


Mutuality as a way of welcoming LGBTQIAPN+ youth in educational environments

ARTICLE

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Abstract

This research aims to investigate mutuality in teaching and learning as an educational practice for welcoming LGBTQIAPN+ adolescents and young people within educational spaces. The study focuses on the Programa Juventudes of the Serviço Social do Comércio de São Paulo (Sesc-SP), a non-formal education and cultural programming initiative offered across Sesc-SP units, designed for teenagers and young people aged 13 to 29, with specific characteristics shaped by the territories in which it operates. The paper reflects on how mutuality in teaching and learning can contribute to the development of educational environments that are more welcoming and safer for LGBTQIAPN+ youth. Furthermore, by incorporating excerpts from interviews with educators who participate in the program into the discussion, the text addresses the collective demands and subjectivities that shape the experiences of LGBTQIAPN+ adolescents and young people. Such reflections point to the relevance and applicability of this approach not only in the context of Sesc-SP but also in other educational institutions committed to equity and social transformation.

Keywords: Education for Diversity; Inclusive Curriculum; Non-Formal Education; Youth.

A mutualidade como forma de acolhimento de jovens LGBTQIAPN+ em espaços educativos

Resumo

A presente pesquisa tem como objetivo investigar a mutualidade no ensino e na aprendizagem como prática educativa de acolhimento de adolescentes e jovens LGBTQIAPN+ dentro de espaços educativos. O texto incide sobre o Programa Juventudes do Serviço Social do Comércio de São Paulo (Sesc-SP), um programa de educação não formal, com programação cultural, presente nas unidades do Sesc-SP, voltado a adolescentes e jovens de 13 a 29 anos, com características específicas conforme o território em que se insere. O artigo constrói reflexões sobre como a mutualidade no ensino e na aprendizagem pode auxiliar no desenvolvimento de espaços educativos mais acolhedores e seguros para as juventudes LGBTQIAPN+. Além disso, ao incluir no debate trechos de entrevistas com educadores que participam do programa, o texto versa sobre as demandas coletivas e subjetividades que compõem a vivência de adolescentes e jovens

LGBTQIAPN+. Tais reflexões apontam para a relevância e a aplicabilidade dessa abordagem não apenas no contexto do Sesc-SP, mas também em outras instituições educativas comprometidas com a equidade e a transformação social.

Palavras-chave: Educação para a Diversidade; Currículo Diversificado; Educação Não-Formal; Juventude.

1 Introduction

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Reflecting on possibilities for more inclusive education for LGBTQIAPN+ learners, many questions arise about how to face the challenge of addressing the demands posed by this movement in its pursuit of broader rights. Studies have provided information on how LGBTQIAPN+phobia hinders students' development, even leading some to abandon their educational paths altogether (cf. ABGLT, 2016). This article engages in dialogue with the master's dissertation *Juventudes: Educational practices of inclusion for LGBTQIAPN+ youth within the Sesc São Paulo Youth Program* (Silva, 2024) and develops reflections based on data gathered from interviews conducted during that research. The focus of the study was *Juventudes*, Sesc-SP's non-formal education program aimed at adolescents and young adults aged 13 to 29, across all units, encompassing various artistic languages, sports, and physical activities, as well as discussions on social and contemporary issues (Neves, 2017, p. 3).

This article intentionally adopts *neolanguage*, recognizing that there are people who do not identify with either the male or female gender. Thus, the pronouns *elu/delu* were chosen to refer exclusively to nonbinary individuals, or used in the plural when their presence was noted. During the master's research, five interviews were conducted, which this article engages with – one of them with a nonbinary person who preferred the use of neutral pronouns, which prompted the adoption of neolanguage, using *elu/delu* in specific statements. Therefore, when referring to the interviewees in plural form, neolanguage will continue to be employed; in individual statements, the person's gender identity will be respected, whether she, *elu*, or he. Since the words “educador” and “educadora” are gendered, the form *educadore* was chosen to maintain agreement. Accordingly, when referring to other research sources or citing excerpts from the interviews, the gender

markings of the respective author, *autora*, or *autore* will be followed. It is important to note that, as there are no established grammatical rules for neolanguage, writing becomes an act of experimentation – *a queer writing that also builds itself through strangeness*. Nevertheless, it does not abandon the responsibility and formality required in academic research: it seeks precision, considering both teaching experience and coexistence with nonbinary individuals. It is crucial to recognize that commitment and courage are required in responding to this urgent demand, and one cannot wait for formalization to validate the existence of people who are already visibly present. In this sense, the choice was to take the risk of an engaged form of writing, one that reminds the reader of these individuals' existence, even without clearly defined prescriptions.

Another important decision present in this text concerns the acronym used in its title, as it carries a trajectory of struggle within a social movement. The transformations it has undergone reflect both the historicity and the maturing of its causes, along with greater inclusivity. In recent years, the expansion of the acronym illustrates how discussions about diverse experiences and reflections within the community have deepened. In the research that originated this article, the following combination of letters was adopted: LGBTQIAPN+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual/travesti, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual, nonbinary, and other variations of sexuality and gender), as commonly used in the contexts with which the study engages.

It is important to recognize that the term LGBTQIAPN+ is temporary, as sexuality and gender identity are in constant transformation, aligned with contemporary issues. For instance, in addition to incorporating more letters, the letter L was placed first to challenge lesbian invisibility and to question male dominance within the movement itself. Some participants have even proposed expanding the acronym to LGBTQQICAPF2K+, which includes: Questioning, Curious, Allies, *Two-Spirit* (2S), Kink, and other variations. However, in the case of documents, texts, or interview excerpts that employ different formalizations, this study respects the proposed nomenclature, maintaining both the record and the historical coherence within the movement's evolution.

Having established these choices, the article is structured as follows: first, an introduction to Sesc-SP's *Juventudes* Program; then, a reflection on the diversity of gender identity and sexuality; and finally, a discussion on mutuality in teaching and learning, and how it can serve as a form of inclusion for LGBTQIAPN+ youth.

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2 The *Juventudes* Program and the Inclusion of LGBTQIAPN+ Adolescents and Youth

The reflections presented in this text offer an analysis of the *Juventudes* Program of the Social Service of Commerce of São Paulo (Sesc-SP). This non-formal education program, aimed at individuals between 13 and 29 years of age, can take shape through meetings with youth educators or through programmatic activities such as workshops and interventions for adolescents and young adults. It encompasses various artistic languages, sports, and physical activities, as well as discussions on social and contemporary issues (Neves, 2017, p. 3).

The choice of the age group served aligns with several frameworks: the *Child and Adolescent Statute (ECA)*, which defines adolescence as ranging from 12 to 18 years old; the UN definition, which determines that the youth population includes those aged 15 to 24; and the *Youth Statute (PL 4529/04)*, which establishes this life stage as spanning 15 to 29 years (Sesc-SP, 2013, p. 1). However, the program decided to begin at age 13, since the institution had already implemented another non-formal education program, *Curumim*, since 1987, aimed at children aged 7 to 12 (Park & Fernandes, eds., 2015).

To better understand the program's guidelines, one can refer to the documents *Term of Reference of the Juventudes Program of Sesc São Paulo* (Sesc-SP, 2013) and *Presentation of the Juventudes Program* (Sesc-SP, 2018). Since its founding in 1946, Sesc-SP has developed actions for this audience, including cultural and sports activities. As early as the 1940s, initiatives focusing on young people already existed, reflecting Sesc's commitment to integrating educational approaches into all its activities and services,

with the aim of contributing to sociocultural development through interaction and the integral growth of its participants (Souza, 2024, p. 65).

In 2013, the *Juventudes* Program was officially created with the goal of strengthening and systematizing work with adolescents and young adults (Sesc-SP, 2013, p. 1). Its creation reinforced attention to this social group, which represents 25% of the population of the state of São Paulo, with a large concentration in peripheral areas – for instance, 86,000 young people living in Jardim Ângela, a neighborhood in the southern zone of São Paulo (Sesc-SP, 2018, p. 5).

Based on the analysis of the documents mentioned, the proposal was to differentiate actions by age: up to 17 years old, the establishment of ongoing, systematic, and permanent meetings; and from 18 to 29 years old, the development of specific proposals to broaden cultural experiences, viewing them as cultural producers who need more space to share their previous references and promote exchanges (Sesc-SP, 2013, p. 2). However, this division gradually fell out of use, given the vast diversity of youth experiences. Some Sesc-SP units propose systematic meetings for young adults and one-off actions for adolescents, depending on each community's specific profile. This flexibility was already part of the original design of the program, allowing each unit to develop its activities according to local demands, including age range and project format (Idem, 2013, p. 4).

In practice, programming technicians are responsible for the program in each unit. They also participate in various activities, including people management, activity and space coordination, and direct interaction with the public as youth educators. Other responsibilities include research, planning, implementation of activities, and knowledge production about this age group, as well as the hiring of specialized professionals for specific actions, such as workshops or cultural presentations (Sesc-SP, 2018, pp. 15–17).

Regarding its general objective, the program's guiding document defines it as follows: "To promote autonomy and develop notions of responsibility and ethics in relation to young people, respecting their specificities and differences, and contributing to the development of their potential" (Sesc-SP, 2013, p. 1). As for its values, the 2018 document

reaffirms the importance of acknowledging the heterogeneity of social, cultural, and economic contexts (Sesc-SP, 2018, p. 5), as well as the plurality of audiences (Idem, 2013, p. 7), diversity within and among youth (Idem, 2013, p. 8), and cultural diversity and democracy (Idem, 2013, p. 9). Among the specific objectives, respect for differences (Idem, 2013, p. 10) is highlighted as a central value of the program.

Almeida (2016), in *The School and the Ethics of Difference*, when discussing public policies for the inclusion of people with disabilities in public education, deepens this discussion by emphasizing that:

[...] the inclusion of minorities and marginalized groups in educational systems stems from a social understanding that segregation leads to dehumanization. Indeed, the exclusion of so many human beings from social life only concealed their richness and prevented society from confronting the questions raised by difference and minority existence. [...] the inclusion of the different in coexistence, in the world of work, and in school learning processes is a powerful way to humanize society as a whole. (Almeida, 2016, p. 15)

This statement highlights the transformative potential of education based on difference and underlines the possibilities of a non-exclusionary education for all, expressing a commitment to what the author calls “humanizing society as a whole.” Broadening this perspective, one can consider the struggle for the inclusion of non-cis-heterosexual youth, since such diversity also contributes to a more democratic and safer educational environment, helping to address inequalities related to gender and sexuality.

The defense of plurality is reinforced by the program’s very name: *Juventudes*. The plural form was chosen to reflect the diversity of the audience it seeks to reach. The decision to focus on “youth” rather than “adolescents” aimed to avoid a naturalizing and biologist view centered on chronological age. This terminology also emphasizes the program’s broad age range and the diversity of social, cultural, and subjective contexts it encompasses (Sesc-SP, 2013, p. 1).

The document also reinforces that youth participation should be encouraged in accordance with respect for social, cultural, and anthropological aspects, recognizing this

group as subjects of rights, capable of speaking for themselves and expressing their worldviews. When addressing the relationship between youth and adults – most often the educators – the document states that they “stand neither behind nor ahead, but alongside adults,” proposing co-leadership through dialogue with youth (Idem, 2013, p. 2), a perspective that aligns with the notion of mutuality discussed later in this text.

The *Term of Reference* also presents several principles, such as: “Doing *with* youth; Recognizing youth as creative beings; Creating conditions for dialogue and exchange; Promoting the formation of bonds” (Idem, 2013, p. 3), which are revisited in the 2018 document under the topic “Action Axes: *for* youth; *with* youth; *about* youth/juventudes – ‘bond and horizontality’” (Idem, 2013, p. 12). Another key point appears among the program’s guidelines, specifically in “Welcoming – spaces of dialogue/affection” (Idem, 2013, p. 10), demonstrating that the concern with how to foster inclusion is embedded in the program’s foundational documents.

It is important to highlight how these values can promote the participation of LGBTQIAPN+ youth, since when they are recognized as creative and participatory individuals, their experiences and perspectives enrich the entire group. Additionally, the final principle – bonding – deserves attention, as it serves as a powerful tool against prejudice. People are more likely to empathize with LGBTQIAPN+ experiences when these are shared by peers. Returning to Almeida (2016, p. 15), one can understand coexistence as a means to humanize the social sphere.

The following section will explore how the LGBTQIAPN+ community undergoes processes of dehumanization and the crucial role of education in combating LGBTQIAPN+phobia.

3 A bisexual Mowgli raised in a pack of heterosexuals

From the meeting of the two authors of this article emerged an important reflection. Almeida (2022), in one of their lectures, discussed the possibility of defining education as:

a process of transmission of natural and cultural forms of survival (food, protection, preservation, customs...) to younger generations, and an organized process of maintaining and improving life for organized social groups. It is part of a civilizing process around which a people or group organizes and identifies itself.

This reflection connects teaching to the processes of social maintenance and improvement, as well as to the broader project of nation-building. If the current model of education – within this framework of natural and cultural survival – excludes any trace of LGBTQIAPN+ experience, one can infer that there is an effort to erase these people, their achievements, and their histories. Such erasures are not accidental but rather part of a project that values only cisheteronormative ideals.

Almeida (2023), in the text *Chat GPT – Thinking, Knowing, and Demonstrating Knowledge*, points out that schools function, among other things, as “cultural agencies, officially equipped for teaching, representing both the State and society” (Idem, 2023, n.p.). Therefore, addressing diversity in gender identity and sexuality within schools is essential, as it is in other non-formal educational experiences and in the private space of the home. In the same text, the author deepens the discussion on the relationship between education and the maintenance of existence by drawing parallels between the stories of Mowgli and Tarzan and educational processes, demonstrating how mutuality in learning is fundamental to human development. Living among wolves or apes would not allow someone to develop as human. In dialogue with Freire (Freire, 2001, apud Almeida, 2023), it becomes clear that anthropological coexistence is essential for learning, as individuals are mediated by their reality.

The participation of the LGBTQIAPN+ community brings both challenges and potential to these teaching and learning processes. Over the past decade, there has been a notable regression in public education policies addressing themes relevant to this community and meeting the needs of youth. Almeida (2023) introduces the concept of mutuality to shed light on the issue of this silencing: “The mutuality of learning is the key piece in human history. This is the first hybridization of the act of knowing: mutually! If we wish, we can say: hybridly.” And continues, “Without teaching, humankind does not

perpetuate” (Almeida, 2023, p. 17). The invisibility of diverse sexualities and the exclusion and genocide of the trans population have led many LGBTQIAPN+ youth to find no sense of humanity within their families, schools, or broader society, as though there were an intentional proposal of finitude and non-perpetuation for these individuals.

Even though references exist in media and social networks, in the daily life of many families and social spaces, there is often no guidance on how to exist as an LGBTQIAPN+ person. This experienced loneliness, combined with the reflection above, evokes the image of a queer Mowgli raised in a pack of heterosexuals. No matter how much a developing person may imitate performances and behaviors, they could never be considered an equal.

Sedgwick (2007), in the article *Epistemology of the Closet*, explores how a culture centered on individuality advanced in the nineteenth century while simultaneously refusing to comprehend non-heteronormative sexuality, relegating this aspect of human subjectivity to a private realm and perpetuating stigmas that silence expression (Sedgwick, 2007). The issue becomes more oppressive when one recognizes the epistemological actions toward the LGBTQIAPN+ community embedded in our culture. Oppressions based on gender or race are typically grounded in visible stigmas that do not require a “coming out.” These oppressions are often linked to ancestry, cultural roots, and family support (Sedgwick, 2007, p. 32). In contrast, the solitude experienced by non-cisheterosexual individuals has been countered by the community’s efforts to create its own ancestral connections, cultural bonds, and shared roots.

Continuing with Almeida’s parallel (2023, n.p.): “[...] autonomy is different from loneliness. Learning autonomously is profoundly different from learning alone.” Loneliness is a recurring phenomenon within the LGBTQIAPN+ community, especially during the process of self-understanding, when one has not yet fully identified their own feelings or the reasons why certain behaviors and expressions cause discomfort in others. This feeling may be aggravated by inappropriate comments, whether from adults or peers. In such situations, the person does not feel safe to talk or seek help; rather, they perceive something strange within themselves and choose isolation as a response.

Instead of fostering diversity, cisheteronormative values are often reinforced. For example, teaching that boys have penises and girls have vulvas can generate a profound sense of incongruity between one's identity and the roles assigned by society. When addressing bodily transformations, it is important to include diverse experiences – such as discussing menstruation not only in relation to cisgender girls but also trans boys. Including the questions and needs of non-cisheterosexual individuals is an urgent necessity, as is ensuring access to reliable information about non-normative affective and sexual practices, which remains a challenge.

Learning toward a queer humanity can be a lonely process, one that often lacks references. The assurance of human dignity for the LGBTQIAPN+ population has not yet been fully achieved in contemporary times, even though significant advances have been made over recent decades through individual, collective, and policy-driven efforts. Learning to be human in a queer way poses challenges for those still finding themselves. The LGBTQIAPN+ community faces struggles such as name rectification, family structure transformations, and access to community-specific health matters – all of which demand proper representation in political spaces. This community proposes a revolution, whether through art, fashion, or the breaking of the *status quo*. Such an experience, which cannot fit within established structures, could only result in a revolution. A striking example of this can be found in the *ballrooms* – spaces of dance and bodily aesthetics where queer individuals have found affection, kinship, home, and family beyond their places of origin.

Finding LGBTQIAPN+ representation among teachers, in curricula, and across all social sectors is fundamental to creating a fairer world for learners. “Coming out” is essential to protect children and youth and to show them that it is possible to live their affections, desires, and identities. It is necessary to have professionals who are part of the community – within schools and in non-formal educational spaces – who do so proudly and visibly, alongside the recognition of LGBTQIAPN+ figures from the past, in order to collectively build an ancestral space that has long been denied to us.

Returning to the story of Tarzan, when he encounters other humans, his feelings mix curiosity, confusion, and fascination. This sense of euphoria can be compared to what

an LGBTQIAPN+ individual feels when entering a community space. Certain behaviors and social codes that are not yet fully understood coexist with a feeling of belonging, acceptance, and freedom – perhaps for the first time experienced. As more spaces, people, and ways of living emerge, more possibilities for queer existence and identity are built through contact with *others*.

However, this identification and creation of collective belonging must also take place within education, as these spaces are often marginalized. It is necessary to break barriers and build bridges so that society can truly become a more welcoming, diverse, and safe reality. To be queer cannot fit inside a closet; the power of queer experience cannot be confined to private life – it must be lived collectively.

Often, educators have limited access to these discussions and may struggle to know what information is most important for learners. Nevertheless, it is essential to foster spaces of diversity in education, to break hegemonies, and to build a more democratic society. Contemporary researchers such as Da Silva (2015), De Melo (2022), and Fernandes (2017) show how compulsory heterosexuality and the binary division of gender are legacies of colonialism. In this sense, seeking ways to overcome this violent heritage is everyone's responsibility, just as living in diversity enriches society as a whole.

Mutuality helps guide this process of finding paths forward, since educators do not know everything and must place themselves in spaces of listening, attention, and collective inquiry. In this way, they may discover opportunities to expand knowledge and, consequently, transform education into a safer and less lonely place for LGBTQIAPN+ students.

Keeping in mind that “Where there is life, there is incompleteness” (Freire, 2015, p. 50), human experiences are always in transformation, and the more freely we can live, the more diversity can exist. Together – as educators, families, and society – we can create a better world for these adolescents and youth, acknowledging the potential of being human, as Freire (2015) states: “I like being human because the history that I make with others, in which I take part, is a time of possibilities, not of determinism. That is why I insist so much on problematizing the future and rejecting its inexorability” (Idem, 2015, p. 52).

It is possible to build a more welcoming future for LGBTQIAPN+ experiences through the problematization of current challenges, even if the path is not yet fully outlined. Therefore, this study investigated the actions of the *Juventudes* educators at Sesc-SP that aim to welcome LGBTQIAPN+ youth in connection with the principle of mutuality.

4 Mutuality in the *Juventudes* Program

In reflecting on the actions aimed at welcoming LGBTQIAPN+ youth, this section engages with the professional experience of Silva (2024), one of the authors of this article. Academic and teaching practices feed into each other as they connect with memories of the author's own trajectory as a non-formal educator at Sesc. Upon beginning work as an educator, I reflected on the tension between keeping my queer identity “in the closet” and simultaneously feeling the need to share aspects of my personal life in the workplace, since issues related to sexuality often remain confined to the private sphere. However, striving to ensure a safe space where everyone could feel comfortable also required that learners knew they were not alone – that the educator who spent every day with them shared similar experiences.

Within the group, several social markers intersected, but the concern with the LGBTQIAPN+ community brought experiences that inspired this research. The understanding of how to support the needs of LGBTQIAPN+ adolescents and youth, as well as the challenges they faced, was built mutually with them. Although I had previously conducted academic research on education, culture, and social markers, and had a professional trajectory in art education within museums and exhibitions, working at Sesc-SP prompted me to pay closer attention to the experiences of youth, especially contemporary issues related to gender identity and sexuality brought forth by the young participants. In practice, when observing situations in which young people seemed to need support, there were moments when neutrality was not an option.

The relationships formed with youth led me to reflect on questions concerning gender identity and sexuality. These experiences reinforced the importance of not making assumptions about anyone's sexuality or gender identity. When meeting someone, it is common to try to infer these aspects based on their appearance or relationships, but such assumptions must be avoided. It is up to the individual to decide how and when to define themselves. Even when someone identifies with a fixed sexuality, desire and affectivity are always in flux. A bisexual or pansexual person may have a long-term relationship with a person of one gender without ceasing to be bisexual or pansexual. For youth, sexual and affective experiences are still developing, and uncertainty about one's own desires is common – hence the need to discuss non-heterosexual sexualities with everyone.

Engaging and listening to young people changed my perspective on the topic, and responding to their needs became urgent. Some challenges arose from intersectional identities, especially for young people who were both LGBTQIAPN+ and Black, or for lesbian youth. Other questions stemmed from generational experiences, such as pansexuality and non-binarity (Silva, 2024, pp. 65–75).

Beyond the authors' personal perspectives and experiences, excerpts from interviews in Silva's previously cited dissertation (2024) were analyzed. Five Sesc-SP units were invited to participate in the research, each suggesting which educators should take part in the interviews. To reflect on how the *Juventudes* Program welcomes LGBTQIAPN+ youth, the study focused on educators' perspectives through a qualitative, narrative-based approach. The stories were collected to better understand and interpret subjective, human, and personal dimensions.

Not all educators were known personally, nor were their sexual orientations known beforehand. During the interviews, four participants discussed their sexuality even though this information was not directly requested. The sample included: a cisgender bisexual man, a cisgender bisexual woman, a cisgender lesbian woman, and a nonbinary bisexual person. The only educator who did not mention sexuality was a cisgender heterosexual woman. Similarly, among all participants, only the nonbinary educator discussed gender identity. It is important to recognize how heterosexuality and cisgender identity are treated

as norms – individuals belonging to these categories often feel no need to “come out,” as it is always the “other” who must speak of their “deviant” identity. This observation is not a critique of the interviewees themselves but rather an invitation to reflect on the broader dynamics this experience reveals.

The act of sharing one’s identity appeared in multiple ways – subtly within a story, as a direct statement, or within the narrative of their professional and personal development as educators (Silva, 2024, pp. 129, 142, 156, 171). Belonging to the LGBTQIAPN+ community was not an indifferent fact; it could not be ignored, even if not explicitly asked about.

Among these accounts, two stand out. The first is from the heterosexual educator, who spoke empathetically about LGBTQIAPN+ youth, stating:

I think it's about developing genuine admiration, because this is someone who, in addition to all the challenges any human being faces in growing up [...], must also fight against many prejudices. For that alone, they deserve our respect, admiration, and affection. [...] We should embrace this person with the love they need, because they are courageous. Their very existence expands the symbolic boundaries of the world. And they do that with their chest open, breaking through the layers of prejudice we all carry. (Silva, 2024, p. 152).

While this testimony carries a strong emotional weight, it is important to note that the educator recognizes a difference: LGBTQIAPN+ learners face additional challenges compared to others. Yet this difference is not a source of distance – it becomes a source of connection and empathy.

The second notable account comes from the nonbinary educator, who shared the following:

I'll say something I think is very important for this to happen – the presence of LGBTQIAPN+ bodies in our group of educators. I believe the body attracts the theme. So it's not an institutionalized practice, but something that emerges from how this reality often intersects with the educator's own experience. From that bond, young people identify and recognize themselves in another body that may express gender differently. That's where practices that welcome these youth begin. (Idem, 2024, p. 129).

This excerpt highlights the importance of representativity within the educational team. Even before any explicit disclosure, performance itself becomes a space for presenting diversity and fostering identification among youth. Presence alone can serve as an act of care and inclusion, since a young person who recognizes an adult with whom they can identify finds a meaningful point of reference. This perspective deepens in another passage from the same interview:

No one ever exhausts their capacity for knowledge, and knowledge is produced through dialogue. I produce knowledge when I talk with you, because they also bring me profound reflections. I'll share something personal – I came to recognize myself as nonbinary while working with trans youth. They provoke me. They bring me knowledge, and that's very important too. (Idem, 2024, p. 133).

If the previous account emphasized the power of difference, this one highlights the power of proximity. The movement is not limited to youth learning from educators; it is reciprocal. The relationship of mutual learning is evident, as previously discussed – it is like “a bisexual Mowgli raised in a pack of heterosexuals.” Not only do LGBTQIAPN+ youth learn from adults about the possibility of growing and thriving as part of the community, but adults – who may not have had LGBTQIAPN+ references or contact before – also discover new aspects of themselves through this exchange. This learning process is not exclusive to non-cisheterosexual individuals; everyone rethinks their relationship with their sexuality, identity, and gender expression.

The accounts presented in the research reveal numerous examples of how this process of shared learning and self-discovery appeared in these relationships, as seen in statements such as:

“I must confess, I've learned a lot from this generation.” (Silva, 2024, p. 138)
“We learn something new every night we spend with them.” (Idem, 2024, p. 139)
“This place doesn't direct you to a path – it says, come here, let's discover together.” (Idem, 2024, p. 140)
“I'm sure I learn something every day.” (Idem, 2024, p. 137)
“I believe none of us are ever fully resolved; we are in constant search of ourselves.” (Idem, 2024, p. 141).

This awareness – that knowledge is built collectively – leads the educator to see themselves as unfinished, always in the process of becoming.

As Freire (2014) states, “[...] the educator is no longer the one who merely educates but the one who, while educating, is also educated, in dialogue with the learner who, while being educated, also educates. Both thus become subjects in the process in which they grow together...” (Freire, 2014, pp. 95–96). Although educators prepare and study to welcome youth as best they can in educational spaces, the concern remains because mutuality is always present in teaching and learning moments. This is especially true when addressing subjective topics – new challenges and transformations arise in how each person experiences life and constructs their identity, and mutuality becomes essential. Therefore, an open posture toward shared growth is vital.

Freire (2014) also speaks of the historical nature of being human: “to recognize humans as unfinished beings, incomplete within and with a reality that, being historical as well, is likewise unfinished” (pp. 101–102). By acknowledging our human condition of incompleteness, we uncover a transformative potential – what Freire calls “being more”: “This movement of search is justified only insofar as it aims at *being more*, at the humanization of humankind.” (Idem, 2014, p. 104).

Changes that promote plurality and humanized experiences for the LGBTQIAPN+ community are indeed possible, and in this pursuit, we can always strive to *be more*. We believe this goal can be achieved through collective knowledge-building among educators and learners, among youth, within educational teams, and in partnership with families. In the face of human diversity and subjectivity, together with the study of existing knowledge, mutuality may be the most effective path toward addressing sexual and gender diversity in education.

5 Final Considerations

It is well known that the cisheterosexual framework is foundational in our society; however, this text has shown that there are collective ways to build strategies of resistance

against it. When we speak about LGBTQIAPN+ youth, it is essential that they know their educator is an ally. As one educator interviewed stated, “It is not easy to be a dissident body moving through society and through Sesc” (Silva, 2024, pp. 163–164); therefore, young people must know they are not alone.

This text sought to adopt a queer form of writing, in the sense that, as it developed, it exercised ways of writing that respected the pronouns and identities of the people who participated – directly or indirectly – in its construction.

Throughout the process, reflections emerged on how to express such a sensitive and present practice within an academic framework while still engaging with formal language. Including the lived experiences of youth in relation to sexuality and gender identity within the curriculum is both essential and urgent to ensure safer educational spaces. As discussed throughout this article, to achieve integrity in the education of adolescents and young people, it is crucial to integrate experiences of gender identity and sexuality, enabling maturity and self-knowledge with dignity, and offering the potential for application in educational spaces beyond Sesc-SP.

The accounts analyzed demonstrate that the mutuality of learning fosters both the welcoming of collective needs and the recognition of the subjectivities that shape the lives of LGBTQIAPN+ adolescents and youth. These reflections point to the relevance and applicability of this approach not only within Sesc-SP but also across other educational institutions committed to equity and social transformation.

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Responsible publisher: Genifer Andrade

Ad hoc experts: Eli Conceição Vasconcelos Tapajós e Fernanda Ielpo da Cunha.

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How to cite this article (ABNT):

SILVA, Wagner Pereira.; ALMEIDA, Fernando José de. Mutuality as a way of welcoming LGBTQIAPN+ youth in educational environments. **Rev. Pemo**, Fortaleza, v. 8, e15330, 2026. Available in: <https://revistas.uece.br/index.php/revpemo/article/view/15330>

Received on April 11, 2025.

Accepted on May 25, 2025.

Published in January 1, 2026.