

GENDER RELATIONS IN THE MUNICIPAL NETWORK OF BELO HORIZONTE: CONTINUOUS TEACHER TRAINING

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ABSTRACT. This text presents the reflective report of the project of continuous teacher training in the Municipal Education Network of Belo Horizonte, between 2015 and 2018, in the field of gender relations. Partnership between the Municipal Department of Education and the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais promoted the necessary conditions for the implementation and integration of academic activities of extension, education and research at undergraduate and graduate levels. Despite the national political context of gender offensives in the educational field, the demand for training actions came from teachers and education managers when they faced the impacts of asymmetries in learning between girls and boys, as well as situations of gender violence at school. In the light of the post-structuralist theoretical assumptions of gender, training uses diverse methodologies such as study groups, seminars, pedagogical workshops and case studies in different spaces of the city, such as schools, universities and museums. The analysis of the four years of the project revealed the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to gender relations of a permanent nature, since isolated training actions have proved ineffective.

Keywords: School; teacher training; gender.

RELAÇÕES DE GÊNERO NA REDE MUNICIPAL DE BELO HORIZONTE: FORMAÇÃO DOCENTE CONTINUADA

RESUMO. Este texto apresenta o relato reflexivo do projeto de formação continuada docente na rede municipal de educação de Belo Horizonte, entre 2015 e 2018, no campo das relações de gênero. A parceria entre a Secretaria Municipal de Educação e a Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais promoveu as condições necessárias para a realização e integração das atividades acadêmicas de extensão, ensino e pesquisa nos níveis da graduação e pós-graduação. Apesar do contexto político nacional das ofensivas antigênero no campo educacional, a demanda por ações formativas partiu de docentes e gestores/as da educação ao se depararem com os impactos das assimetrias na aprendizagem entre meninas e meninos, bem como situações de violência de gênero na escola. À luz dos pressupostos teóricos pós-

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estruturalistas de gênero, a formação utiliza metodologias diversificadas como grupos de estudo, seminários, oficinas pedagógicas e estudos de caso em diferentes espaços da cidade como escolas, universidade e museus. A análise dos quatro anos do projeto revela a importância de uma abordagem interdisciplinar das relações de gênero e de caráter permanente, pois ações formativas isoladas têm se mostrado ineficazes.

Palavras-chave: Escola; formação docente; gênero.

RELACIONES DE GÉNERO EN LA RED MUNICIPAL DE BELO HORIZONTE: FORMACIÓN CONTINUADA

RESUMEN. En este texto se presenta el informe de reflexión del proyecto de formación continua de profesores y profesoras de la Red Municipal de Educación de Belo Horizonte, entre 2015 y 2018, en el ámbito de las relaciones de género. La asociación entre el Departamento Municipal de Educación y la Pontificia Universidad Católica de Minas Gerais promovió las condiciones necesarias a la realización e integración de las actividades académicas de extensión, enseñanza e investigación en los niveles de licenciatura y posgrado. A pesar del contexto político nacional de las ofensivas de género en el ámbito educativo, la demanda de acciones de capacitación provino de los maestros y administradores de la educación cuando se enfrentaron a los impactos de las asimetrías en el aprendizaje entre niñas y niños, así como a situaciones de violencia de género en la escuela. A la luz de los supuestos teóricos postestructuralistas de género, la capacitación utiliza diversas metodologías como grupos de estudio, seminarios, talleres pedagógicos y estudios de caso en diferentes espacios de la ciudad como escuelas, universidades y museos. El análisis de los cuatro años del proyecto muestra la importancia de un enfoque interdisciplinario de las relaciones de género de carácter permanente, ya que las acciones formativas aisladas han demostrado ser ineficaces.

Palabras clave: Escuela; formación docente; género.

Introduction

This article consists of a report of the experience of teacher training in the field of gender relations with teachers from the Municipal Education Network of Belo Horizonte between 2015 and 2018. The experience is the result of a partnership between the Municipal Education Department of Belo Horizonte, through the Center for Education, Culture and Citizenship, and the Graduate Programs in Psychology and Social Sciences and the Pro-Rectorate of Extension at PUC Minas.

Teachers of the Network were consulted about their training demands and presented initial questions, which were taken as a guide: Is the teaching expectation about students distinguished by gender? How do girls and boys occupy the collective spaces of the school? What are the gender representations in didactic books? What to do with that student who does not fit in the masculine or feminine norms?

Taking the field of post-structuralist studies of gender and sexuality as an epistemological perspective (Louro, 2003; Miskolci, 2012; Butler, 2018), teacher training actions have used different methodological strategies in different spaces in the capital of the

state of Minas Gerais to discuss asymmetries in teaching/learning, gender violence and relationships between girls and boys in school life.

Brief history of the Municipal Education Network in the field of public gender policies

Since the end of the 20th century, the Municipal Education Network of Belo Horizonte has invested in a public policy of continuing teacher education in the field of gender and sexuality studies. According to Alves and Souza (2017), there have been records of teacher training actions for about three decades, either through projects or activities developed in the daily context of the municipal schools, or through training and improvement courses, organized by Municipal Education Secretariat of Belo Horizonte, addressed to teachers from the entire Municipal Network.

In the 1990s, that approach expanded, moving from a purely biological frame to a multidisciplinary perspective, incorporating the areas of Portuguese, History, Arts, Geography, among others (D'Andréa, 2014). This multidisciplinary character made it possible to include gender studies, contributing to overcoming biological and cultural essentialisms to understand the differences between the sexes.

Continuous training of elementary school teachers has been the topic of numerous public educational policies in Brazil, such as the Law of Directives and Bases of National Education (Brasil, 1996a), the Fund for Maintenance and Development of Elementary Education and Valuation of Teaching (Brasil, 1996b) and the National Curriculum Parameters (Brasil, 1997).

In the early 2000s, teacher training in gender and sexuality proliferated throughout Brazil, encouraging a qualified discussion on this topic in the field of education. However, since 2016, the inclusion of the theme of gender relations in the school curriculum has been the subject of numerous debates and controversies, and the actions of the 'School Without a Party' political movement and the defense of a gender ideology as a fallacy have resulted in the suppression of this theme in the National, State and Municipal Education Plans. There is currently a mismatch between the prescriptions of the legal texts regarding the treatment of gender relations in the school context, and the demands for tackling gender inequalities in elementary education, which justifies the efforts for the continuous training of the teaching staff.

Against this political setback, in August 2017, the City Hall of Belo Horizonte joined the United Nations Program Platform 50/50 (ONU Mulheres, 2017) "Gender equality: achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls". The Center for Education, Culture and Citizenship of the Belo Horizonte Municipal Education Secretariat is responsible for the Inclusive Education axis in the committee for the elaboration of the Municipal Gender Equity Plan that is articulated with the UN proposal. One of the recommendations of the UN document is the continuous teacher training, as well as the monitoring and assessment of practices aimed at promoting gender equity in public facilities, including schools.

Asymmetries in gender relations in the school environment have produced a series of challenges for the daily practice of teachers, including the naturalization of gender inequality and the learning of children and adolescents. Data from the International Student Assessment Program (Brasil, 2016) reveal that boys have superior results in learning mathematics compared to girls, while these have superior results in learning language content. The contents are hierarchized, thus, the mathematical ability, resulting from logical reasoning, a characteristic attributed to men, is more valued than the ability of language and communication, associated with the sensitivity that is seen as characteristic of women. The

analysis of these data reveals the reproduction of gender inequality at school: boys and girls do not learn equally because education is not performed equally.

In this context, the Municipal Education Secretariat established, in 2015, a partnership with the Graduate Programs in Psychology and Social Sciences and the Pro-Rector of Extension at PUC Minas, in order to develop research and intervention methodologies in the field of gender issues at municipal schools and addressing learning asymmetries and violence resulting from inequality within these relationships.

The trajectory of the project between 2015 and 2018

The first action, in 2015, was the drafting of the *Diretrizes da educação para as relações de gênero na Rede Municipal de Educação de Belo Horizonte* (Belo Horizonte, 2015), which aimed to contribute to the construction of educational public policies to confront sexist practices.

In 2016, the second action was entitled *Meninas e meninos aprendem a mesma coisa? Desigualdades no processo de ensino e aprendizagem*. In order to facilitate teacher displacement, training courses were offered in four regions of the city (Center-South; Barreiro; Venda Nova and Northeast), this strategy allowed for greater teacher participation in monthly meetings that focused on practical actions to promote gender equity in the classroom (Moreira et al., 2017).

In 2017, the action *Gênero, educação e cultura: estratégias de intervenção* aimed at instrumentalizing teachers in the theoretical-methodological field of gender. The monthly meetings, this time, were held at the Museum of Arts and Crafts aiming to promote a critical reflection of the museological collection from the perspective of gender relations in the daily work developed by men and women, in public and domestic spaces.

In 2018, the action *Educação e equidade: assimetrias entre meninas e meninos na escola* took place in four schools, located in different administrative regions of Belo Horizonte. This activity was constituted as a pilot project of direct intervention in schools, for that, we have students from extension undergraduate programs in PUC Minas to accompany schools through qualitative strategies such as participant observation, photographic records and informal conversations, in order to produce a critical observation in the school routine. At the end of that year, a feedback was given to participating schools through an interactive seminar at PUC Minas, when teachers from these schools presented the activities carried out in their pedagogical practices to tackle gender asymmetries in learning.

In these four years, about 2,700 teachers from the Municipal Network participated in the continuous training actions described above. Activities were previously disclosed to the schools of the network, the participation was always made by free joining, based on a previous registration, in which some information was collected. Data systematization revealed that this audience is composed of 14% men and 86% women; with an average age of 30 years; with an average of 10 years of teaching experience; the majority with specialization and/or Master's degree.

The project is still ongoing and in the 2019-2020 biennium it intends to evaluate the results of the continuous training of the municipal teaching staff, as well as to produce a paradigmatic material with innovative methodologies for addressing issues present in gender relations in the school context.

Gender relations and school: some learning and many possibilities

Gender is understood here as an analytical category that makes it possible to understand the narrative and prestige disputes for the positions of men and women in the social context, which leads us to understand how differences are transformed into inequalities, creating poles of domination and submission that become naturalized (Scott, 1990), and producing precarious conditions of existence (Butler, 2003, 2018). Gender studies have led to the deconstruction of the naturalized explanation of differences attributed to sexes for biological reasons. The essentialist explanation that the differences in the position of boys and girls in social relationships or in the ways of conducting life were derived from hormonal differences was rejected. We also sought to highlight the risks that the explanations that associate differences with socialization processes were also taken in a naturalized way and converted into immutable behaviors (Butler, 2003, 2018)

The naturalized understanding of socialization processes leads us to believe that men and women learn from childhood the ways considered socially proper to lead life and that it will not be possible, when young and adults, to change such habits. Nevertheless, we know that learning is a continuous and non-linear process, therefore liable to change throughout life.

The concept of gender of Scott (1990) seeks to break the dichotomy between the collective and the singular, since the processes of subjectification can only be understood as processes experienced by contextualized and socially active subjects. Such processes are dynamic, continuous and non-linear and, therefore, the meanings produced for the gender positions of men and women can be transformed throughout life.

Discussion on gender at school needs to be carried out with dialogical and participatory methodological strategies, since dialogue is the sign that should mark the production of knowledge at school, as a democratic space where everyone has to express their ideas, to be heard and respected (Rena, 2006). The critical and dialectical bias of this methodological choice questions a static view of reality, showing a transforming interest in the situations or phenomena studied, rescuing its historical dimension and unveiling its possibilities for change.

A recurring complaint among teachers participating in the training is the difficulty of approaching the theme in the classroom, requiring some instrumentalization for student work. In this sense, a diversified methodology can meet this demand, for example, the realization of group dynamics that work as starting points for discussion, being necessary the due adaptation of the professional, according to age, maturity, interest and specificity of the public and each educational space. Based on the assumption that there is no formula or explanatory manual that guides the pedagogical work with gender relations, the so-called professional lucidity is essential (Perrenoud, 2000), from which the education professional experiences the dilemmas, the surprises and the permanent mutual search for solutions to conflicts arising from everyday school activities in the field of gender.

The school demarcates, frames and reiterates the places of girls and boys, establishing rules and penalties for gender transgression (Louro, 2003). Such framework is materialized in the organization of students in rows of girls and boys, in the library books indicated for girls (novels and poetry) and boys (action and adventure), in the games of girls (doll) and boys (ball) and in interpersonal relationships. These gender markers at school can generate conflicts, resistance and, mainly, unequal learning processes. In this scenario, it is up to the school management team - management, administration employees, teachers,

monitors and partners - the important task of promoting dialogue actions of gender equity in education.

Another example of the naturalization of gender hierarchies is revealed in the use and mastery of the school's physical space. It is common for the courts to be mostly occupied by boys for sports, considered to be proper to men. Girls in general use 'the corners', where they can set conversations, share beauty products, play with dolls, in short, activities that denote female stereotypes. Promoting interchange between genders is an initiative that can contribute to the rupture with hegemonic models, such as activities carried out together, ensuring equal times in the use of the collective spaces of the school

Gender inequality at school is also reflected in the practice of violence between boys and girls, and between boys and other boys who are, in some way, outside the standards of the so-called hegemonic masculinity, either because they do not like certain games, or because they are slight and/or considered 'effeminate' (Junqueira, 2009). On the other hand, disputes between girls also reproduce gender stereotypes, for example, in fights for jealousy.

Violence means a serious violation of human rights, and that practiced at school is one of the crossings that produce learning difficulties. A welcoming school climate that guarantees the physical and psychological integrity of students and teachers in their differences is the first step in facing violence. Learning problems and gender violence are highly complex, but they are explained in a reductionist and essentialist way, either when the inequalities are attributed to the biological condition, or to the different modes of socialization of boys and girls. This diagnosis made in municipal schools of Belo Horizonte reveals a situation common to other contexts (Wenetz & Stigger, 2006; Miskolci, 2012). Thus, a fundamental challenge in training actions is to promote the breaking of universal models, since there are different ways of being women and being men, requiring the recognition of difference, not as inequality, but as a potent pedagogical strategy for discussing human diversity.

Considerations in movement

As pointed out during this experience report, gender inequality negatively impacts learning processes at a significant stage in life, affecting personal life, and social and work relations in a longitudinal way, as considered by Louro (2003), Junqueira (2009) and Miskolci (2012) among others, in their research on gender in educational contexts.

The promotion of educational equity practices is a strategy to face gender violence. The design of educational public policies with guaranteed rights is opposed to a school culture marked by discriminatory practices of student and teacher stigmatization (Junqueira, 2009).

The dimensions of extension, education and research in university practice have been experienced in our projects in an organic way. Going to the field is an opportunity to set teaching/learning relationships, which have been systematized, registered and communicated in academic events. On the other hand, the extension practice is set in a dynamic relationship with the research, because at the same time it is born from the research itself and produces interrogations and questions. From the point of view of the target audience, the analysis of the information produced so far indicates that there is already a sensitivity for the observation of consequences of naturalized gender inequalities in the school context, as well as the teaching manifestation for the training continuity.

The continuous systematization and evaluation of actions also reveal some difficulties in the process that can sometimes be derived from the functioning structure of municipal schools, for example, the inclusion of continuous teacher training in the planning of the school calendar and the workload of teachers. In addition, especially as of 2016, another difficulty can be recognized in the resistance to gender studies by some teachers and educational managers who identify with the posture of conservative political and religious groups.

Continuous training on gender relations in the municipal teaching staff takes place in the context of contradictions and disputes between the narratives, since if on the one hand, we find the supporters of the slogan 'gender ideology', on the other, the City Hall of Belo Horizonte is engaged in the elaboration of the Municipal Plan for Gender Equality, signaling positively for political investment in the discussion of gender in public facilities in the city, such as schools.

Finally, we aim for asymmetric gender relations to be perceived not only in 'problematic' episodes, for example, in acts of violence, in discrepancies in performance in learning assessments between boys and girls or in the unequal use of physical space at school, but that they are considered as a fundamental aspect of the socialization process of boys and girls, as well as in school learning. We seek, at the same time, to investigate how gender relations are experienced at school, and to contribute so that this discussion definitely enters the agenda of teacher education and pedagogical projects, so that teachers and students reflect and incorporate the gender dimension in the school routine.

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