



**The Importance of Sexual Education in Teacher Training and Its Impact
on Sexist Practices in Early Childhood Education: A Look at Current
Literatures.**

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted as the final work of the 'Introduction to Sexuality and Sexual Education' course in the postgraduate program in Sexual Education at the São Paulo State University (UNESP), Araraquara campus. Its aim is to investigate the academic production related to the theme of Sexual Education in teacher training and its impact on sexist practices in Early Childhood Education. The data for the research were obtained from a bibliographic survey conducted in the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations over the last ten years. Through this mapping, it was concluded that there is a gap in the theme of Sexual Education in teacher training, which in turn contributes to pedagogical actions characterized as heteronormative, permeating through higher education to Early Childhood Education.

KEYS WORDS: Sexual Education. Teacher Training. Sexist Practices.

1 INTRODUCTION

Within the concept of Sexual Education, according to the studies by Ribeiro (2017), it 'should be continuous, formative, critical, reflective, and combative'. However, the lack of investment in public policies focused on Sexual Education exacerbates social issues that have always existed in our environment such as: prejudices, gender inequality, misinformation in disease prevention and early pregnancies, poor training of professionals who will deal with the topic in educational spaces, responsibility with the body and self-protection, combating homophobia, sexist practices, among others.

Considering these factors, and perceiving the school as a space for reflection and information, the concern with the initial and continuous training of teachers is still an aspect that lacks investment in Sexual Education training programs. Valuing Sexual Education within universities and subsequently, in schools, is necessary so that this education is intentional and emancipatory, reinforcing our rights and duties as citizens.

Anchored by Ribeiro's studies on Sexual Education and its conception in different spaces, as its conception is comprised of attitudes and values, behaviors and manifestations related to sexuality that accompany each individual from birth, the author defends Sexual Education as a pedagogical process and must be led by a trained professional, with an intentional approach, resulting from attitudes, ethics, and values, practices and conceptions that develop active citizenship.

Ribeiro helps us to reflect and understand the concepts of Education, Educator, and Sexual Education, and the need for the emergence of these themes in areas beyond education and health. Families need to understand the meaning and scope of Sexual Education and, in particular, the importance of looking at the training of the educator who will deconstruct and transform values and worldviews, contributing to the construction of ideas that will generate positive values and feelings in the fight against any type of prejudice.

The federal government's official recognition of Sexual Education occurred in 1997 with the National Curriculum Parameters (PCN), with an emphasis on issues of sexuality, body, and gender. Another landmark occurred in the 2000s with various studies, congresses, publications, and the emergence of the first master's program, the Postgraduate Program in Sexual Education at the Faculty of Sciences and Letters - UNESP, Araraquara campus. From 2003 to 2011, there were significant advances in gender equality and campaigns against homophobia.

These legal landmarks are linked to or result from different social and political movements that have triggered changes in thoughts and values, developing attitudes and sexual behaviors.

The different realities and contradictory discourses in various spaces contribute to the fact that education, especially in the school environment, is still diagnosed with scenarios of exclusion and sexist practices.

According to Britzman,

In terms of educational research, the idea of identity often remains tied to the mistaken view that identities are given or received and not negotiated - socially, politically, and historically. These absences cause identity to be placed on a linear continuum. The result is that, in the context of educational research, identities cannot escape two extremes: they are either seen as painful (when accommodating) or as pleasurable (when resisting). (BRITZMAN, 1996, p. 73)

In this sense, the role of schools should aim at quality and respect for the rights of all, constituting spaces that privilege democracy, that raise awareness and combat inequalities, recognizing the diversity of cultures, genders, races, colors, beliefs, etc. Schools and daycare centers are spaces of coexistence where different cultures meet and merge in their different groups that share values, experiences, and knowledge in a way that tightens bonds, creating opportunities to recognize differences.

2 OBJECTIVE

Based on the concepts presented, our objective is to investigate what academic production exists regarding the theme of Sexual Education, its impact on sexist practices in Early Childhood Education, and to identify the gaps in this theme within teacher training. To this end, an initial search was conducted in the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations over the last ten years, focusing on what has been published on this topic.

3 METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Initially, a literature review was conducted to collect, analyze, and synthesize existing knowledge about sexist practices in Early Childhood Education and the gaps in teacher training. This process involved searching the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations over the last ten years for what has already been written on the topic. After selecting and organizing relevant published studies, we analyzed and synthesized the results.

An initial survey including the topic 'sexual education' resulted in five hundred and six works. Adding later the specific filters 'sexual education; human sciences: education; 2012 – 2022' led us to four dissertations, with one of them having a repeated title. Next, we included the topic 'teacher training' which yielded a result of one thousand four hundred and sixty-eight works. Using the same criteria of specific filters 'teacher training'; 'human sciences: education'; '2012 - 2022', we found four dissertations addressing the theme of sexual education in teacher training. Finally, with the theme 'sexist practices', no work was found in the 'by subject' search. Therefore, we selected the 'all fields' option in the search, which resulted in one hundred and twenty works. Using the filters 'sexist practices'; 'education'; '2012 – 2022', we found twelve

dissertations. Specifically, on the study highlighted among sexist practices in early childhood education, we selected five dissertations.

For a better visualization of the data, the observed theses were systematized in Table 1.

4 ANALYSES

After the completion of the research, it is necessary to create a framework to facilitate the visualization of the analyses. Accordingly, Table 1 outlines the selected studies and displays the following elements: theme/title, objective, and year.

Table 1 – Elements Considered Pertinent for Analysis.

Theme/ Title	Objective
Sexual Education	
1. Faces, Discourses, and Practices: Visions and Experiences of Sexuality and Reproductive Health among Adolescents in a Public School in João Pessoa - PB.	To question why, despite so much knowledge about sexuality and reproductive health, there is a great lack of understanding among individuals about their own sexualities. Year: 2014.
2. Articulation between Paulo Freire and Herbert Marcuse for Humanized Sexual Education.	To investigate precedents about a perspective of liberating curriculum construction in science education on teenage pregnancy, through a Freirean thematic approach. Year: 2015.
3. The Importance of Fairy Tales for the Psychosexual Development of the Child: What Do Teachers Think, Say, and Do?	To understand how teachers use Fairy Tales in the Municipal Centers of Early Childhood Education (CMEIs) of our municipality of Francisco Beltrão/PR. Year: 2016.
Teacher Training	
4. "What is normal for me may not be normal for the other": the approach to body, gender, and sexualities in the teacher education programs of IFS/Campus Aracaju.	To analyze how the themes of body, gender, and sexualities are being introduced in the formative practices of the Chemistry and Mathematics teacher education programs at the Federal Institute of Education, Science, and Technology of Sergipe - IFS/Campus Aracaju. Year: 2016.
5. Gender, Sexual Education, and Teacher Training: Unveiling the Physical Education Course at the Federal University of Sergipe.	To analyze the experiences of teachers and graduating students of the Physical Education Teacher Training course, linked to the Department of Physical Education (DEF) at the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS), regarding the approach to differences and the importance of discussions on gender and sexuality themes in and for teacher training. Year: 2016.
6. Gender Relations in Body Education.	To investigate how gender relations are being addressed by students of Physical Education teacher training courses at public institutions in Goiânia. Year: 2018
7. The Importance of Gender and Sexuality Issues in Teacher Training.	Perceber como as questões de gênero e sexualidade estão ou não presentes na formação docente diante de debates contemporâneos sobre essas questões. Ano: 2018
8. An overview of pedagogical practices that challenge gender stereotypes in early childhood education in the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte.	Analyzing the pedagogical practices of early childhood education teachers who, situated within a heteronormative and sexist culture, seek, through their practices, to challenge gender stereotypes. Year: 2016.

9. The silencing of female teachers and gender socialization in the daily life of early childhood education: connections between teaching and religion?	To analyze how early childhood education teachers, with their religious identities and experiences, interact with children and express themselves about the children. Year: 2019
10. Impact of the presence of male managers and teachers in early childhood education centers: some elements for understanding.	To investigate the conditions that encompass the teaching and managerial work of male professionals in the Child Education Center at a municipal preschool in São Paulo. Year: 2016.
11. Gender and early childhood education: analysis of pedagogical work in a municipal preschool in the West of São Paulo..	To investigate how pedagogical work is developed in an Early Childhood Education institution concerning gender relations. Year: 2016
12. Social representations of gender relations among preschool teachers.	To identify the social representations of gender relations, analyzing the possible relationships between these representations and the teaching practices of preschool teachers in order to understand how gender relations are constructed in Early Childhood Education. Year: 2019.

SOURCE: AUTHORS (2023)

Starting the analysis and following Table 1, we come across Sônia Cristina da Nóbrega Carneiro dos Santos's master's thesis, titled "Faces, Discourses, and Practices: Views and Experiences of Sexuality and Reproductive Health Among Adolescents in a Public School in João Pessoa, PB." The research aimed to investigate knowledge about topics related to sexuality and sexual initiation among 8th and 9th-grade adolescents in a public elementary school in João Pessoa, Paraíba.

The author used questionnaires, interviews, and direct observation to grasp the students' responses and confirm that they respond in accordance with what has been culturally transmitted to them. One piece of data presented by Santos (2014) is related to the question "if there is a difference between sex and sexuality." In response, the author points out that approximately 35% said no, with 18.9% being girls and 16.2% boys; 8.1% did not respond, and 1.4% said they didn't know the difference.

In her final remarks, Santos (2014) found that educators play a disciplining role in the bodies of adolescents, as they spend most of their time in school and normalize behaviors through a normative discourse, avoiding naturalizing and biological discourses.

The next designated article is Text 2, "Articulation between Paulo Freire and Herbert Marcuse for a Humanizing Sexual Education," by Gabriel Ribeiro Demartini. The author begins by questioning to what extent pedagogical practices related to sexuality, its values, meanings, and significance can be limiting factors in a humanizing conception of the subject, and how critical pedagogy can help overcome these limitations.

Using the thought of Herbert Marcuse in conjunction with Paulo Freire's, an analysis was carried out on a Sexual Prevention project in a municipal school in the city of Sorocaba, SP. The idea was to promote a new, more sensitive dialogue in the face of dehumanizing situations. Demartini (2015) found that biological approaches were recurrent and suggested possibilities for overcoming these and directing sexual education towards a more humanizing, aesthetic, ethical, and politically engaged direction.

His final remarks emphasize that the theme of sexual education should not be limited to teaching only in a specific area of science but should engage with the entire educational process, aiming for a liberating educational conception.

Continuing from the content of Text 3, "The Importance of Fairy Tales for the Psychosexual Development of Children: What Do Teachers Think, Say, and Do?", authored by Eritânia Silmara de Brittos, it sought to highlight how teachers use fairy tales in Municipal Centers for Early Childhood Education (CMEI) in schools in the municipality of Francisco Beltrão, Paraná. Data was collected through field research in 15 CMEI, and 30 teachers responded to semi-structured interviews.

As results, Brittos (2016) points to the need for teacher training in emancipatory Sexual Education for Early Childhood Education teachers, linked to psychoanalytic knowledge as a possible path for intervention with children through fairy tales.

We continue with the presentation within the "Teacher Training" descriptor, with Text 4 titled "What is normal for me cannot be normal for another: the approach to body, gender, and sexualities in the teaching programs of the Federal Institute of Sergipe (IFS), Aracaju campus," by Helma de Melo Cardoso.

In this research, the author analyzed the Pedagogical Projects of the Mathematics and Chemistry teacher education courses at IFS. The research involved a professor from the Education and Diversity discipline, a Focus Group, and five students in the final year of the courses. The results obtained indicate positive aspects such as having a diversity-related subject in the curriculum and a negative aspect being the silence concerning the normalization of bodies and sexualities.

Cardoso (2016), in her final considerations, highlights that students did not have official contact with the subject in the teacher education program, and the lack of critical and reflective discussion for these future teachers may possibly lead to the reproduction of sexist knowledge and a standardized curriculum in their teaching practice.

Continuing with the discussion of topics and introducing Text 5, "Gender, Sexuality Education, and Teacher Training: Unveiling the Physical Education Course at the Federal University of Sergipe," written by Luciano Rodrigues dos Santos, the research involved four teachers and four graduating students in the Physical Education teacher education program.

Based on the data presented by Santos (2016), the research results emphasize that topics related to gender and sexuality diversity are necessary and essential knowledge for teacher education in order to minimize prejudice, discrimination, and taboos in society. It is also noted that, because it is a cross-cutting theme, these topics are often superficially addressed, highlighting the importance of incorporating gender and sexuality issues into the agenda of public education policies, especially in the ongoing training of teachers in teacher education programs, as these themes are present daily at all levels of education.

Continuing with Table 1, we come across Text 6, titled "Gender Relations in Body Education," by Kelly Cristini Martins Evangelista. The research included 214 students enrolled between the first and eighth semesters of the Physical Education teacher education program.

Evangelista (2018) aimed to understand how students perceive differences between men and women in general and the notion of difference between masculinity and femininity. Through a series of surveys, it concluded that gender still acts as a barrier to bodily expression

and participation in sports practices. Furthermore, bodily practices both within and outside the institution are also subject to gender differentiations, reflecting an education of the body culturally directed by the conception of male and female subjects.

Continuing with the mapping, Text 7, titled "The Importance of Gender and Sexuality Issues in Teacher Education," by Deisy Christina Moreira Santos. The author seeks to understand how gender and sexuality issues are present in teacher education, identifying academic actions in initial and ongoing teacher education that promote an open debate on these topics.

In her final considerations, Santos (2018) emphasizes the need to make known the concepts of masculinity and femininity and the different ways of experiencing sexuality observed in social interactions, and whether or not these affect teachers' conceptions. She observes that a scientific education is necessary for teachers to address gender and sexuality issues and to be aware of not transmitting their own values, opinions, and beliefs as unique, indisputable truths or considering them principles to be followed

Continuing with the mapping under the descriptor "Sexist Practices," we have Text 8, "An Examination of Pedagogical Practices that Challenge Gender Stereotypes in Early Childhood Education in the metropolitan region of Belo Horizonte," authored by Lorena Marinho Silva Aguiar.

The research aimed to analyze and identify pedagogical practices that challenge gender stereotypes by two Early Childhood Education teachers in Contagem, MG. It also aimed to question and understand teachers' perspectives considering legislation, educational reforms, interpersonal relationships, and living conditions that affect their professional practice from a gender perspective.

In her final considerations, Aguiar (2016) presented practices that were present in the daily lives of teachers and pointed to the need for teacher education in the field of gender and sexuality for the sake of non-discriminatory and more democratic education.

Moving on to Text 9, "The Silencing of Teachers and Gender Socialization in the Everyday Life of Early Childhood Education: Relationships between Teaching and Religion," written by Leniara Pellegrinello Camargo, it seeks to analyze how early childhood education teachers, with their religious identities and experiences, interact with and express themselves regarding children. Seventeen teachers from a Municipal Early Childhood Education Center (CMEI) in Curitiba, PR, participated in the research.

The analyses were collected through questionnaires and observations aimed at understanding the relationships between gender and the religious experiences of teachers as part of their socialization and their daily decisions regarding gender.

In her final considerations, Camargo (2019) concludes that teachers with a more traditional Christian religious background tend to reinforce gender stereotypes more in their speech, actions, and writings than teachers with a more fluid and individualized religious experience. She emphasizes the need for reflective teacher education to break away from sexist practices, contributing to the professional socialization process.

Moving on to Text 10, "Impact of the Presence of Male Managers and Teachers in Early Childhood Education Centers: Some Elements for Understanding," authored by Michelle Mariano Mendonça. The author analyzed an early childhood education school in a municipality in São Paulo in terms of the compatibility between gender and roles performed and how the

community, families, and teaching staff express recognition, acceptance, and identification of the roles of male managers and teachers in their professional spaces. The research involved one male teacher, one female teacher, one male manager, one pedagogical coordinator, two fathers, and two mothers (one of a boy and one of a girl).

Mendonça (2016), in her final considerations, reveals that the professionals' statements reflect the influence of cultural and social institutions in their reflections on breaking gender stereotypes. However, although there are indications of differences between men and women in the discourse, professionals propose activities aimed at building an egalitarian environment with children, and the presence of men in early childhood education allows for changes in the socialization space, breaking with gender-based work organization.

Moving towards the end of the characterization of the studies, we highlight Text 11, "Gender and Early Childhood Education: Analysis of Pedagogical Work in a Municipal Preschool in Western São Paulo," by Juliana Aparecida Zago. The research aimed to understand the gender perception of early childhood education teachers and how it is reflected in pedagogical planning. The research involved three female teachers and 24 children in a preschool II classroom.

In concluding her research, Zago (2016) notes that through interviews and classroom observations, there was a lack of professional preparedness regarding the gender theme, with conceptions rooted in religious beliefs leading to terminological and conceptual confusion. She emphasizes the need for investment in research on gender as a way to conceive more integrative pedagogical practices, reducing the gaps between individuals' experiences based on the exclusionary criterion of gender.

Finally, in the proposed investigation, we come across Text 12, "Social Representations of Gender Relations of Early Childhood Education Teachers," authored by Ana Célia de Souza Santos. The research was divided into two stages, with Stage 1 involving identifying the social representations of gender relations through interviews with thirteen teachers from seven Municipal Early Childhood Education Centers in Teresina, PI. In Stage II, classroom teaching practices of four teachers were observed to identify possible relationships between social representations of gender and teaching practices.

As a conclusion, Santos (2016) reveals that the social representations of gender relations held by teachers are related to sexual identity, constructed from biological characteristics, learned in family interactions under the influence of media communication and religion. Thus, teachers convey knowledge to their students based on a sexist education with aspects related to respect and existing diversities in that space. Gender relations are reproduced through the teaching of behaviors, attitudes, and values through play, art, music, and literature.

5 RESULTS

Considering the themes highlighted in this analysis, it is necessary to conduct a survey of questions regarding teacher education, whether it is initial or continuing, in relation to training in Sexual Education linked to the deconstruction of sexist practices.

Among the 12 selected works, 8 of them directly mention the importance of Sexual Education in teacher training and practice, while the others provide accounts of the

consequences of a lack of sexuality-focused education, with examples of sexist practices and heteronormative education.

According to the texts 1, 2, and 3 presented in Table 1, all of them emphasize the need for teacher training in Sexual Education and how such training can assist in pedagogical practices, avoiding naturalizing and biological discourses. Specifically, Santos (2016, p.16) in text 1 highlights that "the challenges of contemporary basic education have exceeded the limits of traditional curriculum teaching and learning processes and that it is necessary to take into account the complexity inherent in every classroom."

Texts 5 and 6 analyze the importance of training in Sexual Education for Physical Education teacher education programs. In this regard, since it is a cross-cutting theme, the subject is presented and discussed in a superficial manner.

According to Evangelista (2018), "Physical Education is a course that works closely with the body and corporeality and is privileged spaces for addressing gender issues and their links to body education." Therefore, it is necessary to work on questioning the construction of inequalities between sexes and sexuality, deconstructing naturalized representations in a culture of prejudice.

The National Curriculum Parameters (PCN's) emphasize that,

Sexual orientation should be emphasized in two ways: within the scheduled curriculum - through cross-cutting themes in different areas of knowledge; as well as outside the scheduled curriculum - that is, whenever issues related to sexuality arise (BRAZIL, 1997).

Working with Sexual Education promotes the debate and reflection of necessary discussions both within and outside the school environment. The school has the role of clarifying, informing, and providing experiences in the space. Santos (2018) in the mentioned text 7 emphasizes the promotion of opening dialogues about sexuality and highlights the need for scientific training of the teacher.

[...]Qualifying teachers is necessary so that they can feel confident and secure in exploring the subject, ensuring that addressing topics related to adolescence, sex, gender, puberty, and others is not an easy task. In addition, there is a belief that, although there is some preparation for addressing gender issues, there is a certain degree of shyness, insecurity about the theme, among other aspects that underscore the importance of paying more attention to the debate on these issues highlighted in teacher education. (SANTOS, 2018, p.55)

And finally, Camargo (2019) and Zago (2016) understand that teachers in Early Childhood Education reflect in their pedagogical practices the influences of their personal and cultural experiences and religious beliefs. What kind of education is offered to girls and boys? There is a need to deepen this discussion in the daily life of schools, especially in Early Childhood Education, regarding the construction of the notion of gender by boys and girls, with the aim of mitigating practices that reproduce stereotypes and sexism.

6 CONCLUSION

We can point out that Sexual Education is necessary in teacher training, and we believe that such training will contribute to rethinking and reconsidering practices in favor of emancipatory and more democratic education.

The bibliographic review conducted allowed us to reflect on the socialization spaces of children, adolescents, and university students. In all spheres of education, the binary discourse of gender and heteronormativity influences the formation and information of the analyzed subjects

This context indicates the need for more research in the field of Sexual Education, and it also emphasizes the importance of addressing gender and sexuality issues in teacher education, both initial and ongoing, as they are present at all levels of education.

For schools to fulfill their role, including that of educating critical and conscious citizens, Sexual Education is relevant in teaching actions and practices in order to ensure knowledge about oneself, others, and the world.

Schools can help children and adolescents develop a healthy understanding of their sexuality, relationships, and health. Some suggestions to meet this need include developing a comprehensive Sexual Education curriculum that is suitable for each age group in line with the school's Educational and Political Project (PPP).

In practice, seek partnerships with other professionals, such as those in the healthcare field, or teachers with expertise in sexual and reproductive health to teach classes or provide lectures and workshops. These professionals should have experience and a close relationship with students to strengthen trust and a sense of belonging in the same environment. It is not enough to simply put in any random professional if students need to feel confident in addressing topics such as puberty, contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, consent, sexual diversity, gender, and healthy relationships.

It is also important to ensure that Sexual Education is inclusive, covering the diversity of sexual orientations, gender identities, and cultures present in the school, emphasizing the importance of self-care, healthy relationships, and mutual respect.

The space should be safe and welcoming for open discussions about sexuality, encouraging questions and promoting healthy discussion without judgment or stigmatization.

Involving parents or guardians is also essential. Clearly communicate the objectives and content of Sexual Education and opportunities for them to participate, whether through meetings, informative sessions, or online resources. Parents play a crucial role in their children's education, and teachers can provide support, guidance, and resources to help parents feel more confident in addressing these issues at home.

Resources should be educational and up-to-date, evidence-based. There are various materials, books, and digital resources available that can assist and provide accurate information to students.

Assessments can be ongoing, with regular estimates to track the impact of Sexual Education at school. This can be done through surveys, Google Forms, feedback from students, parents, and teachers, and adjustments can be made based on these results. Remember that the implementation of Sexual Education in school should follow local policies and regulations

and involve the collaboration of the entire school team, healthcare professionals, and the community as a whole.

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