



(Dis)Invisibilization: reflections about sexual diversity in the formation of mathematics teachers

(Des)Invisibilização: reflexões sobre diversidade sexual na formação de professores de matemática

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Abstract

The present text aims to reflect on the school process of making people of different sexual orientation invisible and how it can harm, for example, learning in Mathematics. A de-inviability is suggested from the problematization of prejudice. It moves between the processes of estrangement and subjectivation of gender and sexuality, based on experiences during the author's regular training. Through reminiscences, we sought to establish a dialogue with literature that deals with an education that goes beyond an insertion in the world, but for a questioning about why things are, as they are, in order to contribute with reflections for possible reduction of injustices. It is expected to sensitize teachers, from initial training, to a more empathic teaching exercise capable of seeing all students in the classroom to offer a respectful and welcoming environment for teaching and learning.

Keywords: Mathematical Education; Diversity of Sexual Orientations in the classroom; Math class without prejudice.

Resumo

O presente texto objetiva refletir sobre o processo escolar de invisibilização de pessoas de orientação sexual diferente da heteronormativa e como ele pode prejudicar, por exemplo, a aprendizagem em Matemática. Sugere-se uma desinvisibilização a partir da problematização do preconceito. Transita-se entre os processos de estranhamentos e subjetivações de gênero e sexualidade, a partir de vivências durante a formação regular do autor. Por meio de reminiscências, buscou-se estabelecer um diálogo com literatura que versa sobre uma educação para além de uma inserção no mundo, mas para um questionamento sobre o porquê de as coisas serem, como estão sendo, com a finalidade de contribuir com reflexões para uma possível diminuição de injustiças. Espera-se sensibilizar professores, desde a formação inicial, para um exercício de uma docência mais empática capaz de enxergar todos/as os/as estudantes na sala de aula para oferecer um ambiente respeitoso e acolhedor para o ensino e a aprendizagem.

Palavras-chave: Educação Matemática; Diversidade de Orientações Sexuais na sala de aula; Aula de Matemática sem preconceito.

Introduction

With the present text, I aim to share the invisibilization process of sexualities that

Submetido em: 30/09/2020 – **Aceito em:** 15/12/2021 – **Publicado em:** 31/12/2021

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differ from heteronormativity² in the school space, more specifically, in the mathematics classroom. I seek to show how this process can be harmful to learning. For this, I share experiences from my insertion in the school environment to my performance as a teacher who works with teacher training in order to enhance training with emphasis on creating a welcoming and respectful environment for teaching and learning mathematics.

The first day at school

In the year 1982 I was not quite seven years old and I longed to learn to read and write. I was extremely anxious because this would be my first day at a school. I woke up very early, before six in the morning. I would finally have contact with a world far from my immediate surroundings of coexistence. I would learn from an educated person. It was the way my mother referred to the teacher.

The school was just over a mile from our house and we walked there, my older brother Du and I. My mother could not accompany us because she had to take care of my two younger brothers, Pepê who was four years old, and Robinho who was two. Du had been attending school for approximately a month. At almost eight years old he was already used to the route. It was the 1980s and there was a certain confidence in letting children go to school on their own.

The journey could be long, but the will to arrive was enormous. I didn't feel the distance or the time spent to cover it as something tiring. The enthusiasm to get to know the school was very great. I wanted, with all the intensity of wanting – characteristic of a child – to know my new space for living and learning. A few hundred yards away, he could already see the outlines of the school. As I approached, I noticed that the school space was delimited by a fence made of precast concrete columns. Some of them did not form a ninety degree angle with the ground. I thought they had been forced to allow the passage of someone who probably wished to enter. Later on, I would learn that the interest could also be to escape, or rather, to leave that mandatory space for all school-age children.

Through the open gates many children entered. To control access, there were adults making sure everything followed a certain order. I didn't know which one, I was there to learn and would soon learn. I continued to accompany my brother because he was experienced in that place. Even though he was older than me, we were in the same class. I had the privilege of being enrolled in the class he attended. This happened because I bothered my mother to the point that she insisted with the school professionals to allow me to enroll. The principal made it very clear to her about being prepared to accept and, especially, making me accept possibly being held back if I couldn't keep up with the class. I would only be seven

² Heteronormativity can be understood as a compulsory norm associated with heterosexuality that is supported by a standardization of sexuality that regulates the way in which contemporary society uses the mathematics classroom. I seek to show how this process can be harmful to learning. For this, I share experiences from my insertion in the school environment to my performance as a teacher who works with teacher training in order to enhance training with emphasis on creating a welcoming and respectful environment for teaching and learning mathematics.

years old in July and, according to the director, this could imply a development below that of the other children who turned seven years old in the first semester³.

I had finally passed through the gates. Inside the school I noticed that, although there were adults watching on all sides, the patio was an inviting space to run, talk aloud, laugh, play... I followed that movement with great curiosity. I wanted to do the same. Feel all the intensity provided in that place. I longed to meet everyone. It all looked like so much fun. The learning place was meeting my expectations. In the courtyard, while observing every detail of the school space, I couldn't take my eyes off my brother. He was the one who knew the rules of that environment, I needed to accompany him to adjust, insert me.

A loud siren sounds, I notice a different commotion from all that initial movement. Not understanding what was happening, we headed towards one of the orderly arrays of several children, one after the other. The running and screaming had stopped. Now proximity to other children was inevitable. I wanted, or rather needed, to interact with them. I took the opportunity to talk and, as I always do, I gesticulated a lot in order to attract attention. It worked, but not the way I expected. As a new student, I was already an object of curiosity to others. I was a little uncomfortable, because I felt a certain aversion to myself. Soon I would understand the need to be away from the attention of my colleagues. Would be forced to understand the roles⁴ reserved for boys and girls. I will reserve myself to the problematization of this learning. I consider other lessons extremely relevant for the constitution of a subject's identity in relation to class, nationality, ethnicity, among others. However, I would not be able to address so many aspects in this text.

Still in line, I didn't understand why the other children were sneering. I couldn't make sense of that conception – or was it (pre)conception? – which was constituted in relation to me. Recalling this episode makes me think about homophobia at school “expressed through verbal and/or physical aggression to which students who resist adapting to heteronormativity are subjected” Dinis (2011, p. 42). I would also add those who seek to adapt to the norm, but cannot.

From maturity, derived from the experience of the years, I would persist with the attempt to understand the rules of behavior, pre-established, examining how to belong, or not, to the group. The actions of colleagues, throughout my student career, showed and reinforced a distance between us. Later, many years after that first contact with difference, I would realize the need to go beyond a reconstruction, in myself, of what for them was the “correct” way of being. I would need to criticize the highlighted difference and, through criticism, seek

³ It is important to say that the director was not at all wrong. It was really very difficult to learn the lessons because I was younger than the other children, but persistence in my studies – after school I would review my lessons at home and my mother would help me, on a daily basis, to learn letters and numbers – contributed to that I got good grades in the assessments and passed. This is a privilege I had, my mother's care with my studies.

⁴ Roles would be, basically, arbitrary standards or rules that a society establishes for its members and that define their behavior, their clothes, their ways of relating or behaving... Through learning roles, each one should know what is considered suitable (and inappropriate) for a man or a woman in a given society, and to respond to those expectations (Louro, 1997, p. 24).

a way to change the established thinking that the different can be depreciated, considered as inferior.

The queue time, while fast, was enough to teach me something. Even though I didn't fully understand, I noticed a certain distance from my colleagues. It so happens that I was an extremely extroverted child, who talked a lot and gesticulated a lot, all at the same time. To my amazement, my personality was viewed in a derogatory way by others. While some commented among themselves and pointed at me smiling, a boy took the opportunity to imitate my way of talking, exaggerating the gestures. It was enough for everyone to laugh, not with me, but at me. I didn't know, but I was a "faggot child" and the

[...] effeminate mannerisms, evidenced in the way of walking, talking, acting, behaving, in the way of being of the "faggot child" in the school space, [...] disturb the school routine, once their presence causes silencing... [need to be contained], monitored, so that others do not consider such behavior acceptable or an example to be followed (Rios, 2019, pp. 124-5).

I didn't perceive my manners and mannerisms as something capable of bothering others or any difference that would justify my diminution as a person. I couldn't see anything in myself putting me in a condition of inferiority. However, the methods used by colleagues were very effective in demonstrating, through practical situations, in the form of verbal and physical aggression, that I was not well liked because I was me. It was my way of being that bothered them. I was affected⁵ and it affected⁶ other people. The difference perceived by them, and evidenced countless times, was a reinforcement to the aggressors of my supposed inferiority. Being inferior, I could not complain, or even feel insulted if I considered the disrespectful treatment to be unfair⁷.

The lesson given was efficient for the understanding that the differences that constitute our individualities are not always well received. My behavior was at odds with the expectations of others. Masculine behavior, for a boy, should be the norm, according to my experience in the queue since my first day at school.

Another bell rings and the lines of children begin to move. Each class was grouped into two parallel rows, one for girls and one for boys. They were heading toward a hallway to the classrooms. There was an adult person at the head of each couple of rows; she seemed to be in charge of the class, because her mere presence caused significant calm. There was no more laughter or conversation, the noise was the footsteps, similar to military movements, they were so orderly. There was an unspoken agreement, everyone knew how to behave. The children remained silent, the sounds heard were the instructions of those who were leading their respective class.

Finally, we arrived at the long-awaited classroom. A place where I would learn from

⁵ I use it as a way of understanding myself as a person with delicate mannerisms, more associated with feminine behavior.

⁶ It refers to the way people felt uncomfortable with my behavior that differed from others.

⁷ In the last sub-item, I present an experience to show the discomfort caused when the insulted person expresses his indignation in the face of prejudice.

an educated person. But, before learning directly from the teacher's class, I sought to perceive, even if intuitively, the learning of the logic that governed that space. There was the demarcation of time delimited by the sign, the separation of bodies (of boys and girls through lines), putting “each one in his place”. Louro (1997) considers this an effective, continuous and subtle learning, with a rhythm, a physical disposition, a posture that penetrates

[...] the subjects, at the same time that they react and, involved by such devices and practices, constitute their “schooled” identities. Gestures, movements, meanings are produced in the school space and incorporated by boys and girls, they become part of their bodies. There, one learns to look and to look at oneself, one learns to listen, to speak and to be silent; one learns to *prefer*. [Highlighted by the author.] (Louro, 1997, p.61)

I made my choice and preferred, as a beginner learner, to be attentive to everything and everyone to understand, even without being able to rationalize, the functioning of that space and the way I should behave. In the classroom, my brother introduced me to the lady who led us; she was our teacher. I finally met her. She asked my name and pointed out where she would have me sit. Once again the organization of the children one after the other. The difference is that now there were tables and chairs lined up to accommodate us and, at the same time, distance us, reducing the possibilities of parallel conversations and interruptions to the teacher's speech.

We needed to be silent to learn, the instructions had to be faithfully reproduced and memorized. The only voice heard was that of the teacher. When a child spoke, it was to ask a question. All the time we were reminded not to interrupt, understand how not to interfere, and recommended to do our tasks. In the seat next to me, was a girl who nudged me and took advantage of the teacher's distractions to annoy me. As I scolded the girl aloud, the educated person asked me to behave. I found it strange, or rather unfair, and I tried to explain the situation to the teacher who told me: **Quiet! Behave like a man!** From then on, I realized, as Weaver-Hightower (2011) argues, that masculine behaviors are also endorsed by school professionals, including educators, as something to be followed. A consequence of the teachers' actions, in denying the existence of homosexuality at school, is a recognition of the gay student or the lesbian student as deviant, unwanted, or ridiculous. As Louro (1997) points out, when asking teachers about sexuality at school, perhaps

[...] make statements like: “in our school we don't need to worry about this, we don't have any problems in this area”, or else, “we believe that it is up to the family to deal with these matters”. Somehow, it seems that if these “problems” are not addressed, sexuality will be left out of school. (Louro, 1997, p. 80)

When thinking from the perspective indicated by Louro (1997), I (re)consider the way I tried to approach the teacher with a problem that should be non-existent in her classroom. How daring of me! Would it be the courage of a child to expose a situation of injustice or naivety for not knowing something uncomfortable for the teacher? It is an important learning experience to know what can and cannot be said. That was the first time I noticed the act of being silenced. I was in the group of “subjects who are not, either because they cannot be associated with the desired attributes, or because they cannot exist as they cannot be named”

Louro (1997, p. 67). The lesson was just beginning and the school experience would show the relevance of being silent and paying attention simultaneously, at least for me, to the teacher and colleagues. A strategy to protect myself, as I will detail later.

As if I had a target drawn on my back, I remained in a constant state of alert so as not to be caught off guard in an offensive attack. I didn't come out unscathed, the consequences were quite negative. My self-esteem gradually diminished. It took a lot of effort to keep believing in my learning potential because, as I wasn't very participative during classes, the teachers stopped noticing me. It was a side effect to not being persecuted, but it was worth it. Getting noticed was worse, much worse! In addition, the tension derived from a permanent attention, to reduce the possibilities of aggression, caused a significant decrease in my attention to the lessons transmitted by the teacher.

Being constantly attacked makes you feel progressively less able to stand up to others, to express your opinion on a subject, much less to have the confidence to defend your own ideas and disagree with colleagues. When Perrenoud (2000, p. 146) deals with new teaching skills, he defends teacher training that fights against sexual, ethnic and social prejudice and discrimination. For him, “no victim of prejudice and discrimination can learn with serenity”.

To personally feel the lack of a peaceful environment in which to learn is bad. Even worse when there is the feeling that the teacher has closed their eyes to a situation of persecution from colleagues. Freire (1998), after defending the need for methodical rigor in the act of teaching, with the creation of an environment conducive to critical learning, emphasizes the relevance of educators and learners as restless subjects, questioners, creators, instigators, curious people, besides humble and persistent. For this, he emphasizes “[...] the importance of the educator's role, [and] the merit of peace with which he lives the certainty that it is part of his teaching task not only to teach the contents but also to teach how to think right” (Freire, 1998, p. 29). By creating an environment for the promotion, development, construction of right thinking, it would add, to the educator, the responsibility to promote peace in the environment. It is important that peace is also established through a safe place for all students, where they value and teach respect for differences in gender, race, social class, religious belief, sexual orientation, among others. In order not to get to the extreme of homicide cases against young people of a sexual orientation other than heterosexual, as reported by Loutzenheise and Moore (2011) when defending safe schools.

It is up to the educator, committed to creating an environment without prejudice, to convince himself of the importance of respecting the other during the class. Not in sporadic moments as if stolen from the program content. But, being “intimately convinced that he does not deviate from the essential when he attacks the prejudices and discrimination observed or referred to in class”. (Perrenoud, 2000, p. 147). On the contrary, the educational effects demand rigorous work from those who do not miss anything.

Being rigorous has to do with a reflection on the way we say what we say. Freire (1998), for example, argues in favor of right thinking, presenting as a counterexample saying that Madalena is black, but she is competent and decent. On the other hand, he adds, being

blonde doesn't need any additions. For a black woman, it is worth noting, with the adversative conjunction *but*, qualities that would be “out of tune” with the race, while for a white woman it would be nonsense to do the same. We recognize this way of speaking as prejudiced, as something to be overcome. “The climate of right thinking has nothing to do with pre-established formulas” (Freire, 1998, p. 55), he says, it demands criticality.

It is possible to add other questions to be critically analyzed, through correct thinking such as, for example, “João is gay, but he is not effeminate”. What would be wrong with being gay and effeminate? A possible answer is in another prejudiced phrase: “Nothing against being a faggot, but not in front of me”. It is worth remembering the important role of the school in the social representation of the behavior of men and women. It educates bodies to behave as male and female, there can be no divergence and, when there is, it needs to be hidden. We usually hide something considered wrong like dirt under the rug. “As a critical teacher, I am a responsible “adventurer”, predisposed to change, to the acceptance of the different” (Freire, 1998, p. 55). When the teacher, even if he/she claims to accept the different, is not opposed to a prejudiced situation, he/she is contributing to the maintenance of prejudice.

Attacking prejudice and discrimination is not departing from the essential. It matters little to the student knowing grammar, algebra or a foreign language if a young person, upon leaving school, is convinced of his superiority over minorities. It will be a failure of the education system if no teacher intervenes to contribute to an awareness of respect for the expression and thought of the other. Such questions are more important than this or that content of some class (Perrenoud, 2000).

Insecurity in the school environment promotes fear of drawing attention even when answering roll call. The worst is when a teacher, or professor, makes a question directed to a specific student. Sometimes this happened to me, and even when I knew the answer, I preferred to shake my head with a negative gesture, avoiding talking. When there was no way, that is, I was forced by the teacher to answer, it was not uncommon for my speech to be followed by the mockery of one of the students, a probable future stand-up comedian. I use this term because these comedians often adopt as target of their jokes characteristics of the considered minorities, such as, for example, skin tone and hair type, manner and mannerisms, physical bearing and so on. And that's exactly what these students did to me.

The feeling is horrible, especially when the teacher, as if they had forgotten their role as an educator, was also amused and smiled at the joke directed at me. Of course, there were teachers who pretended nothing had happened and those who loosely disapproved of the student's derogatory-pejorative attitude. Afterwards, everyone continued with their class schedule as if nothing had happened. Failing to problematize the situation can be a way of deviating, opting for an easier path, to return to the subject of the class. A consequence of the lack of teacher problematization can be an understanding, by the students, of prejudice as something normal, that is, it becomes natural.

I recognize that teaching is a difficult task, but it is necessary to face problematic

situations in order to promote a more pleasant environment for everyone. It demands a “permanent criticism of the easy detours with which we are tempted, sometimes or almost always, to leave the difficulties that the true paths can pose to us” (Freire, 1998, p. 36). Faced with situations of prejudice, it is necessary to impose “a stop, with the teacher having the feeling that such stereotypes cannot be accepted and also the means to improvise an explanation and open the debate” (Perrenoud, 2000, p. 146). It is worth remembering, with Freire (1998), that teaching requires ethics, it demands overcoming the educational experience beyond a pure technical training that diminishes “what is fundamentally human in the educational exercise: its formative character. If the nature of the human being is respected, the teaching of contents cannot be alien to the moral formation of the student.” (Freire, 1998, p. 37).

As if nothing was so bad it couldn't get worse, some teachers liked to put us to work in a group. To learn to live together, it is important to learn to work in a group. I believe that, but the group work was nothing less than a moment of torture. For example, when you are discriminated against, you are rarely chosen to be part of a certain group. Great, just do the work yourself... No! There were teachers who did not accept group work being done individually. The situation got even worse when the teacher chose a group to put you in. It's hard to feel confident in expressing ideas in the group about the topic being discussed when you are constantly belittled by your peers. They remind you all the time that you are different and that your contribution comes down to being a reason for the laughter of others. Not because of what you say, but because of the way you say it. Attitudes like these gradually undermined my interest in expressing myself in the classroom. Answering questions asked by the teacher, exposing doubts, sharing ideas in group work... was out of the question.

In this way, the “right to remain silent, because everything you say can and will be used against you” is internalized. Not knowing others who share the same problem intensifies the distance, the feeling of not belonging. It is very difficult to bear because, as a child, I felt insecure at school. There was no one I could talk to or anyone to turn to about being persecuted for being me. It implied an understanding of myself as wrong. As if something was broken in my being and generated a behavior that was not what I expected.

As a teenager, I made an effort to look like everyone else, adjusting my behavior to social expectations. If I did not accept to deny the way I was, I would feel the consequences of verbal and/or physical violence to show my non-place. Non-place because not meeting the expected standard was as if I shouldn't be in that environment. Thus, there was a need to make a choice by trying to adapt or by withdrawing. As I was not successful in adapting myself, I used silence as a defense mechanism. In other words, a silence imposed on me for not allowing me to be who I was. This silencing followed me through high school and graduation. I rarely asked any questions during class, and there was a feeling that, with time, things might change.

The art of being invisible

I looked forward to the passing of the years to enter other levels of education. Believed that things would be different. However, the feeling of unease was translated into a constant feeling of inadequacy, which grew as I advanced through school grades. At first, at the age of less than seven, I did not understand why I was treated with indifference, contempt and, often, aversion. But as time went by, the lesson was learned, the feeling of not belonging became more and more intense. My premise was wrong, advancing in the grades and grades of education did not bring a more friendly environment. On the contrary, sometimes, during puberty, it was so difficult that I almost couldn't stop crying. Obviously I couldn't cry, it would be considered a sign of weakness and the persecution would intensify. Tears would be “a trophy”, proof that they affected me negatively. It was not uncommon for me to have the urge to run away, run away and never go back to school. The desire to drop out stems from the lack of respect in the school environment, which makes it “a place that is not welcoming or safe for LGBT students, harming their academic performance and, often, leading them to dropout” (Pesquisa Nacional sobre o Ambiente Educacional no Brasil, 2016, p. 84).

For me, the option of abandoning formal education was out of the question. My mother would never accept, or allow, a child without studying. There was no way, I would continue in that environment of torture. But how? With the creation of subterfuges to escape violence. I would develop strategies to survive in the hostile and disrespectful education system. As if it were enough to do ordinary things - speak in class, get up from my desk and walk to throw something in the trash or even walk and/or run at recess - to be the butt of derogatory jokes, there should be something that could be done to lessen hostility. From then on, I would minimize, as much as possible, any movement or interaction with others. I would try to be invisible.

Invisibility could be the answer to survival in school. Most children have played at being invisible. That's what I would do, I would be invisible. It wouldn't be a joke. Nor is it a personal choice. The Invisible Man, a character created by H.G. Wells, was an adult and decided to do the experiment of his own volition. No one had forced him to become invisible. Even if by accident, it was something caused by him, by his choices. Other than that, in my case, at the age of ten I had no choice. If I didn't go unnoticed, the consequences would be extremely unpleasant. Another perspective in relation to the process of invisibility is assumed by Denilson Lopes (2006, p. 358): for him, “invisibility, disappearance and lightness [are] as more subtle strategies and less defined by a confrontational position”. Like Lopes (2006), I did not want confrontation, but being invisible was far from being something light, because it took great effort to be something I was not, that is, a child without a voice and without gestures: mute and immobilized..

By the age of ten, I had learned that the price paid for being noticed was too high. I understood the name-calling associated with me in mockery, and because of that, it was able to affect me deeply. To the point of believing, on certain occasions, that I was really inferior to others. The quest for invisibility meant not speaking at school for almost a year. I was in

the fifth grade, currently corresponding to the sixth year of elementary school. I literally *entered mute and left silently^{8*} in any space, whether in the classroom, on the patio during recess, or on the gym during Physical Education classes.

In the classroom, I sat, almost motionless, and did not interact with anyone. At recess, I kept my back against a wall, so as not to move around too much, and I still didn't talk to my colleagues. In Physical Education classes, I sat on a bench and interacted as little as possible with the teacher and colleagues; only answered the roll call. Freire (1998), when dealing with a silent student in the classroom, considers that the teacher's common sense should warn him

that there is something to be understood in Pedrinho's behavior, silent, frightened, distant, fearful, hiding from himself. Common sense makes me see that the problem is not in the other boys, in their restlessness, in their excitement, in their vitality. My common sense doesn't tell me what it is, but it makes it clear that there is something that needs to be known. This is the task of science, which, without the scientist's common sense, can go astray and get lost. (Freire, 1998, p. 70).

We can think about Pedrinho's silencing from another perspective. He could be a distant, fearful student, who hides in silence, who is acting like this because of some problem caused by his colleagues. The teacher's sensitivity also needs to be imbued with common sense to realize that prejudice among students can cause silencing and exclusion from the group.

Before school, I was an extremely communicative child. But, schoolmates imposed on me the need to change. I tried my best not to show myself, I didn't expose my opinions even in group work. In math classes, for example, when the teacher asked us to do some work together, I would just write the answers, in my notebook, of what I could do. Only shared what I had done if someone asked, otherwise not. Thinking about it, 'no' was very common in my school life: I didn't ask questions, I didn't expose my ideas, I didn't disagree, I didn't want to show up, I didn't want to be there...

The strategy of silence didn't always work, sometimes I was noticed by a colleague who took advantage of any distraction from the teacher, or professor, to get up from his desk and poke me, mess up my hair, throw something at me, wave his hands pointing at me, as if imitating me... This was followed by laughter from the other classmates and a shhhhhh from the teacher. The invisibility strategy may not have been 100% efficient, but it contributed to my permanence in school. The experience acquired over the years and the persecutions also taught me that the different is important because it assumes one of the leading roles in the persecution scenario: it is the target! The way I was constantly treated, in addition to naming myself, built me, as well as other bodies and subjects.

This is a constrained and limited process from the beginning, as the subject does not decide about the sex he will or will not assume; in fact, the regulatory norms of a society open up possibilities that it assumes, appropriates and materializes. Although these norms always, in a compulsory way, reiterate heterosexuality, paradoxically, they also give space for the production of bodies that do not fit them. These will be

⁸ Translator's Note: Popular saying in Brazil, in Brazilian Portuguese: 'entrava mudo e saía calado'.

constituted as “abject” subjects – those who escape the norm. But, precisely for this reason, these subjects are socially indispensable, since they provide the limit and the border, that is, they provide “the outside” for the bodies that “materialize the norm”, the bodies that effectively “matter” (Louro, 2001, p. 548-9). [Highlighted by the author.]

As in the endings of children's books, with a moral lesson, my performance served to highlight, delimit and control the border. The way everyone should, or should not, behave if they wanted to be accepted by the majority and be part of the group of owners of the place, of whom “materialized the norm”. I have to agree with Bourdieu (1995); when referring to a constraint through the body, he considers that male domination, strongly consolidated, does not need to be justified:

it can be content to be and to say itself in the practices and discourses that enunciate being as if it were an evidence, thus contributing to make it be according to the saying. The dominant view of the sexual division is expressed in discourses such as sayings, proverbs, riddles, songs, poems or in graphic representations such as wall decorations, ceramics or fabric motifs. But it is equally well expressed in technical objects or practices: for example in the structure of space, and in particular in the interior divisions of the house or in the opposition between the house and the field, or even in the organization of time, the day or the agrarian year, and, more broadly, in all practices, almost always at the same time techniques and rituals, and especially in the techniques of the body, postures, manners, bearing (Bourdieu, 1995, p. 136).

Male domination is so consolidated that it is considered natural. Perhaps for this reason, anyone who disagreed with the physical and verbal aggression inflicted on me would remain silent because they understood it as a “norm”. Understanding oneself as being “abject” exponentially increases the feeling of being alone. An understanding is incorporated that there is no one capable of considering the behavior of the persecution of the different as wrong because it is he, the different, who is wrong, inadequate, fleeing from normality. I thought I was alone in this process, but that was far from the truth. The violence suffered by being considered different was not, nor is it, exclusive to me.

Just read, for example, the National Survey on the Educational Environment in Brazil, a study carried out in 2016 that addresses the experiences of adolescents and young people with a sexual orientation different from that of heterosexual ones. In it there are alarming data. The survey shows that: i) 73% of the 1016 young respondents reported having suffered verbal aggression because of their sexual orientation; ii) 27% said they had been physically attacked; and, iii) 60% of those interviewed said they felt insecure in the school environment. Not infrequently, situations such as those reported lead adolescents to drop out of school. Another worrying fact is the lack of support after suffering physical or verbal violence. The study points to

[...] low levels of responses in families and educational institutions that make such environments unsafe for many LGBT students, resulting in low performance, absences and dropouts, as well as depression and the feeling of not belonging to these sometimes hostile institutions (National Survey on the Educational Environment in Brazil, 2016, p. 13).

In another survey, carried out by Unesco in 2000, in 14 Brazilian capitals, involving

241 public and private schools, the authors emphasize the need for education professionals to reflect on this issue. They highlight that 60% of the teachers participating in the investigation said they were not used to intervening in situations that expose prejudice because they felt unprepared (Abramovay et al, 2004).

Living with difference contributes to the formation of dialogic subjects who learn and grow with it. Creating an environment with respect for the different requires a stance against any type of discrimination, contributing to the formation of ethical subjects.

Don't give me genetic, sociological or historical or philosophical justifications to explain the superiority of whiteness over blackness, of men over women, of employers over employees. Any discrimination is immoral and fighting against it is a duty no matter how much you recognize the strength of the conditioning to be faced (Freire, 1998, p. 67).

Aiming to deconstruct such justifications, the psychologist Baptista (1999) uses the term *knife sharpener* to refer to people who indirectly collaborate with the daily massacre of bodies. Not all bodies, only those considered as the other, the different, and which, for this reason, can be eliminated. He points out discourses considered scientific, in previous moments of our history, which aimed to diminish the other. While blacks lived in subhuman conditions in slave quarters, medical theories classified them as a sub-race. In contrast to the public advancement of women, psychiatric theories defined them as hysterical, fragile and nervous. Workers were seen as promoters of disorder, promiscuous and dangerous, justifying the construction of workers' villages, by employers, for greater control and surveillance. Homosexuality is removed from debauchery and placed in the plot of the unconscious by a psychoanalysis brought from Europe to Brazil in the 1920s.

[...] The degenerate, the addicted and amoral leaves, and the perverse is inaugurated, the little child victim of the fatality of Oedipus. At the same time, sexuality gained vital importance for the knowledge of human nature. Nothing can be hidden, unrepenting and confessing are the techniques proposed for good psychic functioning. Sexuality becomes a mystery, it mixes with the soul, and the gaze of the new psychoanalysts, defenders of eugenics, of the betterment of the race, penetrates vigilantly into the small acts of everyday life. (Baptista, 1999, p. 47)

Such a climate of mystery, related to different sexualities from the heterosexual, was part of my school routine and, at the limit of what was bearable, contributed to my isolation in the classroom. Faced with the difficulties experienced in my student life, I never imagined becoming a teacher. The school, I hope I was able to show, was an inhospitable space that I didn't want to be a part of. But things are more complex than we think, I couldn't escape the school environment and became a teacher. In the sequence, I will reflect, from my student experience, about the training of teachers for the viability of a respectful school environment in which one learns and grows with the differences.

For an awareness of the different

Today I am a professor at the State University of Goiás (UEG), I work with the Mathematics Degree and, for some time now, influenced by Marcos Vinícius, a former

student and eternal friend, I ask the academics to write a training memorial. According to Moura (2019), the stories and training of students, reported “in the training memorial and training narratives, can reveal the capacity for qualitative, personal and professional change, in the light of a reflective relationship between them, recognizing the life as an experience” (Moura, 2019, p. 72).

The stories narrated, always very moving, contribute to thinking about the choice of the teaching profession. As I read them, I reflected on my choice, but I did not put these reflections on paper, or rather in Word. Once, when participating in a meeting of the Abakós research group, Professor Marcos Antônio Gonçalves Júnior (Marquinhos) invited the members of the group to write a training memorial. I didn't know what to write about, so I opted for the first, uninterrupted lesson I learned by entering a school. When reflecting on this lesson, after so many years, I consider it to have been a factor that contributed to my professional choice. Being a teacher is a way of taking a stand against situations of injustice and maybe I am doing this in my professional work.

The writing of an experience provides us with a more detailed reflection about ourselves. When we put into words something that happened to us, we attribute meaning, different meanings or even nonsense to our experiences. As Larrosa (2002, p. 21) said, “the way we place ourselves before ourselves, before others and before the world in which we live also has to do with words”. Through the written word, I shared an experience with the group and exposed my interpretations of the readings I made, revealing the way I appropriated them.

Writing moved between the processes of estrangement and subjectivation of gender and sexuality, based on my training experiences. Through reminiscences, I sought to dialogue with the literature that deals with education that goes beyond an insertion in the world, but for a questioning about why things are, as they are, in order to contribute with reflections for a possible decrease of injustices.

As stated by Foucault (1992, p. 143) “writing transforms the thing seen or heard “into forces and into blood” [Emphasis by the author.]. This excerpt is closely related to the process derived to deal with the experience that passed on to me, affected and still deeply affects me. As Meyer and Paraíso (2014) point out, it was a zig-zag movement, that is, of coming and going, seeing and reviewing in the search for meaning to re-signify what was experienced. In this process, I took a particular path. In a first move, with the challenge of Professor Marquinhos, from the Abakós group, I wrote about my training to say how school had an impact on my life. In this process, I realized, as Louro (1997) says, that the marks of the school go beyond the contents of the curricular subjects.

As I wrote, I realized what I wanted, or rather, needed to say. It was as if the situations I had experienced, and so hard locked under seven keys, were knocking on the door to get out. They no longer wanted to be hidden, invisible, they wanted to be under the sun to expose a problem camouflaged at school: the pursuit of the different, their non-place culminating in non-being. I zigzagged between this object and the thoughts that moved and

mobilized me to experiment, to express my struggles. The second moment was the quest to reinvent myself, trying to look at the situation from the perspective of others in an attempt to transform an experience of persecution as a way of sensitizing one look to the other.

Today, as a teacher who teaches mathematics and who works with the training of mathematics teachers, I would like to think about the teacher's care for their students who suffer from some prejudice. In addition to the syllabus, an environment must be created, as suggested by Freire (1998), so that students, as knowing subjects, build and rebuild their own knowledge about the object of study in order to become capable of expressing their considerations about the subject worked on and to appropriate it to read and intervene in the world around them. For this, a continuous effort is needed so that no type of prejudice prevails in the classroom. It is worth promoting discussions aimed at educational actions, in the training of teachers who teach mathematics, for an understanding that in order to “[...] respect and value sexual diversity and gender equality, we need to take into account that social inclusion will only be complete if sexual inclusion is part of it.” (Costa et al, 2009, p. 5).

In this sense, researchers such as Louro (1997), Louro (2001), Dinis (2011), Costa et al. (2009), Rios (2019) among others, suggest approaching the issue of sexual diversity in the school environment, as well as in teacher training. A contrary argument for the inclusion of this theme, for example, in the training of mathematics teachers, could be “teaching mathematics is independent of the person's gender or sexual orientation”. Really?! I take the liberty of exposing my school experience to deal with the difficulty in learning mathematics when I was a child precisely because of the persecution of colleagues and the lack of a respectful environment – and why not say safe? – for learning.

I had excellent teachers, for example, in the sixth grade, a Mathematics teacher who provided an environment conducive to learning equations. He encouraged us, as suggested by Ponte, Brocardo and Oliveira (2005), to work together to solve a task. He intended us to explore the situation and formulate questions from reading and understanding the problem. He encouraged us to organize the information given in the problem and make statements about it. He asked many questions with the aim of testing and reformulating the ideas raised to solve the problem and, consequently, refining our conjectures. He encouraged us a lot so that our answers contained mathematical arguments to justify the way we had thought and evaluated our answer to the problem.

Although the teacher has taught classes with such potential, I feel strong sadness in recognizing that I was not able to participate. I would like to say that I was able to get involved, as described in Alrø and Skovsmose (2010), through investigative cooperation. I would have liked to have recognized the perspectives of colleagues in the process of outlining mathematical ideas, to have had an opening to listen carefully to the speech of colleagues and to put my point of view based on the statements presented. I would have liked to have insisted on a path that I considered to be the most correct, or the best, way to solve the problem. It would have been a very good experience to work on an equal footing with

colleagues to test the validity of our answers.

I would also like to have had the courage to paraphrase a colleague, by adopting his perspective and reworking the idea presented, identifying and reinforcing its main points, explaining convergences or divergences through questions to other colleagues on the subject. It would have been great to have listened to and complemented the ideas put forward by colleagues. I wanted to ask questions about how they were thinking when I didn't understand their point of view, and to say how I had thought or was thinking from the input of others. I wanted to challenge and be challenged, question perspectives and be questioned. I would have liked to have asked questions, as suggested by Alrø and Skovsmose (2010), of the “what happens if” type if we equate these data with those or add these data and subtract from the total...

I would really like to say that I joined the group to the point where we did all this and that we evaluated our work, seeking to mutually improve ideas, from refining our conjectures to evaluating the results we were able to achieve. However, this did not happen. I was physically present in the group, but I was not with my colleagues, because my biggest concern was not to be laughed at. My involvement with the class was to write, at most, some idea on paper. The fear of being physically and/or verbally attacked was present and I did not have the courage to express my ideas, disagree with colleagues by challenging them, evaluate the work with the group. Because that meant exposing myself.

During the class, to be involved with the object of study, it is extremely important to feel safe to talk. A dialogue like the one reinforced by Freire (2011, p. 116) is not “from A to B or from A over B, but from A to B, mediated by the world. A world that impresses and challenges one another, giving rise to visions or points of view about it”. Such dialogue is only possible when there is mutual respect for one another. Not only of the teacher in relation to the students or of the students for the teacher, but also of the students among themselves. Without this respect, a new performance of the learning subject is unfeasible, as defended by Boufleuer (2010), because it demands complicity, engagement. This does not happen when you are excluded from the group because other colleagues do not consider you an equal.

In this sense, the teacher also needs to be prepared to offer an environment without discrimination, conducive to the participation of all students regardless of anything. At the end of the text, I would like to ask you, the reader, a question.

An Important Question

Based on the above table, it is worth asking: In the 21st century, is it necessary to deal with respect for differences, including sexual orientation, at school or in teacher training? It would be pretentious on my part to believe that I could answer. In place of an answer, I briefly present a more recent experience. The lesson continues...

While writing about the first, difficult and uninterrupted lesson learned with my entry into school, I received an invitation to join a WhatsApp group, with the aim of organizing a

celebration of the 20th anniversary of our Mathematics Licentiate class. I was delighted with the idea. In the group environment, we could talk about our personal lives and share the challenges of our journey as teachers. Remember the difficulties with the disciplines in graduation.

I was very happy with the invitation, obviously I accepted it and became part of the group. Finally I was part of a group of colleagues I studied with. I started getting notifications from everyone. We talked about our meeting and, sporadically, as in any WhatsApp group, different topics came up. What is my surprise when, among the messages, a montage appears with the image of a male transsexual with several different frames? It was a composition with photos of a public personality. In the first image, holding the newborn child on his lap; in the second, telling the child that when he was older his father would show him a picture of when he was younger; the third image showed a teenager surprised to see in the last frame the picture of his father, before the sexual transition, in an erotic pose from a magazine for the male audience.

Upon receiving the message, I replied that perhaps I had not intended to embarrass anyone, but I pointed out that the derogatory tone to a transsexual individual bothered me. The colleague who shared the image replied that he “posted that” because he understood everyone in the group as “open-minded people”. According to him, I had not understood the message and, for that reason, he would not remain in the group. This time, in addition to being embarrassed, I was alarmed. Everyone in the group was a teacher and seemed to understand offending a transgender person as a “mere joke”. The situation, now in a virtual environment, fed back the painful memories of my first and uninterrupted lesson: *being different is not good*.

I shared with the group – for those who found the image funny, as well as with those who did not take a position – research that deals with violence at school against LGBT people. Subsequently, two teachers from the group asked me not to make comments like that in that space. One of them invited me to chat on her private WhatsApp number and suggested that I leave the group. Once again, the lesson was being (re)applied, the experience felt and (re)felt for a deeper understanding. My presence could be tolerated, as long as I didn't position myself against members of the group by highlighting prejudice. No one else brought it up in the group, nor did I. I kept quiet. All returned to agree place, day and time for the celebration of 20 years of graduation. Even so, after the exposure of my embarrassment, in less than a day I was excluded from the group. My silencing was of no use.

There are similarities and differences between the situations when I was a kid on my first day at school and in the WhatsApp group with my fellow graduates. As for differences, for example, it is possible to think about the protagonism of prejudice. Sometimes it is performed by children, sometimes by adults. In one, the environment is physical with a direct aggression, in the other it is a virtual space and the aggression, at least initially, is indirect. As for similarities, the two situations enact the same script. Exposing, in a derogatory way, who is different. Another similarity is the exclusion of those who disagree with a dominant

behavior, in this case male behavior. The different can frequent the same spaces as long as: the differences are not expressed by speech or gestures; do not ask for, or demand, respect; accept as natural the difference to be evidenced in order to be depreciated. Once again, silencing was imposed. And the question remains: to deal with this problem or not in the 21st century?

I would like to position myself, in the face of the question, defending the urgency of dealing with respect for sexual diversity since the initial training of teachers. It is enough to do some research to notice how the subject continues to be invisible, for example, in Mathematics Licentiate courses at public universities. In Table 1, I present sector graphs representing a search in curricula of Mathematics Degree courses from 98 public, federal and state universities, using the words *gender*, *sexuality* and *diversity* in the names of the disciplines, in the menus or in the curriculum of the courses, when available on the Internet.

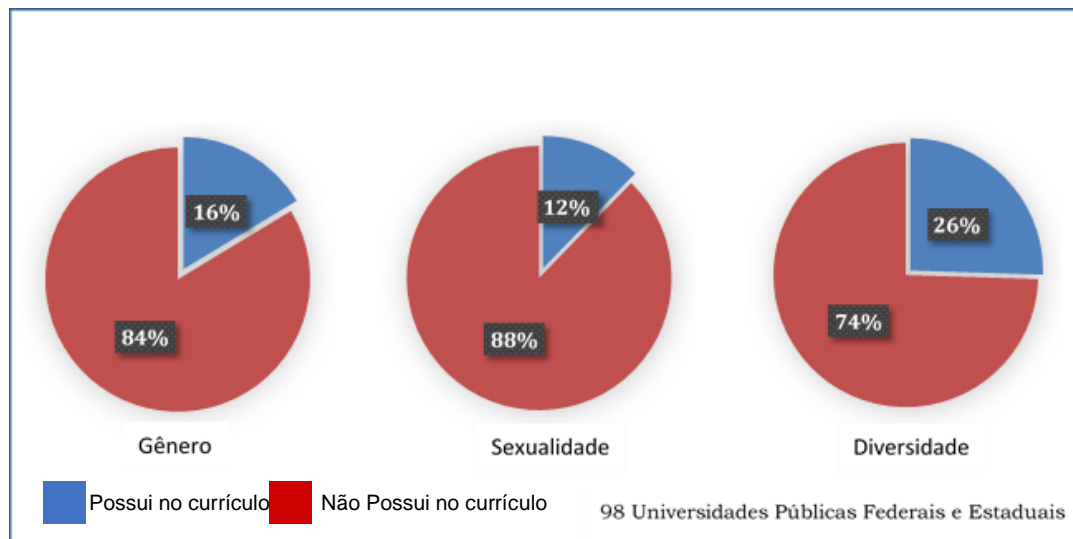


Chart 1 – Gender, sexuality and diversity in Mathematics Degree curricula.
Source: Elaborated by the author

As can be seen from Chart 1, the subject is still incipient in universities and this article can help to strengthen the chorus of those who ask for the inclusion of this theme as a discipline to work on de-invigilating the existence of people of different sexual orientations from heteronormative ones at school. It is worth bringing to the discussion, from the initial formation of teachers, the problem of prejudice. Doing this will help teachers not to listen “without a minimum of critical reaction, speeches like [...] 'What a shame for a man to marry a man, a woman to marry a woman'” (Freire, 1998, p. 150).

Teachers, like my colleagues mentioned above, even with years of teaching, still need to reflect critically to understand that sharing jokes against LGBT+ people is corroborating prejudice. It is to be a knife sharpener who, although not wielding a weapon, contributes to desensitization in relation to the suffering of people such as, for example, transsexuals who are being killed in our country. I performed a Google search on March 20, 2020, with the descriptors *Brazil* and *transsexuals* simultaneously, obtaining more than 2 million and

800 thousand results. The first report on the list, produced by the newspaper *Correio Brasiliense*, has the headline: “Brazil leads the ranking of murder of transsexuals” and is based on data from the European NGO Transgender Europe to inform Brazil's leading role in this type of record. It is worth mentioning that the vast majority of the reports found treat Brazil as a champion in the elimination of trans bodies. In the 21st century, LGBT+ people in our country continue to be expelled from their homes, raped and killed.

Although this reflection was based on sad situations, I must recognize that my story does not follow the standard script – and why not say cliché? – of gay films in which one of the protagonists dies at the end. The hard and uninterrupted lesson, through experiences and coexistence with my schoolmates, contributed to make me who I am today. Being a gay teacher who works with the training of mathematics teachers is a way of positioning myself in the world as someone visible, as a person with a homosexual identity and full of subjectivities. I hope, through my work, to train more empathetic teachers, against prejudice in the classroom, so that they can provide a welcoming and respectful environment for all students to learn.

I felt many attempts to put myself as a “non-being”, desires expressed in words and gestures with the intention of expelling me from somewhere. Some had an effect, others not so much, because here I am and still exist. Unlike a cruel reality that eliminates the poor, LGBT's, women, blacks, browns... I insist on being subversive in relation to hegemonic power and persisting. And, as a teacher, who works with the training of mathematics teachers, I use this place to defend the urgent need for a de-inviability through a reflection on respect for differences to promote a harmonious environment that contributes to the formation of empathic subjects, capable of taking a stand against situations of injustice.

I believe in Freire's (1998, p. 152) teaching to those who want to be a teacher that “the more I give myself to the experience of dealing without fear, without prejudice, with differences, the better I know myself and build my profile”.

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