GENDER AND SCHOOL EDUCATION: MAINTENANCE OR RUPTURE OF THE BINARY WORLD?

GÊNERO E EDUCAÇÃO ESCOLAR: MANUTENÇÃO OU RUPTURA DO MUNDO BINÁRIO?

GÉNERO Y EDUCACIÓN ESCOLAR: ¿MANTENIMIENTO O RUPTURA DEL MUNDO BINARIO?

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ABSTRACT: This essay seeks elements to better understand the relationship between gender and school education. It is a writing that picks up passages taken from specialized literature, with the aim of tracing the context in which deeper issues about gender, school and teaching can be discussed. Thus, the general objective of this paper is to outline arguments in favor of school education as a form of understanding-reflection-action to combat, perhaps overcome, the woman-man social binarism, generator of so many prejudices and reducing so many Human Rights.


RESUMO: Este ensaio, busca elementos para entender melhor a relação gênero e educação escolar. Trata-se de uma escrita que pinça passagens colhidas da literatura especializada, com o objetivo de tracejar o contexto sobre o qual se pode discutir questões mais profundas sobre gênero, escola e docência. Assim, o objetivo geral deste escrito é delinear argumentos a favor da educação escolar como forma de compreensão-reflexão-ação para combater, quietauitar, o binarismo social mulher-homem, gerador de tantos preconceitos e redutor de tantos Direitos Humanos.


RESUMEN: Este ensayo busca elementos para comprender mejor la relación entre género y educación escolar. Es un escrito que recoge pasajes extraídos de la literatura especializada, con el objetivo de trazar el contexto en el que se pueden discutir temas más profundos sobre género, escuela y enseñanza. Así, el objetivo general de este trabajo es esbozar argumentos a favor de la educación escolar como forma de comprensión-reflexión-acción para combatir, quizás superar, el binarismo social mujer-hombre, generador de tantos prejuicios y reductor de tantos Derechos Humanos.

Gender and school education...

Difference does not pre-exist in the bodies of individuals to be simply recognized; rather, it is attributed to a subject (or a body, a practice, or whatever) when we relate that subject (or that body or that practice) to another that is taken as a reference. Therefore, if the position of the urban middle-class white heterosexual man was historically constructed as the subject-position or the reference identity, it follows that all identities that do not correspond to this or that deviate from it will be different. The normal position is somehow omnipresent, always assumed, and this makes it, paradoxically, invisible. No need to mention it. The identities that differ from it will be marked [...] the difference is not natural, but naturalized. Difference is produced through discursive and cultural processes. The difference is taught (LOURO, 2008, p. 22, author’s emphasis, our translation).

This text, written in the form of an essay, seeks elements to better understand the relationship between gender and school education. It is a writing that picks up passages collected from specialized literature, with the aim of tracing the context on which deeper questions about gender, school and teaching can be discussed. Thus, the general objective of this writing is to outline arguments (although still incipient, partially taken from the experience lived as a teacher trainer, working directly in the initial and continuing education of teachers of basic education) in favor of school education as a form of understanding-reflection-action to combat, perhaps overcome, the social binarism between women and men, which generates so many prejudices and reduces so many Human Rights.

It is necessary to reiterate that gender studies are not new: the classics by Margaret Mead (1949) and Simone de Beauvior (1980), published in the first half of the last century, show that the concern with gender issues predates several recent social movements. Among these, for example, are the notorious “Gay Pride Parades” that began to become popular in the United States and in some European countries in the late 1980s and, in Brazil, at the end of the last century.

Another important fact is that gender studies are not scarce at all. This can be proven by the huge amount of published works on the subject that, in addition to reference books, such as “Problemas de Gênero”, by Judite Butler (2003), there are a multitude of periodicals, nationally1 and international ones, which are exclusively dedicated to the theme and its consequences: rights, prejudices, violence, feminism, sexuality, etc.

While social movements are being created and expanded, whether in the form of a “network” or “social mobilization” (GOHN, 2008), of “outraged” (GOHN, 2019) or of

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1 In CAPES' webqualis database alone, it is possible to find more than 15 journals that have the word genre in their name; access in sep. 2021.
“collectives” (GOHN; PENTEADO; MARQUES, 2020), the studies are also expanding, taking over specific academic spaces, generating research centers and study groups and countless theses and dissertations. The quantity and quality of social movements and their militants are also increasing exponentially, attracting more and more adherents, followers and people interested in building a freer, fairer, more tolerant society with equal rights. Even so, the numbers of violence and death have not reduced; on the contrary. Data on violence against women (WAISELFISZ, 2015) and against LGBTI people (GGB, 2016) only reveal that intolerance persists (and in many cases even increases), despite the promotion of social movements and academic production. Which is even understandable, if we understand that agitating apparently calm waters brings out what is hidden at the bottom: the shadow side of the social, sedimented by the dominant ideology.

In this apparent paradox, we have some social practices intervening negatively in social movements and academic studies, so as not to allow banal violence, based on stereotypes and cultural taboos, to cease. In this way, one of the obstacles to tolerance may be precisely in the crystallized behaviors of society that separate men from women in different situations, which also become common sense in school education, as they were intentionally and/or silently incorporated throughout the school. of time by members of their own community.

Let’s look at the study by Pereira and Mizusaki (2015) as an example. The authors applied a questionnaire to students of a degree course in Pedagogy, whose results showed that the majority witnessed the gender issue at school only through jokes between colleagues, in the form of bullying, but claimed to have had no serious discussion at all. respect before entering university. Perhaps, for this very reason, most of these students conceptualized gender as a historical process of male-female binary division. As bullying is a clear manifestation of any kind of prejudice, it is a pity that most of the time the school ignores it as an excellent opportunity for reflection and study on the reason for its emergence in the group of students. And sometimes even the teachers...

In fact, gender is a highly complex word. Joan Scott (1995) had already alerted to the fact that the term has become, in several publications, synonymous with women. In these

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2 We can cite the work of Vianna et al (2011), which aimed to map the national academic production on education, gender and sexuality between the years 1990 and 2006, recognizing its growth. In addition, it is important to note that a simple search in the CAPES Theses and Dissertations Bank, carried out in January 2020, found almost eight hundred works with the descriptor “gender studies” defended in the last 10 years. The number drops to 26 when searching for “gender studies” AND “teacher training”.

3 There was once a time in history when the acronym was GLS (Gays, Lesbians and Sympathizers). As the understanding of diversity has evolved, so has the acronym, the most current being LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and other variations of sexuality and gender).
publications, the term came to designate the contradictions to which women submit (and are subject) to the circumstances of the universe of domination and oppression of men. But, says the author, gender is different from feminism, so they should not be taken as univocal. Although gender studies emerged from feminist endeavors in claims for equal rights, Scott (1995) notes, the concept of gender has nothing to do with the human biology of the x and y sex chromosomes (women give birth and men are physically more strong), but to the roles that are assigned to men and women. On the other hand, feminism is the specific movement of women to claim and respect their rights.

These social/sexual roles appear in the text by Alicia Fernandez (1994) under the idea of “cultural forms”, understood as a process of sociocultural construction based on prescriptions about ways of speaking and acting as a man or as a woman, conditioned to the biology of each individual. person – hence the emphasis given to the alternative conjunction or, since nothing hybrid is possible. “Cultural forms”, the author explains, by polarizing attitudes and ways of being only into a man’s or a woman’s thing, limit people’s identity and open the way to discrimination, prejudice, intolerance and violence, both physical as symbolic. Such prescriptions of “cultural forms” are dangerous, however, socially accepted – even if silently – and reinforced by cultural processes, among others, school education. Thus, it is possible to qualify the “cultural forms” as creators of stereotypes, even the most rudimentary ones, such as the woman being fragile and sensitive, aiming for nothing more than motherhood and the responsibilities of taking care of children and the home.

The article “Representations of body-identity in life stories”, written by Souza (2000), for example, indicates that there are representations in the figures of teachers that reinforce such stereotypes. Furthermore, the author explains that, with exceptions, there is nothing in the school capable of opposing, criticizing or reflecting on the biological determination of the binary culture, man or woman. Thus, we can return to Foucault (1988) and his observations on repression, creation and maintenance of stereotypes as historical elements. In addition, more recent reports, such as those collected by Costa and Vianna (2018), confirm the permanence of “cultural forms”, particularly those regarding women as responsible for taking care of the house and children, not being able to study or work, for this implies forsaking her own home, her husband, and her offspring. Or, we would say, throwing a great load of blame on them, when by choice or necessity they deviate from these standards.

No matter how “modern” society is – a purposeful double meaning, indicating avant-garde and the triple ideation of modernity of equality, fraternity and freedom –, the rancidity of
culturally constructed male superiority still remains. This shows up in the high numbers of violence (including murders), prejudice and discrimination, as compiled by Reis and Eggert (2017). And, paradoxically, the more the movements for equal rights are reinforced, apparently this number seems to increase. The media reports daily events of discrimination, disrespect, violence against women, gays, transsexuals, etc. The idea that comes to mind is that of these air balloons that, when squeezed on one side, increase in size on the other.

However, this is often revealed in a taciturn way in everyday life. When you enter a store to buy a toy, for example, the first question asked by the customer service is usually “for a boy or a girl?”, as there are two distinct sections in the stores, separated by “gender”. This also happens with clothes and other accessories, like a simple protective cell phone case: those with lots of glitter, flowers, hearts, cute animals, delicate characters and pink are adornments for effeminate girls, women and men.

França (2009, p. 18, our translation) recorded this clearly: “it is not sexual characteristics, but their representation and/or appreciation that build female and male identities. These identities are not natural, they are human constructions.” Thus, any form different from the stereotyped pattern of female-mother-female and male-provider-male is qualified as a “deviation of conduct”, and can/should be fixed. And how is this perpetuated in society? Through its rites, having, according to the author, the school as an allied institution for the maintenance of normality: “the school stands out for promoting the fixity of a female identity focused on students and a male identity focused on students, both taken as natural.” (p. 37, author's emphasis, our translation). For França (2009), the school teaches the meanings and attitudes of being a boy and being a girl, including moral aspects of this evident segregation between social roles.

Almost always, it is reiterated, this morality is the one instituted by the so-called “traditional” family, whose tradition is based on the idea of a family centered on the father-provider and on the mother-of-the-home-who-takes care of the children, or that is, the tradition of machismo, of patriarchy, of oppression. Although affirming this is already commonplace, it is worth going back to Louro's text (2000, p. 16, our translation), in which the author records that “despite all the oscillations, contradictions and weaknesses that mark this cultural investment”, recovering the history of struggles for a less segregating and less oppressive social life, “society intentionally seeks, through multiple strategies and tactics, to 'fix' a 'normal' and lasting male or female identity”. Among such strategies, the author draws attention to the fact that children learn (through family, television, church, internet, etc.) “from a very early age,
jokes and mockery, nicknames and gestures to direct those who do not conform to gender standards” (p. 19, our translation).

It is daring to say, however, that there are cultural forms that even predate these scorns learned in childhood. We recover an anecdote heard (or perhaps read) many years ago, whose unexpected ending [one of the tricks of humor to achieve laughter] reveals another strategy for fixing identities. It is said that two newborns were side by side in the maternity ward when one baby catches the attention of another, claiming to be a boy. The curiosity of the other is sharpened, questioning the reasons for such an assertion. The first, the self-declared boy, orders them to look “down” and, in doing so, both do not contemplate their sex (which would be expected), but discover their “blue blanket”.

We saw, then, Reis and Gomes (2011) declaring that there is a certain subtlety in gender issues, as if the segregation between men and women, created by cultural forms, was maintained by “unconscious” and even “innocent” symbolic gestures. He cites as an example the fact of giving a girl a doll, “perpetuating the idea that the girl should be as beautiful as a doll and take care of someone like a child” (p. 507). But what is unconscious in this attitude? The person who presents a girl with a doll would not do the same for a boy, that is, a toy representing a crying baby needs to be fed, have its diapers changed, etc. After all, why would anyone do that, if playing with dolls is for girls? And what message would you be trying to convey to parents, family and friends if you were to present the little junior with a girl's toy?

It seems that this thing would be a serious provocation, but unable to promote the rupture of what is normative for gender issues. Such provocation would remain on the surface of the thing, because the sense of right or wrong for a boy to play with dolls remains at the unconscious level of people and society and is not brought to the surface, except in elaborate speeches, but that do not reach this depth. It does not really "touch" the affective level, where values, prejudices, myths, fears, etc. are rooted. Thus, it would make no sense, within this social atmosphere of division between the attitudes expected for boys and girls, even in the cradle, to promote this "inversion". After all, to give a boy a doll is to invert the expectations for the newborn male, predicting that the boy will be marginalized, because he will become effeminate when he grows up, therefore, unable to become a male provider. So, it really doesn't make any sense at all this kind of attitude, just like gifting a newborn girl with a soccer ball or some blue-colored clothes.

All these questions about being a boy or a girl BEFORE BEING HUMAN were, in a way, very well captured by Berenice Bento (2011), when describing the whole ritual that...
involves the expectation of the birth of a new person, especially the restlessness of if you discover your sex, so that the family is already organized long before the birth, because gestating, giving birth and raising a child involves different attitudes and values according to the penis or vagina. Here are the author's words:

Watch a pregnant woman. As the months go by, the anxiety to know the sex of the child increases. When the sex of the child is revealed, what was an abstraction becomes concrete. The fetus is no longer a fetus, it is a boy or a girl. This revelation evokes a set of expectations and assumptions around a body that is still a promise [...] The materiality of the body only acquires intelligible life when the sex of the fetus is announced. All the symbolic effectiveness of the words uttered by the doctor is in their magical power to generate expectations that will later be materialized in toys, colors, clothing models and projects for the future child even before the body come to the world. When the child is born, he/she will find a complex network of desires and expectations for his/her future, taking into account to project him/her the fact of being a boy/girl, that is, being a body that has a penis/ vagina. These expectations are structured in a complex network of assumptions about behaviors, tastes and subjectivities that end up anticipating the effect that was supposed to cause. The toys, clothes colors and other accessories that will make up the trousseau are chosen taking into account what would be most appropriate and natural for a vagina and a penis. However, how is it possible to say that all children born with a vagina like pink, dolls, toys that do not require much strength, energy and intelligence? What we evoke as a natural datum, the sexed-body, is the result of gender norms. How can we say that there is a natural, original referent for experiencing gender, if at birth we already find the structures functioning and determining right and wrong, normal and pathological? The original is born “contaminated” by culture. Before birth, the body is already inscribed in a discursive field (BENTO, 2011, p. 550).

This long quote was necessary, as its content reveals that the man-woman binary world is part of a common sense fought by academic literature and social movements. Both developing at the rational level and, once again, with few exceptions, unable to reach the deepest level of the unconscious of people, groups and society. However, despite all the complaints to the contrary, everything that was presented by the author is still current. If in doubt, just type “revelation tea” in the search channel and browse the nearly ten million pages retrieved in the search.

Thus, this finding only reinforces how much male-female binarism (usually written in this sequence) is present in the world, being taboo to treat things differently - or would anyone dare to give a dress as a gift to a newborn boy? Again, that would make no sense. After all, it is an affront for an affront, as if it wanted to provoke such a social rupture by an individual, localized action, without educational or social movement promotion sense. Here's the taboo: dress is a thing of gender, and gender is given by biology. It doesn't break that way. However,
no one is horrified when the father dresses his little girl in his soccer team jersey.

Hence the following question: how, then, to overcome this taboo? And it is not at stake whether this taboo needs to be overcome, as it is past time for us to have the recognition of equal rights between people. Bento (2011, p. 555, our translation) recognizes the fundamental role of the school in this endeavor, however: “it presents itself as an institution incapable of dealing with difference and plurality, [because] it functions as one of the main guardian institutions of gender norms and producer of heterosexuality”. Unfortunately and regrettably, this quote refers to an accurate description of the school as a (re)producer of the male-female binary society. Although the author protects the school, taking it not as an isolated institution, but as part of a complex social mechanism, it is not possible to accept that the place of education is a place of discrimination, prejudice, exclusion, mockery, violence, the maintenance of a status quo that impose ways of being on people.

Reis and Gomes (2011), in a way, agree with the idea that the school has served as the guardian of the gender division installed in society, acting in an openly segregating way with distinct gender activities, such as ballet classes for girls only, football only for boys, etc., or in a muted way, maintaining the idea that boys are messier and more focused on science, technology and math, and girls are quieter and more devoted to the studies of letters and languages humanities.

For this very reason, the school still needs to find ways to overcome itself as the producer of these inequalities and differences, as this distinction between female and male children leads to a kind of generalized discouragement, keeping girls away from future professions focused on engineering, science and technology, or so-called masculine activities, and boys in ballet or other activities linked to the sensitive side of the personality.

Thus, school education contributes, silently - or loudly - to the maintenance of a sexist patriarchal society. Although the numbers inventoried by Reis and Gomes (2011) show that girls have surpassed boys both in terms of enrollment and with higher scores on school tests, the job market is still basically sexist, with better paid, more prestigious, greater responsibilities and powers destined, for the most part, for men. In the same direction, Fúlvia Rosemberg (2001) already mentioned the need for school education to be thought beyond itself, because a more egalitarian educational process is useless, if outside the school walls everything remains as it is - obviously not even the egalitarian educational process has been achieved, but it is important not to lose sight of the social context.

In fact, a few years earlier, Rosemberg (1994) had already warned about this type of
work in school education: naturalized occupational segregation (cultural, in fact) tends to promote schooling that is also divided, creating courses, subjects, attitudes and values attributed to them. artificially and forcefully for boys or girls. In fact, the author even postulates the hypothesis that the devaluation of the work of teachers, in terms of respect, salary and career, has accompanied the feminization of teaching. According to Rosenberg (1994), the more women in a given occupation, the greater the chances of precariousness and adverse working conditions. Here's another big – yet silent – problem of gender discrimination in our society that the school needs to recognize in order to fight against it.

This is part of the relationship created between gender and capitalism, acting in “symbiosis”, in the words of Cecilia Sardenberg (2015). The author realized that society's forms of oppression work together, strengthening each other, supporting the “intersected stratification and oppression systems” (p. 56). It is not by chance, therefore, that the labor market works with this way of reinforcing patriarchy and vice versa: both work together to maintain the status quo. It was as well noted by Miguel (2015, p. 1234, our translation): “Male domination and class domination are two central axes of the social structure. Any dense description of the social world, not to mention the quest for its transformation, needs to advance the understanding of their interrelation.

So far, then, we have already dealt with segregating and discriminatory social facts in society that directly or indirectly interfere with school education in terms of gender, as well as dealing with the internal difficulties of the school in dealing with people, because before that, a division of attitudes is sought. values and preparation for the future considering whether they are boys/men or girls/women. However, there are still, as well outlined by Carvalho (2004), problems to be faced in one of the most important society-school connections: the family. In this regard, the author notes the following: “The presence of a father is always surprising, as all the teachers, from public and private schools, report the predominant, if not exclusive, presence of mothers at parent-teacher meetings” (p. 46, author's emphasis, our translation).

In this article, Carvalho (2004) presents several complaints about the relationship between the family and the school, starting with the idea of parents. It is common for the governing body and teaching staff of a school unit to complain about the absence of parents in the children's school life. Often, however, those who participate or fail to participate are the mothers. The author of the article presents some examples, taken from a soap opera from the largest Brazilian network and from booklets distributed in schools, in which mothers are expected to closely monitor what their sons and daughters do at school in terms of performance,
learning, tasks, behaviors, etc. The presence of a father at school is considered surprising. So surprising that the novel creates a scene in which the only parent present at a school meeting is a widower.

As a result, we fall into yet another unclear gender trap: childcare is a maternal responsibility, as the father does not have enough time, skills or affection for such diligence. This is a family model that is both fictitious and out of use, either because of the fact that women are increasingly participating in the family income, or because of their participation in the labor market, etc. And for the more effective participation of men in “household affairs”. Carvalho (2004, p. 55, our translation) reinforces the presence of this stereotyped family model, still reinforced by the media, noting that there is an expectation that “the obligation to follow up on homework, to encourage studies and to give affection to the child is only the mother, even if she works all day, like the father”. However, the school, which reinforces this separation of responsibilities between women (mothers) and men (fathers), goes further, maintaining the invisibility of women when they complain about the absence of fathers, maintaining an association of fathers and teachers or even calling a meeting of parents, but expecting only the presence of mothers.

In a very recent article, Almeida and Ribeiro (2021) bring yet another account that meets this separation between the roles of mother and father in relation to school education, but in a more grotesque way. The authors tell about a particular situation of a male teacher who had broken up a fight between children, when a child had thrown toys at another child. The mother of the most violent child went to look for the teacher at school, without resolving anything. Later, the child's father was waiting for the teacher outside the school gate to resolve the “man-to-man” situation, stating that it was the mother's responsibility to solve the school's problems. The teacher who refuses to fight is called a fag by older students who witnessed the scene. “Everyday life is drenched in traps to make people think it's impossible to row against the tides”, affirm Almeida and Ribeiro (2021, p. 321, our translation).

In this reported situation, we saw that not only is the role delegated to the mother to get involved with the child's school situations, but the father needs to resolve things as a man, being aggressive and macho. Those who run away from the fight are not seen as someone who wants to deal emotionally and rationally with the things of school education, but pejoratively called by words that historically refer to men-not-so-men. Worse, and more regrettable, is that such a report is not an isolated case, but something that is perpetuated in society.

In essence, from cultural forms to the expectation of only the mother's participation in
school, when it comes to the relationship between gender and education, there is no way to disagree with Vianna (2015, p. 793, our translation) who, after two decades of militancy and research, carrying out diverse and in-depth surveys on the subject, in addition to political analyzes focused on the curriculum, he stated that “the impression remains that much remains to be done”. And indeed it lacks; the article by Souza e Souza (2021), published a few months ago, continues to bring repeated statements. This is because for decades the situation has not left the discourse and become a concrete reality; the authors state that it is necessary to “exceed the limits of biological knowledge and problematize the social, political and economic aspects that permeate the production of knowledge at school” (p. 432, our translation).

In other words, the question, as a rule, boils down to staying within the scope of establishing what should be done, although how to do it is rarely addressed. The school as a whole and its teachers still do not have strategies to understand gender issues in depth, to then face and try to solve the problems of prejudice, discrimination, crystallization of taboos and dominant ideas, and so on. Perhaps because discourses develop at the rational, perhaps rationalized, level of expressions of the dominant culture, often dominated by a high degree of stereotyping.

Both in the training of teachers and in the meetings of teachers and teachers in the school environment, immersion in the level that really moves our actions is precarious and even non-existent, the latent, the “shadow side”; where values, beliefs, the prejudices, the myths, which can only be brought to light when the different spaces of formation and action understand the need for a deep reflection on the role of the school and the teacher in the development of their students. A reflection that is only possible through the formation and study of fields of knowledge linked to the fundamentals of the act of educating. In particular, philosophy, psychology, anthropology and sociology, which allow the understanding of people's and society's ways of thinking, feeling and acting.

This training is perfectly possible, if seen in undergraduate courses as fundamental, as far as practices are concerned. The same in relation to continuing education. Because teacher preparation without the necessary humanistic training does not allow for a level of reflection and awareness sufficient to prevent the perpetuation of the same crystallized practices. And the school needs to be different: more human, more solidary, more inclusive and more diversified, because we believe that, from there, society can become another. It is this hope that moves us.

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