education [...] translates the male subject as having an uncontrollable, consequently dangerous, sexuality.” In this sense, the authors (Ramos, 2017; Bello, Zanette and Felipe, 2020) point out two masculine figures that, in the collective school imagination, ‘threaten’ the integrity of the school and the children attended there: the aggressor and the homosexual, which refer to the following two conflicts, the presence of a gay male teacher and teacher harassment of their students.

In a study that interviewed male teachers, school principals, and coordinators in early childhood education and had five discussion groups formed by teachers and the families of the children in these schools, Ramos (2017, p. 139) found that, in general, for the people involved, especially family members,

the possibility of male teachers sexually abusing children — just as often occurs within the family itself — is very high. Discourses like these, which associate early childhood education institutions with the domestic space, show that the line dividing the two institutions is very thin. This causes professionals working in these educational institutions to be treated in the context of domestic tasks and frequently receive treatment similar to that given to aunts and mothers. [...] In the evaluation of other participants, men do not have the same skill to interact with children as women do, and especially as mothers do. For them, men are rough, aggressive, and sexually uncontrolled, and, therefore, should necessarily stay away from children’s bodies.

Consequently, the entry of male teachers into the faculty of these institutions rarely occurs without tensions and estrangements. As the author further points out, beyond the legally required probationary period after the hiring of these professionals, the male teachers who participated in his study needed time to demonstrate their competencies and skills with the education and care of young children, since they were considered incapable of fulfilling such tasks by the school community in which they were inserted.

Regarding the homosexual teacher, Dinis and Cavalcanti (2008) report that the majority of their sample of undergraduate students in pedagogy emphasized that they would only hire a homosexual teacher if “he/she ‘presented an adequate posture,’ requiring the homosexual person to behave almost as asexual, [...] although the same kind of stance is not taken towards other heterosexual individuals” (Dinis and Cavalcanti, 2008, p. 107). In other words, they should conceal their sexual orientation and behave according to the gender assigned to them based on their sex, reiterating the compliance with heteronormativity (Butler, 2003) that permeates the school environment. This is because, as emphasized by Vianna (2010), social institutions, including schools, not only reproduce the power relations and structures of the society they are part of but also serve as strategic spaces to foster their maintenance.

This can be evidenced both by the presence and incidence of conflicts 2, 8, 12, and 13 (totaling 37.01% in Class A and 13.98% in Class B), which concern the reproduction of hate speech, discriminatory practices, or prejudices by teachers, students’ families, school administrators, and other school staff, respectively. In other words, following Vianna (2010), the adults who frequent and compose the school space not only reproduce heteronormativity but also perpetuate it within this environment.

However, returning to the conflict generated by the presence of the male and homosexual teacher in a school governed by this heteronormative logic, it is his responsibility to conceal his sexuality or suffer the consequences, since “the experience of deviant sexualities is seen as abnormal and therefore must be punished” (Hundertmarck, 2021, p. 43). In other cases, due to this double

stigma, male and homosexual — two socially undesirable markers in early childhood education, especially in the context of educating very young children (zero to six years of age) — Ramos (2017) and Bello, Zanette, and Felipe (2020) also highlight that it is not uncommon for teachers to be reassigned to managerial positions, being ‘removed’ from direct contact with children.

It is also important to note that another body of literature in gender studies focuses on the social construction of masculinities, from which the concept of hegemonic masculinity emerges. Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell is one of its main proponents. Hegemonic masculinity is understood as a gender configuration that meets the dominant ideology, privileging those who conform to this configuration while disadvantaging those who do not meet its constituent categories, such as domination, virility, aggression, competition, protection, etc. (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2013).⁷

Although this literature, and Connell’s work in particular, differs from the one referenced so far based on the works of authors linked to post-structuralism and postmodernism, it also helps to understand that institutions such as schools are subjected to hegemonic masculinity, including the teaching profession. In this sense, male teachers who conform to hegemonic masculinity, even in early childhood education, a space where they are not welcomed, are less penalized than those who do not conform to it, such as those considered ‘feminine’ or those who are homosexual. As mentioned, the undergraduate students in Dinis and Cavalcanti’s (2008) study also showed this understanding, that they would tolerate these men in this occupation as long as they concealed their sexual orientation and behaved strictly according to the gender assigned to them.

Regarding the last conflict, the discovery of the body and sexuality, some authors (Lins, Machado and Escoura, 2016; Cavalcanti, 2017) point out that it is common among teachers to believe that the topic of sexuality should only be addressed during puberty with students. However, there are many forms of sexual manifestations among children, such as curiosity and questions that children spontaneously bring to the teacher. In this regard, Cavalcanti (2017, p. 23) emphasizes that “the pedagogue must be aware that sexual manifestations in children occur naturally and are part of human development, as well as observe that the different forms of expression in young children may indicate some curiosity or doubt about sexuality.”

In summary, all these conflicts experienced by undergraduate pedagogy students in internships demonstrate the need for training on these topics from the beginning of their studies. Since most of the conflicts were recently experienced, it is worth highlighting that at least a sample of what occurs within schools today, in relation to gender and sexuality issues and the diversity audience, can be contemplated based on these conflicts presented and systematized here. However, some of the conflicts were also based on the memories of the participants’ own schooling, suggesting that, even with the passing of years and the various achievements for ensuring education committed to equal rights and respect for differences (Brasil, 2007; 2012; 2013), a school that is, at the very least, inhospitable to differences remains present.

DISCUSSION AND FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This article sought to identify and map school conflicts involving sexual and gender diversity reported by undergraduate students in pedagogy at a public university in São Paulo. What are the conflicts currently experienced in schools involving gender and sexuality issues? Which conflicts involving these topics are, in fact, considered conflicts by pre-service teachers? What are the most

⁷ Born Robert William Connell, Raewyn transitioned to the female gender after having published a significant portion of her work under her former name. Out of respect for the author, she will be referred to here as Raewyn, despite the name attributed to the referenced work.

recurrent conflicts that, due to their recurrence, compose the school culture in dealing with sexual and gender diversity? These are questions that, based on the scarcity of articles on gender and sexuality in pedagogy training identified in a review of the literature, should appear more frequently and, consequently, demand the development of further studies to answer these questions.⁸

Aware that many other initiatives are needed to fill this gap, we consider that the results we have found can contribute to this desired diagnosis. After the entire data collection and analysis process, a total of 14 different types of conflicts were reported, some conflicts being more frequent than others and addressing both or only one of the topics.

Most of the situations reported were cases of discrimination regarding sexual and gender diversity, especially by students towards their peers, but also by teachers, administrators, other staff, and school actors. This drew attention to, first, how deeply heteronormativity is ingrained in the culture of these individuals and in the school culture as a whole (Vianna, 2010): these individuals, before entering the school, already bring with them their personal experiences, values, and knowledge about the topics, and at the same time, they are faced with a culture already established on these topics in the school they begin to attend. Second, it draws attention to the fact that LGBTQIA+ people or those who simply deviate from this norm continue to be targets of discrimination, forms of physical and symbolic violence, from their early years of schooling.

This type of report, which we did not find in the literature as it is presented here, proves essential for providing data to base interventions in the “training of trainers,” as pointed out by Silva, Brabo, and Moraes (2021, p. 18): “for any intervention in a given reality, one must start from something tangible, from a diagnosis of the reality to be transformed.” However, given the limitations of an article, it is important to highlight that it was not possible, in our discussion of the identified school conflicts, to exhaust the entire subject matter, given the vast body of gender studies literature already produced on each of them, although we have made efforts to engage with the literature, referencing some of the key research produced on them.

Nevertheless, the conflicts supported previous findings on gender and sexuality conflicts emerging in schools (Braga, 2014; Castro, 2016; Negrão and Santos, 2020), which, as these authors report, rarely employ appropriate forms of treatment and resolution of these conflicts. It is in this sense that we propose rethinking teacher training programs, as “we live in a time where certainties escape, models prove useless, and formulas ineffective, so that it becomes almost impossible to stop the new issues that arise. There is no way to ignore the new practices, the new subjects, and their challenges to what is established” (Dinis and Cavalcante, 2008, p. 102). Therefore, current identity demands require new content, methodologies, and approaches that can support teaching work and thus adequately address these demands.

It is even suggested that, during university internships, supervision work be implemented to guide undergraduate students regarding the conflicts experienced during this period of initial training. We believe that, from the undergraduate level, there should be supervised, focused reflection work during pedagogy internships to provide guidance to students on conflicts involving gender and sexuality that they might encounter in schools during this period, making it a valuable opportunity for their education on both topics within the pedagogy program. Some studies (Moraes *et al.*, 2017; Pimenta *et al.*, 2017), however, have shown that internship activities occur separately from the training provided in the pedagogy course, with no opportunity to apply the concepts learned in class during the internship. However, we agree with Negrão and Santos (2020, p. 195) that

⁸ We are aware, however, that research has been published in other formats, referred to as “gray literature” (Botelho and Oliveira, 2015), which have addressed these questions, such as Braga’s (2014) master’s dissertation, which mapped conflicts related to homophobia recorded in the school’s incident log. We therefore encourage that this research also be disseminated in materials that constitute what is referred to as “white literature.”

“training in gender and sexuality, even if minimal, is essential to spark the conceptions of teachers who had never stopped to think that such issues exist.”

Based on both the literature consulted on the topics during the theoretical foundation process, and the studies found in the review of articles on gender and sexuality in pedagogy training, this training is always reported as falling short of expectations, including those legally required, in relation to the official documents on HRE (Brasil, 2007; 2012; 2013).

While the two versions of the National Plan for Education in Human Rights (PNEDH), published in 2006 and 2013, respectively, serve as a parameter for the implementation of HRE in the country, the National Guidelines for Education in Human Rights (DNEHD) of 2012 standardize and regulate it at all levels of the Brazilian educational system, including undergraduate courses. According to this document, the objective is that, in HRE, an “ethical, critical, and political formation” be promoted:

The first refers to the formation of attitudes guided by humanizing values, such as the dignity of the person [...]. The critical formation refers to the exercise of reflective judgments [...] promoting institutional practices consistent with Human Rights. The political formation must be based on an emancipatory and transformative perspective of the subjects of rights. From this perspective, the empowerment of groups and individuals, situated on the margins of decision-making processes and the construction of rights, will be promoted (Brasil, 2012, p. 8-9).

However, for this training to be provided to students, from the perspective of human rights in relation to topics such as gender and sexuality, teachers, who will have a privileged space in this training, need to have prior exposure to these topics in their own training, preferably starting in undergraduate studies, but also continuing in their ongoing professional development. The undergraduate student-interns in our research already demonstrate the school demand for this training to be made available, which are the conflicts they experience daily and which violate the integrity and rights of those involved simply because they do not fit into social norms and constraints. Once this demand is identified, it becomes necessary to insist on the development of strategies and educational interventions in pedagogy courses and other undergraduate teacher training programs.

We agree with Seffner and Picchetti (2016, p. 77-78) when they say that “valuing diversity and promoting equality are linked to the democratic regime, to the republican public space” and to the principles brought by human rights — as outlined in the official EDH documents (Brasil, 2007; 2012; 2013). In this sense, the authors continue, “efforts to live together with different people allow each one to learn about the importance of creating social rules. Promoting situations of social justice [...] is certainly a complex task, requiring learning from the school benches.” The pedagogy professional, then occupying a privileged position in this proposal for education committed to equal rights and respect for differences, needs training in this direction, starting from undergraduate studies, both oriented for themselves and for those they will teach in their work in the school system.

With the conclusion of the research discussed here, a subsequent study has been initiated as a continuation of the previous one, in which we hope to obtain further contributions on the state of this investigated training and insights on how to improve it, now focusing on the training of the psychologist alongside the training of the pedagogue. In this subsequent study,⁹ the curricular variable of the participating undergraduate programs was included among the main variables

⁹ The study was entitled *Competência moral, gênero e sexualidades, e religiosidade na formação inicial pública paulista em Pedagogia e Psicologia* and was funded by CNPq, process No. 131735/2020-9, with a duration from 03/01/2020 to 10/31/2020, and by FAPESP, process No. 2020/05099-9, with a duration from 11/01/2020 to 01/31/2022.

considered by the research, now analyzing their curriculum and political-pedagogical project, in order to verify whether they enable the implementation of what the relevant official documents outline and stipulate, such as the National Curriculum Guidelines for the pedagogy undergraduate program (Brasil, 2006) — not analyzed in the previous research, which focused only on the official EDH documents.

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