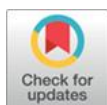


“To resist is to exist”: Conservatism, gender, and sexuality in educational contexts

**Kelvi da Silva Oliveira** 

Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, RS, Brasil.

Pedro Ricardo da Cunha Nóbrega 

Federal University of Vale do São Francisco, Petrolina, PE, Brazil

Abstract

In a context of a resurgence of conservative discourses and significant setbacks in public educational policies, the discussion on sex education in the school space needs to be expanded. This is essential for the topic to occupy a central role in the curriculum, removing the emptying induced by the expansion of conservative forces. This article assumes sex education as a structuring axis of a pedagogy committed to the recognition of gender identities and the appreciation of sexual orientations in their diversity. Anchored in the theoretical contributions of Heilborn (2006), Santos (2018), Silva (2014) and Vitiello (1995), the study analyzes the role of the school as a space for dispute and social transformation, highlighting its potential for resistance against the perpetuation of prejudices and stigmas. Based on bibliographic analysis, the study points to the need for inclusive pedagogical practices, supported by public policies that promote equity, recognition of differences and the consolidation of a democratic school culture.

Keywords

sex education; diversity; gender; sexuality.

“Resistir para existir”: conservadorismo, gênero e sexualidade no contexto educacional

Resumo

Em um contexto de recrudescimento dos discursos conservadores e de significativos retrocessos nas políticas públicas educacionais, a discussão sobre a educação sexual no espaço escolar precisa ser ampliada. Isso é fundamental para que a temática assuma centralidade no currículo, afastando os esvaziamentos induzidos pela expansão das forças conservadoras. Este artigo assume a educação sexual como um eixo estruturante de uma pedagogia comprometida com o reconhecimento das identidades de gênero e a valorização das orientações sexuais em sua diversidade. A ancorado nas contribuições teóricas de Heilborn (2006), Santos (2018), Silva (2014) e Vitiello (1995), o estudo analisa o papel da escola como espaço de disputa e transformação social, destacando seu potencial de resistência frente à perpetuação de preconceitos e estigmas. Com base em análise bibliográfica, o estudo aponta para a necessidade de práticas pedagógicas inclusivas, sustentadas por políticas públicas que promovam a equidade, o reconhecimento das diferenças e a consolidação de uma cultura escolar democrática.

Palavras-chave

educação sexual; diversidade; gênero; sexualidade.

“Resistir para existir”: conservadurismo, género y sexualidad en contextos educativos**Resumen**

En un contexto de recrudescimiento de los discursos conservadores y de significativos retrocesos en las políticas públicas educativas, resulta necesario ampliar el debate sobre la educación sexual en el ámbito escolar, con el objetivo de que esta temática ocupe un lugar central en el currículo y se eviten vaciamientos inducidos por el avance de fuerzas conservadoras. Este artículo concibe la educación sexual como un eje estructurante de una pedagogía comprometida con el reconocimiento de las identidades de género y la valorización de las orientaciones sexuales en su diversidad. Basado en las aportaciones teóricas de Heilborn (2006), Santos (2018), Silva (2014) y Vitiello (1995), el estudio analiza el papel de la escuela como espacio de disputa y transformación social, destacando su potencial como ámbito de resistencia frente a la perpetuación de prejuicios y estigmas. A partir de un análisis bibliográfico, el trabajo señala la necesidad de prácticas pedagógicas inclusivas, sustentadas en políticas públicas que promuevan la equidad, el reconocimiento de las diferencias y la consolidación de una cultura escolar democrática.

Palabras clave

educación sexual; diversidad; género; sexualidad.

1 Contextualizing sex education at school

In a scenario marked by ideological disputes and tensions around educational policies, sex education has traditionally emerged as one of the fields most vulnerable to the influence of conservative thought. Sustained by moral and religious discourses, certain conservative currents seek to restrict the debate on sexuality to the private spheres, delegitimizing and/or emptying its presence in the school space. This movement reduces the complexity of the theme to strictly biological notions, ignoring its social, affective, cultural and identity dimensions. In this context, the plurality of students' experiences is silenced, compromising the role of the school as a promoter of rights and a space for integral development.

The advance of conservatism in public education policies has resulted in the suppression of content related to sexual and gender diversity in school curricula, directly impacting the effectiveness of an inclusive pedagogy. This discursive offensive not only reinforces stigmas and makes historically marginalized subjects invisible, but also feeds exclusionary practices and multiple violence in the school environment. Given these circumstances, reaffirming sex education as a core element of citizenship education is a

fundamentally political-pedagogical act aimed at ensuring the right to information, respect and dignity for all students, in line with the principles of a democratic society (Alves, 2022; Santos, 2018).

Sex education, as articulated by Vitiello (1995), should be understood not as a simple informative content, but as a deep and transformative educational process, aimed at the formation of conscious and responsible attitudes towards sexuality and the multiple ways of living it. It cannot be restricted to the domain of mere data transmission; on the contrary, it presupposes the construction of a set of attitudes, which, by their nature, emerge from a vast and complex understanding of sex and the dynamics intrinsic to human sexuality.

The construction of sexuality has, over time, attracted increasing social attention. Although its development begins in childhood, it is in adolescence that it intensifies, a phase marked by hormonal and bodily changes and the discovery of desire. Confidence, body image and self-esteem are pillars of this process, influencing behavior and identity formation. Understanding this complexity requires a broad and informative approach in the school context, which allows students to consciously and safely deal with the transformations experienced in this central aspect of the human experience (Sarat; Campos, 2014).

Human sexuality is often immersed in *taboos* and prejudices, reflections of the spirit of the time in which such issues are understood, debated and interconnected in the social context. Although teaching about sexuality is addressed in adolescence, due to the regularity of school classes, its construction is a continuous process throughout life. It is not limited to a specific phase of human existence, being the result of a complex set of references that involve the understanding of the body, desires and social relations that both legitimize and restrict practices. Sexuality, as an essential element in the formation of personality, exerts a profound influence on human development, reflecting on the ways in which individuals relate to others and to the world around them.

Addressing sexuality in schools must go beyond just biological aspects, incorporating its emotional, social and cultural dimensions. For Freire (2021), education is a liberating act, capable of stimulating in students the ability to question reality and confront imposed social norms. From this perspective, sex education promotes self-

knowledge, favors the acceptance of differences and challenges stigmas, prejudices and gender conventions, contributing to the construction of a more inclusive and egalitarian society.

The school, in this scenario, plays an essential role in sociability, being a crucial space for the discovery of oneself and the other. By expanding the repertoire of students, the school allows a deeper understanding of the multiple dimensions of the body, desire and interpersonal relationships, promoting respect for diversity and plurality of experiences. It is imperative that the school create an environment that values and enhances the diverse experiences of students, offering a space for reflection on issues often seen as *taboo*. This process includes contact with diversity and the expansion of knowledge about sexuality, often absent in the family environment, helping to reduce prejudices and allowing a respectful and enlightening debate. As Heilborn (2006) points out, this effort contributes so that doubts, fears and uncertainties about sex and sexuality are no longer treated as shameful or deviant practices.

The school functions as one of the most powerful spaces for socialization and debate on sex education, due to its ability to articulate knowledge that involves sexuality, sexual orientation and gender issues. As Salvatierra *et al.* (2019) point out, this environment is conducive to the deconstruction of stigmas and the promotion of inclusive values. Attention to the LGBTI+ community (lesbian, *gay*, bisexual, transvestite, transsexual, transgender and intersex) is essential, both for the centrality of their experiences in the contents of sex education and for their role in consolidating a school culture based on diversity and human rights.

When considering cultural and social influences, it becomes evident that the absence of an inclusive sex education contributes to the reproduction of stereotypes and the marginalization of subjects who do not fit the heteronormative patterns. For the school to fully exercise its social function, it is essential that it is configured as a space for listening, welcoming and belonging, regardless of the gender identity or sexual orientation of the students. Silva (2012) points out that the insertion of themes related to sexual and gender diversity in the school curriculum favors the construction of a culture based on mutual respect and understanding of differences – indispensable pillars for the formation of more conscious and socially committed subjects.

It is important that the school allows a privileged environment of problematization of sexuality, exploring as much as possible its multiple determinations. Only in this way can it contribute to the critical formation of the subjects and, with this, build their social function in a full way. In this sense, curricula need to ensure the broadest possible discussion, incorporating the active listening of young people into educational processes in order to significantly assist in understanding and questioning gender and sexuality norms, contributing to overcoming stigmas and prejudices. Including sex education as a core part of the curriculum supports practices of valuing sexual diversity and guarantees an ethical and citizen formation, one of the main strategies to face the recrudescence of conservatism.

Another fundamental pole for the construction of a school environment capable of opposing the advance of conservatism while promoting the construction of inclusive school practices is the understanding of teacher training as an essential component for the effective implementation of inclusive and pluralistic sex education. Teachers need to be able to approach topics related to sexuality with sensitivity, knowledge and ethical responsibility, overcoming personal prejudices and facilitating dialogues with safety and respect. According to Santos (2018), the resistance or unpreparedness of educators in the face of these issues perpetuate *taboos*, while adequate training transforms the school into a welcoming space, valuing diversity. A school environment structured in this way contributes to the promotion of otherness as a fundamental principle of social coexistence.

The consolidation of a teacher education focused on inclusion faces significant obstacles in the face of the rise of conservative discourses that tension the school space. These ideological forces tend to delegitimize sex education as an integral part of citizen education, classifying it as a threat to traditional and family values. This stance not only weakens public policies committed to human rights, but also imposes limits on the performance of educators who are often restricted by external and institutional pressures. In this scenario, strengthening teacher preparation becomes an urgent measure to face disinformation and ensure pedagogical practices that affirm respect for diversity as a fundamental principle of contemporary education.

It is essential to emphasize that the LGBTI+ community constantly faces various types of prejudice and violence, which, in many cases, compromises the quality of life of countless individuals, due to the inability of some to respect universal human rights. Such deeply inhumane practices of discrimination undermine the fundamental rights of citizens, as highlighted by Arenhart and Pasqualli (2023), highlighting the urgency of a structural change in the social and legal norms that govern coexistence in society.

Sex education cannot be seen as an isolated discipline, but rather as an essential dimension that runs through the entire educational process. Its approach should expand beyond Biology or Science classes, being integrated into discussions in areas such as History, Geography, Sociology, Literature and others, which foster reflection on identities, bodies and rights. This interdisciplinary perspective provides a deeper view of sexuality, promoting inclusion and recognition of human diversity.

An essential aspect of sex education in the school environment is the role of the family in shaping the understanding of sexuality. The school, as a space for integral development, can act as a bridge between the information that students receive at home and the diversity of experiences they have in society. It is common for many families not to address these topics adequately, either due to lack of knowledge, prejudice or *taboos* that persist over time. Thus, the school becomes a privileged environment to provide students with correct information and provide a reflection on their experiences. For Heilborn (2006), it is essential that the school complements what is not discussed in the family context, promoting an inclusive sex education that respects differences and contributes to the emancipation of students.

Sex education, when addressed comprehensively, plays a crucial role in preventing gender-based violence and discrimination. According to Dinis (2008), the absence of an open debate on gender and sexuality issues favors the perpetuation of violence against women and LGBTI+ people. Sex education emerges as a powerful prevention tool, promoting young people's awareness of human rights, gender equality, consent and respect for differences. Not only is knowledge acquired, but the transformation of interpersonal and social relationships is also fostered, contributing to a fairer and more egalitarian environment.

The objective of this article is to analyze the importance of sex education in the school environment, with an emphasis on promoting an inclusive space that recognizes and values gender and sexuality diversity. By exploring the role of the school as a formative and transformative agent, we seek to demonstrate how a comprehensive pedagogical approach can not only combat prejudices and stereotypes, but also contribute to the integral development of students, providing them with the tools necessary for the understanding and healthy experience of their sexuality.

2 Dialoguing with the strange being in formation from the issues of gender and sexuality

The concept of gender comprises a multiplicity of identity constructions that challenge binary and fixed models of masculinity and femininity. The resurgence of moral conservatism has intensified the rejection of these expressions, promoting an alarmist discourse that positions diversity as a threat to the social order. Self-proclaimed movements defending “good customs” operate by the logic of fear, producing a hostile environment that marginalizes and silences dissident bodies. This rhetoric is close to authoritarian regimes in which control over identities is a tool of domination, placing LGBTI+ people as symbolic enemies of the State (Rocha, 2019).

It is essential to break with essentialist conceptions of gender, since this category should not be understood as a natural, static or immutable identity. On the contrary, gender must be recognized as “[...] a performance instituted by the stylized repetition of several acts, which are perceived, regulated and coercively reinforced as feminine or masculine” (Ramos, 2021, p. 18). It is crucial to reflect on the patterns of behavior and values that permeate society, in addition to the lack of mutual understanding that makes it difficult to recognize the experiences and identities of others. Butler (2014, p. 4) complements this reflection by highlighting that:

The suggestion that gender is a norm requires further elaboration. A norm is not the same as a rule, and it is not the same as a law. A norm operates within the framework of social practices under the implicit common standard of normalization. Although a standard can be analytically separated from the practices in which it is inserted, it can also be recalcitrant to any efforts to decontextualize its operation. Norms may or may not be explicit, and when they

operate as the normalizing principle of social practice, they generally remain implicit, difficult to perceive, and more clearly and dramatically discernible in the effects they produce.

The configuration of contemporary society reveals a scenario marked by disorder and polarization, in which the appreciation of the ephemeral and the transient prevails. The growth of conservative movements in Brazil emerges as a clear reflection of this process, driving an agenda that not only propagates a moral and social conservatism, but also reaffirms patriarchy and traditional values as ways to restrict plurality and diversity. Instead of seeking concrete advances for society, this current is dedicated to combating ideologies and concepts without a real basis, such as the so-called “gender ideology”, feeding an atmosphere of moral panic and false moralism (Machado, 2018).

Conservative thought, by fostering exclusionary and polarizing views, disregards the basic principles of democracy, which require respect for differences and recognition of the dignity of all individuals, regardless of their identity or orientation. The spread of hatred and discrimination, often disguised under the justification of defending traditional values, compromises the construction of a more just and egalitarian society, in which diversity must be recognized and protected as a fundamental and inalienable right.

This movement, by rejecting the diversity of sexual identities and orientations, reinforces the idea of a homogeneous and rigidly structured society, in which traditional gender and sexuality norms are seen as the only legitimate ones. This posture, instead of contributing to the construction of a more inclusive and democratic coexistence, fosters a climate of intolerance and exclusion, making it difficult to recognize and respect the plurality of human experiences. The impact of this is directly reflected in public policies and education, areas in which the debate on human rights and diversity continues to be a field of dispute, with profound consequences for the formation of future generations.

Accepting discriminatory behavior that disrespects democratic principles and promotes prejudice is unacceptable. Such attitudes, in addition to violating fundamental rights, must be rigorously faced and punished in accordance with current legislation. Forcing someone to accept or reject something that does not concern them violates individual rights and the values of democracy, which guarantee equal protection to all citizens.

Gender issues continue to be influenced by compulsory heteronormativity, which imposes a rigid and binary standard on bodies, forcing society to adhere to this model. This imposition disregards the legitimacy of the diversity of experiences and identities, not reflecting the plurality of human sexuality and multiple gender identities. For Dal'Igna *et al.* (2019, p. 4):

Poststructuralist gender studies allow us to reject and problematize biologicist, essentialist and universal notions of woman and man to argue that, within different cultural processes, individuals and their bodies are transformed into – learn to recognize themselves as – female and male subjects.

Also, according to the authors:

[...] we have needed to redo the very history of the concept of gender *mainstreaming*, its emergence in the context of recent international movements of women, its incorporation/regulation by the UN and other international organizations, as well as its institutionalization within the scope of the current Brazilian State, in articulation with a very specific grammar and vocabulary, which involve terms such as equality, equity, intersectorality and intersectionality, for example (Dal'Igna *et al.*, 2019, p. 11-12).

A person's subjectivity cannot be reduced to the way they define themselves, as it is also related to the image, they project of themselves. This conception is deeply influenced by heteronormativity, which can destabilize the centrality of the individual, imposing rigid and limiting standards. Salles and Ceccarelli (2010) state that the trivialization of sexuality, often seen as a setback in the social and educational context, or as a factor of marginalization, distorts the natural order and constitutes a serious injustice, violating the rights of citizens.

Sexuality is often viewed negatively, but it extends far beyond individual experience and includes gender, identity, orientation, and reproduction. These aspects reveal the complexity of knowledge and the persistence of *taboos* that, despite social advances, are still central in debates about the body, history and customs. Resistance to these themes is also reflected in the biological, social and cultural regulation of individuals.

This restricted and stigmatizing view of sexuality reflects a resistance to human diversity. Despite advances in inclusive discourses, conservative narratives still persist that attempt to control bodies and behaviors, reinforcing stereotypes and heteronormative

norms. The school, as a space for citizen formation, has the power to challenge these *taboos*, promoting an education that values diversity and respects the different identities and ways of experiencing sexuality. It is essential to seek a broader and more inclusive understanding of gender and sexuality issues, overcoming the limitations of exclusionary views.

Resistance to inclusive approaches to gender and sexuality is often fueled by conservative narratives that, over time, seek to maintain and reinforce rigid standards of behavior. These narratives not only ignore the complexity of human identity but also limit each individual's ability to express themselves. In a society that, albeit slowly, moves toward the recognition of multiple ways of living and identifying, attempts to resume a restrictive and binary view are dangerous and detrimental to social progress. This resistance, often associated with conservative positions, ends up stigmatizing those who depart from normative standards and weakens the principles of equality and freedom that should guide any democratic society (Mouffe, 2005; Ribeiro; Moraes; Kruger, 2019).

In the struggle to remove conservative influences from the school and as a strategy to combat the conservative upsurge of the current world, it is essential to rescue the resistances already built as a starting point for the complex understanding of possible confrontation. Thus, the bodies that conservative discourse targets with stereotypes and prejudice can appear, especially in the formative context of the school, as belonging to political subjects who understand the need for possible resistance built by understanding their existence as a political and daily struggle.

It is through the body politic of the LGBTI+ subject formed in an inclusive school environment that it will be possible to build a deep critique of the normativities that govern discourses on gender and sexuality. Butler (2003) argues that gender is not a natural essence, but a reiterative *performance* that produces the effects of a stable identity. Questioning the naturalization of gender binarism and compulsory heterosexuality is a way of destabilizing the norms that support the exclusion of dissident subjects. The spaces of subjective formation and normative socialization, such as the school, need to be problematized, which implies understanding that curricula, pedagogical practices and daily interactions often reinforce hegemonic patterns that silence or marginalize bodies and identities that escape the *cisheteronormative* model.

The search is not to replace one dominant identity with another, but to disarticulate the very idea of identity as something fixed, coherent and natural. This has direct implications for how sexual and gender diversity is treated. Openness to thinking towards these historically marginalized subjects invites educators and managers to build more plural, critical and welcoming educational spaces that promote respect for difference and resist conservative pressures that seek to maintain the *status quo*.

In this context, education plays a key role. The school, as a space for critical construction and reflection, must be a point of resistance to imposing normativity. By providing an environment that welcomes gender and sexuality diversity and allowing these issues to be discussed openly, the school contributes to the strengthening of a more inclusive society. Overcoming the exclusionary views that still permeate conservative thinking is an essential task in ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation, can live fully and without fear of discrimination. Thus, education emerges as a vector of transformation, challenging limiting social constructions and fostering the construction of a more just and egalitarian world (Alves, 2022; Gonçalves, 2010; Junqueira, 2012).

3 LGBTI+ themes in the Brazilian basic education curriculum

The National Curriculum Parameters (PCNs), created in the second half of the 1990s, aim to provide guidelines to ensure cohesion and organization in the Brazilian educational system, assigning to the State the responsibility of standardizing the national curriculum. The document aims to respond to the demands of public education policies, highlighting the relevance of discussing significant social issues within the school context. Among the cross-cutting themes covered, sexual orientation is addressed in the Natural Sciences, highlighting the intention to integrate themes related to sexuality and promote a broader and more inclusive understanding of diversity.

The NCPs recognize the importance of addressing issues such as sexual orientation, with the purpose of combating prejudices and stimulating empathy among students, expanding understanding of the LGBTI+ community. The inclusion of these topics in the curriculum seeks to implement practices that minimize discrimination and

promote mutual respect. An example of this approach is the insertion of the transversal theme “Sexual orientation”, which aims to implement educational actions that contribute to the reduction of prejudice and the strengthening of the acceptance of differences within the school environment. However...

[...] human sexuality is considered an expression that involves biological, cultural, social and pleasure factors, with a much broader and more varied meaning than reproduction, for people of all ages. It is an element of human achievement in its affective, social and psychic dimensions that include, but are not restricted to, the biological dimension (Brasil, 1998, p. 46).

NCPs play a key role in promoting the common good and social respect within educational environments, contributing to the construction of a more just and harmonious society. By addressing cross-cutting themes such as sexual orientation and gender diversity, NCPs aim to guide the formation of attitudes that favor balanced and respectful coexistence between individuals. This approach provides an education that goes beyond the academic content, establishing a commitment to the ethical and citizen education of students (Moura, 2011).

In the Brazilian scenario, the lack of diversity has driven setbacks and perpetuated inequalities, hindering progress towards equality. The country, marked by a deep plurality and a long history of inequality, faces a historical debt that needs to be faced. Teixeira *et al.* (2021) state that, in the early 2000s, the concept of diversity was still limited to a discourse without concrete actions, however, in the following two decades, diversity gained visibility and materialized, resulting in significant advances, especially in the prevention of violence in the school environment. Rossi and Hunger (2012) emphasize that this realization of diversity not only strengthened the relevance of the theme, but also contributed to the creation of a more inclusive and respectful school environment, promoting the reduction of conflicts and the improvement of interpersonal relationships. It is possible to state that:

The school still resists the insertion of frequent discussions about sexual diversity in its daily life and formal curriculum. [...] The fact is that the school can play an important role in the construction of gender identities and sexual identities, since, as part of a society that discriminates, it produces and reproduces inequalities of the most diverse, of gender, race/ethnicity, constituting a gendered space (Rossi; Hunger, 2012, p. 5).

The school plays a central role in the training and development of students, being essential for their personal and social growth. In the educational context, the development of social skills must be integrated into the societal context, considering the plurality and diversity that permeate society. The NCPs address sexual orientation comprehensively, with the aim of including the entire LGBTI+ community and emphasizing the relevance of the thematic axes related to “Human being and health”, in addition to gender issues. The document recognizes the need to integrate these themes into school curricula, seeking to promote knowledge, understanding and respect for differences.

By addressing the cross-cutting themes of NCPs, it is possible to observe that, although they are of great importance, some approaches can minimize the complexity of sexuality by emphasizing the absence of absolute truths. Sexuality, due to its subjective nature, is formed by diverse influences and can evolve throughout life. As Silva (2015, p. 85) points out, “[...] the history of sexuality is objectified in the products of culture”, indicating that it is the result of the interaction between biological and cultural factors. This perspective shows how sexuality is a dynamic phenomenon, influenced by cultural and historical contexts, and essential for the integral development of the human being.

In contrast, the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) aims to establish guidelines for the essential learning of students in all stages of Basic Education, covering the various teaching modalities. The document went through three versions between 2015 and 2017, with a final update in 2018 (Brasil, 2018). The BNCC has generated controversy, especially due to the omission of topics considered crucial for the promotion of social diversity, such as “gender” and “sexual orientation”, in the most recent versions. This exclusion reveals a disconnect between BNCC norms and current educational realities, since issues related to diversity and the LGBTI+ community were suppressed, limiting the construction of a more inclusive and pluralistic school environment (Souza Junior, 2018).

In the initial versions of the BNCC, there was a significant emphasis on themes essential to the promotion of democratic plurality and the inclusion of the LGBTI+ community, with the inclusion of these topics in the “Biology curricular component”. In subsequent versions, this approach has been considerably reduced. The original

document recognized the importance of addressing such issues within the school curriculum, understanding them as fundamental for social advancement and the formation of more conscious and respectful citizens. Subsequent revisions reflected a decrease in emphasis on these themes, evidencing a shift in curriculum priorities and a shift away from current demands for more inclusive and pluralistic education. So:

It can be said that young people cannot do without conceptual knowledge in Biology to be well informed, if they position and make decisions about a series of issues in the contemporary world, which involve different themes, such as: ethnic-racial identity and racism; *gender, sexuality, sexual orientation and homophobia* (Brasil, 2016, emphasis added).

After the second version of the BNCC, there was a substantial change in the treatment of plurality within the school curriculum. The third version, published in 2017 during the government of former President Michel Temer, omitted fundamental issues such as “gender” and “sexual orientation”, themes that were present in previous versions. This exclusion reflects a significant setback, highlighting the changes in the content of the document and its departure from the principles of inclusion and diversity initially defended. The process of drafting the BNCC was marked by intense ideological and political disputes, resulting in a revision that neglected topics crucial to the promotion of equality and human rights. The suppression of topics such as gender and sexual orientation created an uncertain scenario for equality in education, compromising the construction of a plural and inclusive education (De Moura, 2018).

Given this scenario, it is essential to analyze the role of the National Education Plan (PNE) in promoting inclusion and advancing educational issues in Brazil. The last PNE, established by Law No. 13.005, of 2014, effective until 2024, establishes 10 guidelines and 20 goals for national education. During its processing, one of the main controversies was the modification of measures related to diversity, with a special focus on promoting gender equality and sexual orientation. The substitute approved by the Chamber of Deputies, in item III of article 2, emphasizes the need to “[...] overcome educational inequalities, with an emphasis on promoting citizenship and eradicating all forms of discrimination”. This change represents an effort to integrate diversity in educational parameters, seeking to ensure more equitable and inclusive treatment within education policies (Brasil, 2014).

The fight against discrimination is key to ensuring that all individuals are properly represented and included in all spheres of society. This effort goes beyond promoting a more harmonious coexistence, also functioning as a barrier against setbacks that may compromise the advances made in terms of equity and social justice. The essence of democracies is found in open dialogue, mutual tolerance and respect for differences, essential pillars for the construction and preservation of a just and inclusive society, where everyone can fully exercise their rights and freedoms.

4 Final Considerations

This article discussed the relevance of sex education in the school environment, highlighting its fundamental role in promoting inclusion and recognizing gender and sexuality diversity. The analysis showed that the school is not limited to academic teaching, but is also an essential space for the construction of attitudes and values that influence students' perception of themselves and others, helping form conscious, respectful citizens capable of addressing today's social challenges ethically and empathetically.

Integrating comprehensive and reflective sexuality education is essential for students to develop a deeper and more respectful understanding of diversity, contributing to building a more inclusive and equitable society. This approach encounters resistance in some conservative currents, which see the inclusion of issues related to gender and sexuality as a threat to traditional values. This conservative thinking often reinforces stereotypes and perpetuates the binary view of gender, limiting the acceptance of different sexual identities and orientations. By challenging such rigid prejudices and norms, sex education in schools has the potential to reduce the stigma associated with gender identities and diverse sexual orientations, creating an environment in which all students feel recognized, respected, and safe to express their true identity. It is possible, little by little, to combat retrograde ideologies and build an education that values human plurality as a fundamental principle.

The article highlighted the importance of a pedagogical approach that is not limited to the transmission of biological knowledge, but also encompasses the emotional,

social and cultural dimensions of sexuality. This integrated approach is critical to preparing students to understand the complexity of sexuality in a healthy, respectful, and informed way. Through a broader perspective, sex education can provide students with tools to address issues related to gender identity and sexual orientation, promoting acceptance and respect for diversity. This not only contributes to the integral development of students, but also to the construction of a more inclusive school environment that is less prone to discrimination.

Sex education should be understood as an essential instrument for the complete development of students, providing not only the necessary knowledge, but also the skills to interact in a respectful and empathetic way. The school, as a formative space, has the potential to become an agent of significant social transformation. Effective implementation of educational policies that promote diversity and inclusion is therefore vital to achieving this goal. It is essential that these efforts be maintained and expanded, ensuring that all students have access to an education that values, respects and celebrates their identities and experiences, creating an environment in which each one feels recognized and respected in their plurality.

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Kelvi da Silva Oliveira, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRS)

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-6937-4604>


Master's Degree in Education from UFRGS. Graduated in Natural Sciences from the Federal University of Vale do São Francisco (Univasf, 2024). Member of the Study Group on Education and Gender Relations (Geerge) at UFRGS. Member of the Study and Research Group on the Social Production of the (Geppse) Space at Univasf.

Authorship contribution: Textual writing, content review and formatting.

Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/0039283860812910>

Email: kelvi.svaoliveira@gmail.com

Pedro Ricardo da Cunha Nóbrega, Federal University of Vale do São Francisco (Univasf), Study and Research Group on the Social Production of Space (Geppse)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9640-3351>

Graduated in Geography from the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE, 2006), Master in Development and Environment with emphasis on Environmental Management and Policies from UFPE (2009) and PhD in Human Geography from the University of São Paulo (USP, 2015). Adjunct professor at Univasf, Senhor do Bonfim *campus* - Collegiate of Geography. Coordinator of the Human Geography Laboratory of the Geography course at Univasf (since 2018); leader of Geppse at Univasf (since 2016).

Authorship contribution: Textual writing, content review and formatting.

Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/6947287718664579>

Email: pedro.nobrega@univasf.edu.br

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