

## Alphabet soup: building a body-chorus towards literacy diversity in basic education

### ARTICLE

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### Abstract

In Brazil, it has become common to hear criticisms such as: “Why so many letters in the acronym that represents diversity?” Always in a mocking tone, they accuse LGBTIA+ people of forcing the expansion of existences. Therefore, it is important to dismantle the stereotypes crystallized in common sense that end up fueling LGBTIAphobia. To this end, this work has as its methodological design applied research, starting from reality to propose discussion groups and the construction of a glossary, which aim to broaden the understanding of gender and diversity among the academic community of the Instituto Federal de Sergipe, *Campus* São Cristóvão. By constructing the reality of new discourses, a central political and pedagogical role is played in the formation of the subject-gender, the body-subject and sexuality. Hence the importance of making the school an environment that deconstructs stereotypes towards respect for diversity and a civic school for everyone.

**Keywords:** Literacy Diversity. Basic Education. Queer Pedagogies.

### Sopa de letrinhas: a construção de um corpo-coro rumo ao letramento em diversidade na educação básica

### Resumo

No Brasil, tornou-se corriqueiro ouvirmos críticas do tipo: “para que tantas letras na sigla que representa a diversidade?” Sempre em tom de deboche, acusam os LGBTIA+ de forçar a expansão das existências. Por isso, é importante desmantelar os estereótipos cristalizados no senso comum, que acabam alimentando a LGBTIAfobia. Para tanto, o presente trabalho tem como desenho metodológico a pesquisa de natureza aplicada, partindo da realidade para propor rodas de conversas e a construção de um glossário, que visam a ampliar o entendimento sobre gênero e diversidade junto à comunidade acadêmica do Instituto Federal de Sergipe, *Campus* São Cristóvão. Ao construir a realidade de novos discursos, desempenha-se um papel político e pedagógico central na formação do sujeito-gênero, do corpo-sujeito e da sexualidade. Por isso, constata-se a importância de tornar a escola um ambiente que desconstrua estereótipos, rumo ao respeito à diversidade e a uma escola cidadã para todas, todos e todes.

**Palavras-chave:** Letramento em Diversidade. Pedagogias *Queer*. Educação Básica.

## 1 Introduction

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One of the challenges for human beings in the 21st century is learning to live together. In this respect, thinking about plurality and understanding the challenges of dealing with difference become fundamental elements in this journey, especially with regard to issues related to gender, sexuality and corporeality. In short, existences other than the cisheteropatriarchal world we have come to know. For this reason, there is a need for a politics of difference capable of recognizing the other and valuing their specificities. To this end, it is important to demystify identities, to dismantle the stereotypes crystallized in common sense that end up feeding LGBTIAphobia, violence and daily violations. This is the importance of thinking about literacy for diversity as a tool for building a fairer, more equitable and inclusive world.

By uniting theory and practice; by articulating research, teaching and extension; by developing meaningful activities, we are able to build spaces for transformation, mediators between the external world and the internal world of academia. In this way, this project invites us to think about school and everyday micro-politics, narratives to be made and written, corporealities, their relationships and the production of knowledge, in order to narrow the gap not only between theory and practice; between academia and society; but also to think about other strategies and technologies for intervening in the world. According to Catherine Walsh (2009, p. 15), these decolonial pedagogies “integrate questioning and critical analysis, transformative social action, but also insurgency and intervention in the fields of power, knowledge and being, and in life”. Thus, as Thiffany Odara (2020, p. 105) assures us, “the pedagogy of disobedience is much more than an academic project, it is an entire movement”; a movement capable of transforming education into a practice of freedom whose power allows us to think differently about genders, sexualities, bodies,

desires, materializing as a political and liberating act through LGBTIA+ experiences within education, establishing diverse content and languages. Therefore,

it is urgent to think of an education that understands the practices of school inclusion and that disobeys the orders of a hegemonic system, marked by various exclusions that exist for populations that do not respond to certain dominant normative standards (Odara, 2020, p. 106).

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In Brazil, whether in the political debate, in the entertainment field or in common sense, it has become commonplace to hear criticisms such as: “Why so many letters in the acronym that represents diversity?” Always in a tone of mockery, with the intention of ridiculing the fight for inclusion, they accuse LGBTIA+ people of pushing the boundaries in expanding their existences. For York and Nolasco (2022, p. 23), the struggles of the dissident sex-gender-sexual orientation movements:

set agendas and demanded the right to: EXIST. And by existing, they are fighting for quality of life and legal security, for the right to elaborate their lives without pathologizing their bodies, without having to opt for marginalized jobs, without being expelled from schooling processes, without being the target of bullets.

Of course, all corporalities and existences are not reduced to the letters of an acronym, but they help to make up an ever-expanding acronym that underlines the incoherence of a standard meter based on cisheteronormativity. “The alphabet soup can be dispensed with when we no longer need to classify bodies, because all bodies will have become free” (York; Nolasco, 2022, p. 23). Otherness is built as an insistence on the potential of another horizon, another possible world. By building the reality of new discourses through research, teaching and extension, a central political and pedagogical role is played in the formation of the gender-subject, the body-subject and sexuality, since gender and sexuality can exist even if they are not talked about, and it is even in this situation that they operate most vigorously. Banning people from talking about gender and sexuality will not prevent them from existing, but it will not only hinder people from understanding how they work; it will also reinforce stereotypes and prejudices that end up feeding the most varied forms of violence.

That's why it's so important to make the school an environment that problematizes, reflects on and deconstructs these stereotypes towards respect for diversity and a civic school for everyone. Thus,

the expansion of letters in the acronym LGBTIA+ is not just a linguistic formality, but signals the struggle for the pluralization of existences. Dissident sexualities, historically invisibilized or annihilated by physical and/or symbolic deaths, need to establish their names (even if arbitrary and incomplete) and their flags in order to delimit actions, especially in the field of public policies (York; Nolasco, 2022, p. 25).

Thus, the project entitled *Sopa de Letrinhas: Letramento em Diversidade para Além do Senso Comum* (Alphabet Soup: Literacy in Diversity Beyond Common Sense) aimed to discuss concepts and theories that underpin the debate on gender, bodies, sexualities and diversity today; knowing the historical and intersectional aspects surrounding the different pillars of diversity and inclusion, the effects and impacts of inequalities in society. This makes it possible to look at and inhabit the educational sphere in a different way through queer pedagogies, because to “queerize” the school is to “hack normality, dissolve binarisms and articulate alliances and networks” (Trujillo, 2023, p. 142). As a product, a glossary was produced to promote diversity literacy among the external and academic community of the IFS, *Campus São Cristóvão*. In this way, another language has been created that shows not only the importance of the subjectivities that materialize in the letters, so that they don't become empty in the face of common sense; but also reveals the different forms of oppression and discrimination, both in their silent daily presence and in their most perverse form of violence and violations.

## 2 Methodology

The methodological design of this research is qualitative, as it emphasizes the subjective as a means of understanding and interpreting experiences. As Thiffany Odara (2020, p. 13) states, sharing the life stories of those who live in dissidence “is about understanding the codes and signs that make up our transgressive bodies, how they are

seen by society and what place they occupy in it". This is an applied study, since it starts from reality to propose the application of conversation circles and the construction of a glossary, which aim to broaden the understanding of gender and diversity among the academic community. In terms of objectives, it is also descriptive, since it aims to report the facts without personal interpretation, moving on during the project to an explanatory analysis evaluating the facts in more depth. The WASH methodology was also taken as a reference, in which students experiment, experience and produce in order to learn. All in an environment in which the scientific method is valued and student autonomy is encouraged.

The LGBTIAfobia Letal Dossier reported that in 2023 there were 230 violent deaths of LGBTIA+ people in the country. Of these deaths, 184 were murders, 18 suicides and 28 other causes, reiterating how much our country is still an inhospitable place for this population. In addition to the high rates of violations of their rights. This scenario reiterates the importance of creating intervention technologies capable of developing diversity literacy that can deconstruct the stereotypes that populate the social imaginary about the existences that make up the so-called alphabet soup.

With this in mind, eight meetings of the Literacy in Diversity Reading Group were held virtually, with the participation of the external community and project scholarship holders. We also held two virtual meetings of the Sopa Convida Letrinhas activity with external guests and face-to-face activities at the Language, Literacy and Literature Laboratory – LabLilit, open to the school community.

### 3 Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Alphabet Soup: building intervention technologies

The project was carried out in two stages. The first was a diversity study group with eight meetings, six of which were virtual with previously established theoretical debates, with the aim of not only building a homogenous discourse, but also strengthening us as a collective, and two in which we invited LGBTQIA+ people to talk about their experiences

and the crossings that intersectionally mark our experiences of being and existing in the world.

Activities that, according to Cruz and York (2022, p. 75), encourage “reflection and the deconstruction of prejudices and discrimination with regard to people who experience gender and sexuality differently from normative perspectives”. In addition to those already mentioned, there were face-to-face meetings at the Language, Literacy and Literature Laboratory – LabLilit, which were open to the school community. These were safe spaces in the academic environment for reflection, sharing knowledge and exchanges.

**Figure 1 – Virtual meetings**



Source: Authors, 2024.

Being based on academic studies to debate what we experience in our own lives strengthens our resistance to a necropolitical environment and reinforces the need to bring these debates to more people, relating the texts to what we know on the personal level: the dehumanization and difficulties of life on the margins of a society that doesn't even notice our existence and the difficulties that come with this rejection. Reading Stella Carvalho's poem shows us the difficulty of moving through the patriarchal world that is imposed on us, like a child whose way of seeing and acting doesn't conform to the role assigned to her/him. And for this reason, she/he suffers the trauma of simply wanting to be a free child in a world that belongs to men, where refusing his/her masculine role and adopting anything that deviates from it is an affront that could cost his/her own life (Scholarship holder 1, 2024).

Sopa Convida Letrinhas opens with Kevin Martins, a gay black man, who, from his place, made us think about the processes of subjectivation that lead to what we call



identities, while at the same time reiterating the power of “acuirolombarmos” as a strategy of existence and resistance. Afterwards, we welcomed Lorena de Castro, a non-binary, gender fluid, bisexual, autistic and ADHD person, who told us about the challenges she faces on a daily basis, especially in her work environment. “Lorena reminds us that ‘being different’ from what is expected of us can cause resistance in processes that would not exist for cis, straight, white and neurotypical people. But that’s why we must strengthen ourselves and occupy these spaces” (Scholarship holder 3, 2024).

In the light of these experiences and the discussions that took place during the meetings, the normativity and stereotypes embedded in pedagogical practices and curricula can be questioned and broken down at the same time as they expose the apparatuses of society that make life precarious for the LGBTIA+ population. According to Maria Clara Passos in her reflections on the *Pedagogies of Transvestites* (2022, p. 108), “by denaturalizing dehumanization as a given fate, these other pedagogical possibilities reveal the history of violence experienced by transvestites and transsexuals [and other dissidents]” in our society. They also build intervention technologies capable of confronting the established order.

**Figure 2 – Sopa Convida Letrinhas Card**



Source: Authors, 2024.

To think about the letters is to do so on the basis of four guiding concepts that seek to account for the plurality of human experiences in terms of gender and sexuality: anatomical sex, gender identity, gender expression and sexual identity/orientation. Each letter, based on its specific characteristics, fights for a dignified existence and respect in a cisheteropatriarchal society marked by coloniality. Their stories reiterate that, beyond the letters, there are subjectivities, corporealities, desires, life and a basic struggle: the right to exist. As Gracia Trujillo (2023, p. 22) argues, “we need to rebuild alliances and build new ones, thinking about objectives that unite us more than identities. Advancing together in rights and freedoms without leaving anyone behind”. More than thinking about identities, diving into the letters means thinking about the subjectivities, desires, struggles and violence that traverse them on a daily basis.

### 3.2 Collaborative thinking: the construction of the study group

The LGBTIA+ experience in an educational institution can be very challenging, and sometimes lonely. Imagine a trans experience! Gender dissidence in the educational environment is something relatively new, and it's not easy to be a pioneer. Being one of the first transmasculine students has led me to some very good conversations and experiences, and just as many bad ones. When it was my turn to use my social name, to use the appropriate restroom, or to tell teachers and classmates about the change of pronouns when addressing me, there were already precedents – a graduate of the technical course and a teacher, at the time on leave because of her doctorate. And I'd like to say that this only made things easier, but the experiences that mainly technicians and teachers had with those who came before me, made it easier on the one hand, but leveled the discourses that, I'm sure, in most cases, were just ignorance, but ended up being, at the very least, invalidating for my individual experience, since every transgender experience is different.



preciado says:  
then the nation exists.  
the file exists.  
the map exists.  
the document exists.  
the family exists.  
the law exists.  
the border exists.  
science exists.  
even god exists.  
but  
my trans body  
doesn't  
exist?

(Dada Galvão Cartaxo *apud* Pfeil *et al.*, 2023, p. 22).

As much as my initial desire was just to try to educate the other person and move on, I had in mind that I wasn't the only one facing these little acts of violence. And that they can be even worse with someone who is not seen as white, or who takes the opposite path, transfemininity. So there were episodes that needed to be denounced, because they should never happen again. In this way, I was provoked to act in the way that a militant should. In these attempts, I discovered that it was no use just informing, trying to educate by extinguishing ignorance about it. Not even by appealing to empathy. Hate wears blindfolds and earplugs. If you're shouting to yourself, you're still just another person who's clamoring for changes that you won't see in your own time. Then there was discouragement. When invalidated or provoked into action by the other person, I no longer knew what to do or even had the strength to act. I saw myself as alone and weak.

make mine an impossible body  
be absurdly a body  
moving between worlds  
making the body a world  
make me a possibility  
a body in transit in the world  
like all bodies in the end  
walk  
or should  
making my body the impossible  
creating possibility in me  
a transit in movement  
continuous  
(Floresta *apud* Pfeil *et al.*, 2023, p. 20).

On one of those days when I saw myself exactly like that, I was invited to take part in a project in which my experiences, and especially my concerns, were not only welcome but wanted. A path of resistance and confrontation opened up. Not even the strike could stop us. In this group, made up of an educational technician, two teachers, one of whom is trans, and five students, only one of whom is cis, we began our academic and poetic readings of what it means to be LGBTQIA+. We discussed the reasons why we are a minoritized group in this society built to crush anyone who is “different” from the white-cis-hetero man who has money and power. We have seen how the discourse of what is “normal” or “natural” exists only to legitimize the dehumanization of diversity, and that it is precisely in this diversity that our strength and beauty lie. There were exchanges of experiences and reflections that made us see our individual power and that of a group, strengthening both our relationships and our discourses and making us stronger and more aware of our role in the struggle to make a difference and build a better future in which diversity represents what it is: greatness!

**Figure 3 – LabLilit**



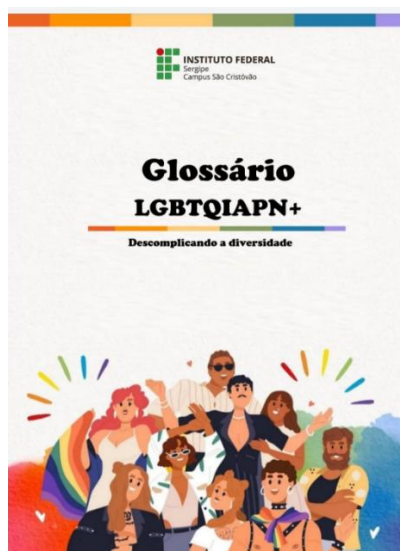
Source: Authors, 2024.

Our small group, in which cisgender is the exception, aims both to bring us closer in discourse and experience and to do something that is so necessary: to break down the preconceptions about the LGBTQIA+ population among young people. Discrimination based on ignorance, which we believe is the most common type of intolerance, is also the most susceptible to change. And who better than us to talk about ourselves? This experience gained through a research project is fertile ground for us to grow, to find our voice and to reveal our potential. It should be noted that, without this safe space, I would only find the hard ground where so many other seeds – hopes for a better world – dry up and die, whether inside or outside educational institutions.

### 3.3 Building the glossary: experiences

The construction of the glossary was important because it was both a time to operationalize the discussions held previously and a moment to think about the impact of this movement on our own work and how it could reverberate in future actions. These actions are understood as producing new discourses and as tools for transforming the oppressive LGBTIaphobic reality.

**Figure 4 – Cover of the glossary**



Source: Authors, 2024.

As far as the participants are concerned, they were able to learn more about the definition of the letters in the LGBTIA+ acronym, gaining a better understanding of the meaning and importance of each of them and the challenges they face in society. Although different, there are issues and struggles that cross us in a similar way. The combination of technical and scientific research with extension has enabled me to better see all the historical battles that each letter in the acronym carries in its formation. Thus, York and Nolasco (2022, p. 22) argue that:

diversity – which is a consequence of life as a production of difference – demands not only benevolent acceptance/assimilation/integration in institutional spaces, such as schools and universities, for example, but also a commitment to transforming mentalities and making public policies viable that guarantee the right of all bodies to health, safety, formal work and, above all, education.

The way in which the project brought together personalities who make up the community led to a dynamic and effective understanding for a better study of each letter, resulting in a glossary based on research and reading on the subject to be used for diversity literacy in basic education schools. The lectures on the Sopa Convida Letrinha project, the poetry, the reading circles on the theme of diversity and the construction of a glossary based on our daily experiences on the theme of sexual diversity allowed for a better understanding of the entire history behind this theme and a more critical look at the discourses and the possibility of constructing intervention technologies capable of having a direct impact on the way society relates to our existence.

The extension of this project brings with it an unparalleled brand of gender and sexual orientation education, both in technical scientific and empirical form, for students, educators and the general public, due above all to the re-education on the subject of diversity beyond common sense. This multiplication brought with it a debate and a better understanding of the meaning of each letter for the formation of the LGBTIA+ community for the entire body of the project. In the end, I was able to see that each letter brings with it historical battles and struggles that still need to be fought, through the creation of public policies that ensure their rights in society. Furthermore,

the publication of the glossary represents the result of our meetings. From listening attentively to our peers, from welcoming our experiences and proposals. An achievement in talking about ourselves and our peers. I believe that the glossary can become a tool for LGBTIA+ literacy for the IF community. Both for its intended audience, students, and for teachers who need to get to know and delve into gender and sexuality issues. To be able to teach about diversity, and not perpetuate ideas and misconceptions about the community, as well as knowing how to better deal with the diverse bodies of their students (Scholarship holder, 2024).

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During the course of the project, I realized that queer pedagogies “help to incorporate genders and sexualities into the educational agenda, not only as content, but also as ways of rethinking some of the categories of this field, such as ‘knowledge’ and ‘teaching’” (Trujillo, 2023, p. 142). In addition, I detected different social dilemmas present in this issue, which corroborates the generation of multiple vulnerabilities in the lives of people who are part of the LGBTIA+ community. I also identified the social exclusion they suffer every day because of who they are, and so I was able to create methods and mechanisms that don’t lead me to impartiality, but to action, because the guarantee of freedom needs to be a continuous struggle. Thus, the:

construction of this glossary has the power to exclude the singular sexual or gender labeling of people, escaping from cisheteronormativity and thus excluding standard straight thinking. The publication of this glossary shows and gives rise to a new way of looking at diversity literacy for the entire IFS academic community. The glossary is an auxiliary tool so that the community can learn the meaning of each letter, and thus exclude or minimize erroneous terms and meanings attributed to the LGBTIA+ community. “It’s a ‘means’ of inclusion and education to reduce prejudice. And to give people a clearer understanding of the concepts and terms that involve the LGBTIA+ community” (Scholarship holder 2, 2024).

## 4 Conclusions

Brazil continues to be one of the most inhospitable countries for LGBTIA+ people. Frighteningly, in 2023, every 38 hours someone from the community is murdered, not to mention the high rates of human rights violations suffered. According to a survey carried out by Linkedin in 2022, 43% of LGBTIA+ people interviewed said they had already suffered discrimination in the workplace, mainly through LGBTIAphobic jokes and comments. As you can see, LGBTIAphobia provides meanings and technologies for the



reproduction of forms of inequality and violence that shape social life and impact on the formation of citizens. And this is only likely to get worse in the face of the current conservative and anti-gender uprising that is sweeping the West, increasing actions from an even more violent, LGBTIAphobic perspective and dismantling rights that have already been won.

This is why we see the importance of concrete actions through a school that promotes respect as a right and not as tolerance, reiterating our right to exist and to have the conditions of citizenship. To demystify LGBTIA+ existences is to enable students to become anti-LGBTIAphobic and to promote an inclusive, diverse and equitable environment both as subjects who intervene in the world and as professionals in the world of work.

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**Responsible publisher:** Genifer Andrade.

**Ad hoc experts:** Priscila Nunes Brazil e Fabio Zoboli.

## How to cite this article (ABNT):

SANTOS, Manuela Rodrigues; BITTENCOURT, Hannah Victória Santana; PEIXOTO, Samy Santos. Sopa de letrinhas: a construção de um corpo-coro rumo ao letramento em diversidade na educação básica. **Rev. Pemo**, Fortaleza, v. 7, e15277, 2025. Available at: <https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/revpemo/article/view/15277>

Received on March 22, 2025.

Accepted on May 9, 2025.

Published on July 25, 2025.