

Pedagogical practices and sexual diversity: the teacher as a facilitator in LGBTQIA+ students' school experiences

Práticas pedagógicas e diversidade sexual: o professor como facilitador na vivência escolar do aluno LGBTQIA+

Prácticas pedagógicas y diversidad sexual: el profesor como facilitador en la experiencia escolar del alumno LGBTQIA+

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ABSTRACT

In Brazil and all over the world, the need for affirmative actions aimed at the inclusion and well-being of LGBTQIA+ students is palpable. Unprepared professionals and students facing instances of psychological and physical abuse inside the school environment due to said lack of preparation can be easily found. This article sought to bring tools to these educators, gathering data from Brazil and other countries, through bibliometric research and systematic revision of primary and secondary data, related to the school experience of LGBTQIA+ students, as well as reports by professionals either in formation or in activity about how to take actions that have a positive impact towards the creation of a safe and welcoming environment for everyone. The data collected was mainly published between the years of 2015 and 2020, focusing on primary and secondary students. It has been ascertained that the environments where LGBTQIA+ students feel most comfortable were those in which the school faculty members made use of dialog and took a stand on behalf of these students, and thus served as role models so that others would do the same.

Keywords: Faculty. Foreigners. Minorities. Reports. Student body.

RESUMO

No Brasil e no mundo, é latente a necessidade de ações afirmativas voltadas para a inclusão e bem-estar dos alunos LGBTQIA+. Profissionais despreparados e alunos enfrentando situações de abusos psicológicos e físicos dentro do ambiente escolar em decorrência deste despreparo podem ser encontrados facilmente. Esta monografia buscou trazer ferramentas a estes profissionais da

educação, reunindo dados do Brasil e do exterior, por meio de uma pesquisa bibliométrica e revisão sistemática de dados primários e secundários, em relação à experiência escolar de alunos LGBTQIA+, assim como relatos de profissionais em formação e atuantes sobre como tomar ações que tenham um impacto positivo para a criação de um ambiente seguro e acolhedor para todos. Foram coletados dados majoritariamente publicados entre os anos de 2015 e 2020, dando foco a alunos de primeiro e segundo grau. Foi constatado que os ambientes em que os alunos LGBTQIA+ se sentiam confortáveis foram aqueles em que os membros da equipe escolar usavam de diálogo e posicionamento favorável a estes alunos, e por isso serviam de exemplo positivo para que outros fizessem o mesmo.

Palavras-chave: Discente. Docente. Estrangeiros. Minorias. Relatos.

RESUMEN

En Brasil y en el mundo, la necesidad de acciones afirmativas dirigidas a la inclusión y el bienestar de los estudiantes LGBTQIA+ es latente. Es fácil encontrar profesionales y alumnos no preparados que se enfrentan a situaciones de maltrato psicológico y físico en el entorno escolar como consecuencia de esta falta de preparación. Esta monografía buscó aportar herramientas a estos profesionales de la educación, reuniendo datos de Brasil y del exterior, a través de una investigación bibliométrica y una revisión sistemática de datos primarios y secundarios, sobre la experiencia escolar de los estudiantes LGBTQIA+, así como informes de profesionales en formación y trabajando sobre cómo realizar acciones que tengan un impacto positivo en la creación de un ambiente seguro y acogedor para todos. Los datos se recogieron en su mayoría publicados entre los años 2015 y 2020, centrándose en los estudiantes de primaria y secundaria. Se descubrió que los entornos en los que los estudiantes LGBTQIA+ se sentían cómodos eran aquellos en los que los miembros del personal de la escuela utilizaban el diálogo y el posicionamiento favorable a estos estudiantes y, por tanto, servían de ejemplo positivo para que otros hicieran lo mismo.

Palabras clave: Estudiante. Extranjeros. Informes. Minorías. Profesores.

INTRODUCTION

The school, as we know it nowadays, besides being the place where young people go to acquire formal knowledge through classes of several subjects – such as Language, Mathematics and Social Studies – represents a series of other aspects for these youngsters: a place where they develop emotional bonds, where they work on their social skills (whether it be by engaging with their classmates or school employees), where they learn to argue for and defend their points of view. Generally speaking, they see it as a safe place.

That is not the perception shared by all youngsters. For some, school is a place of fear, concern, phobia, trauma and rejection. Everything but a safe place. These young people are usually part of groups known as social minorities, which are commonly composed by all of those who that deviate from the standard Caucasian human, member – even if a non-practitioner – of the dominant religion, belonging to the middle or upper class, heterosexual and cisgender (i.e.; person who does not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth). The youngsters who do not fit in that standard usually suffer from ideological persecution, humiliation and, not rarely, emotional, psychological and physical abuse. While much of that abuse occurs within the student body, teachers have an essential role, as they can be seen as de-escalators or catalysts for these violent actions.

It is notorious, by means of several surveys by national and international non-governmental organizations [NGOs], as shown by Bortoni (2018), Cowie (2018) and Hernández-Morales (2019), that Brazil is one of the countries that most often commit acts of violence against the population formed by lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transexuals or transgender, queer people, intersex, asexual,

among others; commonly designated by the acronym LGBTQIA+. In 2019 alone, 329 violent deaths within that group were documented in Brazil (Grupo Gay da Bahia, 2019).

This alarming scenario of brutality and physical violence against the LGBTQIA+ population is the result of a process of many years, which has childhood as its starting point. In this stage of life, children are susceptible to the types of teachings they receive and replicate, be they moral, interpersonal, civic or religious teachings, among others. Fernandes and Elali (2018) point out that schools are one of the main environments for the child's development, as well as a mean for social interaction.

Schools, one of the main sources of knowledge for youngsters, can teach much more than what we perceive a priori. At the same time students learn the formal content ministered by their teachers inside the classrooms, they also absorb behaviors and attitudes from their classmates and especially from their teachers, such as sexism, homophobia, segregation, etc., towards various genders. It is paramount to highlight that, for many students, teachers are taken as examples of stance, behavior, virtuousness, discernment and character. Even the students that present a more hostile attitude towards their teachers tend to expect at least an impartial and fair behavior from the teacher, as when it comes to the classroom, the teacher is the entity that must take care of all those present in an equal manner.

Crociari and Perez (2019) shed light as to how, with the silencing of the debate regarding the existence of necessary practices by teachers towards the LGBTQIA+ student body, the problem of emotional, psychological and physical violence towards the percentage of that population at school age expands exponentially, and the key to beginning the process of change is the teacher; however, for that to occur, the teacher needs pedagogical tools to become an agent of change of the status quo and the breaking of paradigms. Graduation courses, for the most part, do not offer subjects that deal with the topic of Sexual Education (Leão e Ribeiro, 2013). Devoid of that knowledge and oftentimes restrained from acting in a way they believe to be the best course of action by groups such as Escola Sem Partido (Nonpartisan School), teachers end up with no trustworthy means to search for knowledge for their actions in defense of marginalized students (Salles, 2017).

Founded by Miguel Nabig (who detached himself from the movement in 2020), Escola Sem Partido has as its cornerstone the premise that Brazilian schools serve as promoters of the political views of the teachers, identifying students as victims of hegemonic harassment, by being exposed to the ideologies of their teachers (Escola sem Partido, 2019). However, for many scholars, such as Renata Aquino, the discourse of Escola Sem Partido fosters, in a covert way, censorship and scapegoating towards teachers (Matuoka, 2018).

According to the Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais [PCN] (National Curricular Parameters) of 1996, the Transversal Theme of Sexual Orientation must be broached by teachers of several areas of knowledge, although, since the publishing of the Base Nacional Comum Curricular [BNCC] (Common National Curricular Base) of 2017, this theme no longer features as transversal but as restricted, implicitly or explicitly, to the section of Natural Sciences, more specifically as part of the curricular component known as Sciences (Brasil, 2017).

By expressing their sexuality, young LGBTQIA+ people are cast in a vulnerable position inside the school, oftentimes being discriminated against by their peers, teachers and school employees as a whole. It all contributes to several of these youngsters foregoing their studies, which may cause devastating consequences ranging from functional illiteracy to unemployment.

The LGBTQIA+ youth is clearly unassisted, and in Brazil this lack of aid seems to be growing. The current panorama of silence, restriction, and lack of access to information by teachers rarely any action in defense of young LGBTQIA+ people in the Brazilian educational system.

This paper sought to contextualize the LGBTQIA+ scenario in Brazil, show problematic situations faced by the professionals of education, and identify pedagogical practices employed in

other countries that can be put to action so that we have positive results, not only in the process of learning of these youngsters, but also in their school experience.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The project was conducted by means of a bibliometric research, alongside a systematic review of primary and secondary data regarding the topic of the education of young LGBTQIA+ people.

The bibliometric research consists of a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the bibliographical production of the topic at hand, making the analysis of the results of said intellectual activity possible (USP, 2018).

The systematic review consists of a planned investigation of scientific literature which, through means of systematic methods, identifies, selects and critically evaluates relevant studies about a clearly formulated question (Sousa & Ribeiro, 2009).

Searches were made, primarily, in the electronic library of research and download Zlibrary, which possesses open access, is of public domain and is updated daily. By researching the descriptor "LGBTQIA+", only eight articles were found. By changing the acronym to "LGBT", considered outdated for not bringing visibility to other nuances of sexuality, over 500 articles were found. By using the markers "LGBT students" and "LGBT education", once again, over 500 articles were found in each research. Using as criteria articles that were published within the last 5 years, from 2015 to 2020, and after analyzing the titles and summaries of the articles, in the timeframe the searches were made, 27 articles from this databank seemed potentially pertinent to the development of this paper. A substantial part of the articles found was directly related to health or areas stereotypically associated with homosexuals, such as beauty, and not pedagogical experiences – which significantly reduced the initial high number of over 500 articles. Other texts used came from various sources such as the Ibero-American Journal of Studies in Education, Revista Aleph, news websites, among others.

Academic articles, reports and national and international indexes were analyzed, being obtained via official documents, such as data from the Brazilian Public Ministry and Chamber of Deputies; as well as publications of trustworthy outlets such as the Journal of LGBT Youth. Initially, such texts were considered and selected according to the suitability to the topic. After that, markers describing the scenario experienced by the LGBTQIA+ youngsters in Brazil and abroad were identified. Data referring to statistics regarding school and pedagogical practices applied by educators was collected. With that data and reports in hand, the situations in need of change, and how that change has been applied in a small scale, were identified.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Minorities and prejudice in Brazil

Brazil is an extremely plural country, with a vastly rich culture, composed of a mix-and-match of several foreign cultures and that of our native ancestors; which makes it a challenge to define what is a stereotypical Brazilian, considering the diversity the country holds. However, groups that do not belong to certain standards are oftentimes disliked, stigmatized, persecuted and even physically assaulted.

Those groups, called minorities, not always are in a smaller number when compared to the rest of the population. According to data from the last Demographic Census carried out by the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE] (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) in 2010, 54% of the Brazilian population was composed of non-Caucasian individuals, which are still considered a racial minority, nonetheless.

Therefore, it is possible to assume that many of said minorities are thusly classified for not possessing some social markers that are seen as being of a higher prestige by society. Such markers include, but are not limited to: male, cisgender, heterosexual individuals possessing a stereotypically European phenotype (light eyes, skin and hair, small lips and nose, among others), practitioners of Catholicism, and members of the upper class. Despite an extremely limited percentage of the Brazilian population belonging to that description, it is immensely common for individuals not fitting in that standard to suffer from prejudice from those around them.

The LGBTQIA+ population has been suffering physical, mental, verbal abuse, going through discriminatory and embarrassing situations both in the job market and in their private lives (that is; having services refused to them), negligence from authority, among other social and legal problems.

According to a survey by Grupo Gay da Bahia [GGB] (2019), every 26 hours an LGBTQIA+ individual passes away, either by murder or suicide, stemming from years of abuse of varied types. That data puts Brazil as first place in crimes against sexual minorities – even when compared to countries where being LGBTQIA+ is a crime under penalty of death. Between 2000 and 2019, the total number of violent deaths of LGBTQIA+ people in Brazil was 4.809, with 2017 being the most violent year with the harrowing number of 445 victims.

IBGE does not include in its census the percentage of LGBTQIA+ people in Brazil. LGBTQIA+ leaders in Brazil estimate, in a non-official manner, that 10% of the population (20 million) is composed of gays, 6% (12 million) lesbians and 0.5% (1 million) of transgender people.

According to data by Grupo Gay da Bahia (2019), this demographic group suffered from 329 violent deaths in 2019, of which 90.7% were of people between the ages of 20 and 50, 3.9% elderly and 5.8% under the age of 20. Among these 329 victims, 7.3% were teachers and 5.1% were students. The region with the highest concentration of victims in 2019 was the Northeast, with 35.36% of all occurrences (117 victims), followed by the Southeast with 29.79% (98 victims), North with 17.02% (56 victims), South with 9.42% (31 victims) and Center-West with 8.21% (27 victims). However, the three federal units with the highest number of victims were São Paulo (50 victims), Bahia (32 victims) and Pernambuco (26 victims).

Some types of prejudice (xenophobia, religious prejudice, etc.) have been fought against for years – such is also the case of racial prejudice. With campaigns being broadcast in media outlets, as well as the inclusion of racially diverse characters in works of fiction, the figure of the non-Caucasian person is already better accepted socially than a century ago. However, this is far from ideal. Prejudice related to questions of sexuality has been discussed in the last decades, although it has not reached the level of progress that the racial debate currently holds.

Media representation

In regards to representation in Brazilian media, it is remarkable the increase in the number of LGBTQIA+ characters in soap operas by the largest producer of that type of content in the country, albeit with a caveat. A large portion of those characters continues to follow a pattern: male, Caucasian, gay, and comic relief provider.

In the last decade, the largest producer of soap operas in the country aired 88 soap operas (Xavier, 2007). According to the survey by Bernardo (2020), in the last five decades, taking into consideration all free-to-air TV broadcasters, a total of 87 soap operas with one or more LGBTQIA+ characters were aired: eight characters in the 1970s, 26 in the 80s, 22 in the 90s, 61 in the 2000s and 66 in the 2010s, a total of 183 characters. Comparatively, it is easy to see how small the representation of this population is in Brazilian culture, which makes social acceptance more difficult.

Not only is this audience rarely represented, but when seen in soap operas, they lack full disclosure of their social life like heterosexual characters have. The first LGBTQIA+ kiss without any

other pretext (i.e.; acting for a play, a challenge, etc.) only aired in 2011. The first and only intersex character to appear in a soap opera until today was in 1993, and was not played by an intersex person. The first transgender character came in a 2001 soap opera and was not played by a transgender person.

The inclusion of these characters has surely contributed in one way or another for the normalization of these people in social circles and is a great step forward. Outside of fiction, the LGBTQIA+ population anxiously waits for the moment in which professionals that are part of that group will have more room to carry out their professions.

Effects of violence in the life of LGBTQIA+ students

The lack of representation leads to, among many things, the sensation of unfamiliarity and strangeness. With the propensity for rejection of that which is not familiar, ostracism and even aggressiveness towards those that behave or express themselves differently from most, people find several arguments to defend their attitudes – which oftentimes are replicated by their children in the school environment.

There is a series of questions that Brazilian society makes use to justify their prejudiced attitudes, with religion probably being the predominant one. The Brazilian society - which according to a survey carried out by Instituto de Pesquisas Datafolha (Datafolha Research Institute) in 2020, has 50% of its members as practitioners of Catholicism and 31% as practitioners of Evangelism – ends up developing a much more conservative character in regards to sexuality – even though not all of religious people are prejudiced towards the LGBTQIA+ population.

A person's sexuality in Brazil, much like in several other places in the world, is considered taboo and the harsh wave of conservatism that sweeps over the country has aggravated the scenario of prejudice and violence. Those at school age that belong to the LGBTQIA+ population find themselves in an extremely delicate situation in several aspects of their lives thanks to intolerance. It is likely that those people find their parents, classmates, friends and teachers resistant in accepting them.

More specifically in the school environment, LGBTQIA+ teenagers report experiences of trauma and unsafety. In the 2020 report made available by the Office of Education of Associação Brasileira de Lésbicas, Gays, Bissexuais, Travestis e Transexuais [ABGLT] (Brazilian Association of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transvestites and Transexuals) in which 1,016 students from 13 to 21 years of age were interviewed, the following reasons for feeling insecure at schools were reported: 60.2% due to their sexual orientation, 42.8% due to how they express their gender, 14.2% due to their gender / gender identity. The interviewees reported the places in which they feel unsafe: 38.4% in bathrooms, 36.1% in Physical Education classes and 30.6% in locker rooms. In the same report, 31.7% of the interviewees affirmed they had missed at least one school day in the month before the interview due to feeling insecure or embarrassed.

The problem of the LGBTQIA+ youth and the toxic school environment is not exclusive to Brazil. Sansone (2019) points out a shocking reality through analysis of research data from the High School Longitudinal Study of 2009, which followed groups of 20 to 30 students in 940 public and private schools in the United States of America: students who, in the research, identified as LGBTQIA+ were less likely to graduate High School and at some point, have abandoned school at least once. LGBTQIA+ students are more likely not to have a High School diploma, but a General Equivalency Diploma [GED]. LGBTQIA+ students have consistently lower results during High School, lower grades in school exams and, because of that, lower average grades; both in the general scope of High School and in each separate year, and take up fewer elective courses. Those students have a weaker sense of belonging to the school environment and are less likely to think they are capable to finish High School and college education. However, they do not have an inferior performance

than their peers in standardized tests, quite often achieving results that are a bit higher than heterosexual students, like in Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Tests [PSAT] and Scholastic Aptitude Tests [SAT]; tests created to allow the students' entry into a university.

In the past, research pointed out that LGBTQIA+ adults had significantly higher academic achievements than heterosexual adults, however, in other decades it was more common for people to only open up about their true sexual identity at a later stage in life. It was also considered the possibility that LGBTQIA+ students managed to have a good performance the moment they started college, as that environment tends to be more accepting and respectful of differences. Generations Y and Z are much more likely to open up about their sexual identity in earlier stages in life, like in adolescence (Sansone, 2019).

On a survey held by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network [GLSEN], it is noted that the sense of insecurity remains. This survey consulted 23,001 people from 13 to 21 years of age, in the 50 states that compose the United States of America. From that total, every 4 out of 10 interviewees declared themselves as gay or lesbian. From that group, 98.5% declared having been called 'gay' as an insult by the speaker and 34.8% skipped at least one school day for not feeling safe at school.

The American School Counselor Association [ASCA] and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA] are two North-American organizations that endorse ethical principles and practices as to how principals and school counselors generate a safe environment in their schools, through equative support and use of resources, for minority students, usually referred to as 'diverse'.

Principle 3 of the document called Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (NPBEA, 2015), which deals with equity and cultural response incentivizes principals to "confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status" (NPBEA, 2015). ASCA's Ethical Principles (2019) direct school counselors to develop school atmospheres that are respectful and free of bullying and discrimination based on the students' sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

Difficulties found by educators in Brazil

Brazilian Education professionals find a series of difficulties, of the most varied sort, when it comes to LGBTQIA+ inclusion in schools.

The current version of the BNCC suppressed terms such as 'gender' and 'sexual orientation' from its text as it is seen as "controversial", even though the majority of those that contributed to the creation of the current BNCC edition placed themselves in favor of including said terms (Daher, 2018). Despite the suppression, it is still possible to understand that the BNCC is in accordance with the inclusion of said topics as transversal subjects, since Competences 7, 8 and 9 of the document broach topics related to the respect for human rights, valorization of human diversity and the fight against prejudices of all kinds.

With the current conservatism wave in Brazil, making this topic explicit becomes even more necessary, since a pattern that segregation is acceptable and inherent to an individual's gender is being perpetuated (Almeida, Jaehn, & Vasconcellos, 2018). An example of resistance is the December 2017 curriculum of the city of São Paulo, grounded on the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs], which explicitly deals with the topic of gender identity, in tandem with the SDGs. It is important to point out that what São Paulo did is not a loophole but a constitutional right guaranteed by the Brazilian Federal Constitution (1988), Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação (Law of Guidelines and Bases for Education) (1996) and Lei Maria da Penha (Maria da Penha Law,

which aims to reduce domestic violence, named after an activist and former victim of such violence) (2006).

Escola Sem Partido (2004) is one of the greatest causes for the conservative pressure on the current educational scenario. Claiming that educators place students under “ideological indoctrination” when oftentimes these educators are only dealing with transversal topics deemed not only pertinent but also valuable by documents like the Brazilian Federal Constitution (1988) or the SDGs (2015); this conservative movement, as well as others, frequently intimidates professionals of Education who might not hold knowledge of the legal basis they possess or simply prefer not to cause “embarrassment” or “discomfort”.

The mixture of conservatism and disinformation causes serious embargos to the discussion of gender in schools. It is known that, around the world, teachers in training lack classes that help them learn how to deal with situations of prejudice and social injustice. In Brazil, while this reality is not different, we still find ourselves in disadvantage in other points when compared to European countries and the United States of America. In those places, the figure of the school counselor holds great importance when it comes to discussing matters of the LGBTQIA+ student body, different from school counselors in Brazil.

While in Brazil the school counsel is formed by members of the school community, such as the principal, teachers, parents, and those who live near the school, in an attempt to take up practices that are beneficial to the school in the administrative, pedagogical and financial areas; in the United States of America, for instance, being a school counselor is a formal profession, in which the professional needs to be a bachelor in the area of Education, preferably in the sub-areas of Child Psychology and Communication. Besides that, to carry out the job, it is also necessary to have a master's degree in School Counseling. The school counselor deals with students from Primary to High Schools, in a single school, and is charged with providing counsel regarding educational, vocational, socio-emotional questions, among others. The partnership between an engaged school counselor and a cooperative school manager may bring a series of beneficial changes to LGBTQIA+ students, since the counselor has training in areas that go beyond Education which help to mediate debates, organize seminars, be active in student organizations, among many other possible affirmative actions.

Some educators practice, in the best way they can, affirmative actions in their teaching environments. Mariano and Altmann (2016) report in their research how the attitudes of two Physical Education teachers towards a group of students, in which one of the teachers adopted mixed procedures and did not distinguish genders while the other reinforced stereotyped gender standards, impacted both negatively and positively the behavior, actions and organization standards of both groups. That experiment reinforces how necessary it is that teachers receive formal instruction as to how to deal with differences of gender and sexual identity so as not to reinforce stereotypes and create segregational and uncomfortable environments. Seemingly harmless actions, such as breaking off the class in groups based on gender, might lead to bullying and social exclusion, in case a student with a profile the other students consider inadequate for that label is directed to work alongside them. Several teachers consider forcing the interaction of initially disparate groups will solve the problem, although that sort of action tends to have the opposite effect.

Pathways adopted by foreign educators

It is remarkable that the stance of people in high positions in the hierarchy of any organization serves as a role model for all others in that entity. It is not at all different in the school environment. Students tend to follow the behavioral guidelines proposed by teachers and to follow

said guidelines more thoroughly when the request comes from members of the school coordination or administration.

The stances taken by the management team of a school heavily impacts not only the academical life but also the personal life of students; with directors and school counselors being able to become the trigger for critical and empathetical thinking in the student body, teaching staff and general members of a school community.

In the 2009 report by the North-American association College Board, named "Finding a way: Practical examples of how an effective principal-counselor relationship can lead to success for all students" it was concluded that as the partnership between principals and counselors grew stronger, the number of counselors that considered the principals as cooperative increased, teachers started treating themselves more respectfully, the school community elevated its standards and the school became less vulnerable to external influence. The collaboration between principals and counselors was seen as a significant factor related to this improvement. Beck (2018) believes values and beliefs that school counselors and principals personify, as well as collaborative actions to which they might have been seen as role models, may be pivotal in the advancement of educational opportunities for LGBTQIA+ students.

On a special edition of the Professional School Counseling magazine which focused on the role and function of counselors in transforming schools into safe environments for LGBTQIA+ youngsters, Gonzales (2017) revealed that some school counselors had strategic plans to adopt inclusivity and create a safe school environment for LGBTQIA+ students. Those plans included: (a) student engagement, (b) implementation of student curriculum, programming and clubs (i.e.; Gay-Straight Alliances); and (c) hosting of lectures and seminars.

Beck (2019) conducted a study with the intent to allow principals and counselors with experience in advocating for LGBTQIA+ students who were part of their respective school communities to be heard. In that study, two principals (identified as Chris and Mark) and two school counselors (identified as Jordan and Tina) were interviewed, having been recognized state- or nation-wide by their fight for LGBTQIA+ students and were given, or nominated to, "educator of the year" awards, among others.

The participants of the study reported that their personal experience was fundamental in making them become allies to the cause and to fight for the rights of LGBTQIA+ students. The lack of safe and inclusive spaces for those students at school, both when the interviewees were students and nowadays, was one of the main reasons that led them to act. Of the four educators in Beck's study, one identified as gay (Mark), one as lesbian (Jordan), one as transgender (Chris) and one as cisgender heterosexual (Tina). According to Mark, the absence of a welcoming space to LGBTQIA+ youngsters in his school back when he was a student made him feel as if he did not belong to that environment. Jordan, who also did not have a safe space in her student years, had that as the main motivating factor to work in Education: being able to return to school and make a difference to these kids who end up being silenced. With 75% of the professionals interviewed by Beck having lived through bullying and ostracism, the sense of urgency for the beginning of a project of inclusion and acceptance of LGBTQIA+ students was blatant. Mark and Jordan included the topic of LGBTQIA+ students in their college classes, as this topic was previously not addressed.

The educators also highlighted the importance of knowing their school and giving visibility to the plurality of students therein. Mark claims that when students enroll in his school, they will hear on his presentation speech about the school population and the LGBTQIA+ students. In several environments the LGBTQIA+ people are hidden, existing in silence, but the four educators involved in the study make the presence of said students in their environment quite clear, bringing information for current and future students about the LGBTQIA+ community, looking for programs and initiatives that bring benefits for the LGBTQIA+ student body, and building bonds with the

students – the four participants claimed to feel responsible for ensuring each student has the opportunity to reach their highest potential.

They highlight that it is important to search in one's own school community for inclusive policies for the LGBTQIA+ population, both for the students and the employees. Jordan, who is a student counselor and a lesbian, believes that the fact she found support from the institution as a lesbian employee made the student groups that are commonly marginalized feel better represented and included; as well as seeing the institution as more welcoming and, therefore, safer.

When it comes to visibility, the educators use their own sexualities/gender identities to make the debate more real; ceasing to be an abstract discussion. Mark did not hide he is gay in his work environment, as he wanted to show that there is a homosexual person as the school principal, so as to provide visibility to the LGBTQIA+ population and make that environment safe, so that other LGBTQIA+ employees could also feel comfortable and with no need to hide. Meanwhile, Chris believes that not having hidden that she was a transgender person facilitated the building of bonds with other transgender students and instigated a culture of respect to sexual diversity in school, which was passed along to new students each year. Chris also uses her gender identity as a teaching tool when it comes to putting a face to a victim of bullying and allowing students to exercise their empathy. When a student is insensitive to the LGBTQIA+ community, Chris talks to them about why that kind of comment should not be made and why she was hurt upon hearing it.

Jordan defends that it is important for the professionals of Education to present themselves as a role model – not with the idea of “ideological indoctrination”, but as a positive possibility of a pathway students may take. The moment youngsters have an example of someone that managed to go through adolescence, having survived all the struggle that follows having a non-standard sexual identity and managing to lead a successful and healthy adult life; it allows these youngsters to see that it is possible to tread this road and to have someone to look up to.

Tina, who is an heterosexual and cisgender allied to the LGBTQIA+ cause, started to adopt inclusive practices by taking as an example the actions of a workmate who was openly homosexual. Having her own LGBTQIA+ students as models, she started using them and their experiences as agents of change – she gave voice to these students, putting them in touch with other students in the same situation, thus creating a safe environment for all. When there are training sessions with the school staff where she works, Tina always encourages them to take a stance and be vocal when they witness inappropriate behavior, as this can lead to change.

According to Mark, being vocal in an inappropriate situation shows the non-complicity with prejudiced behavior and that is the first step for the breaking of paradigms. The professional that sees something incorrect taking place at school and remains silent is perpetuating actions by people that may even become physically aggressive towards LGBTQIA+ people. It is important to have a critical dialog with those people and make them reflect upon such behavior.

Both school principals, Chris and Mark, reinforce that, despite there being external objections, having an inclusive curriculum (i.e.; including textbooks with LGBTQIA+ characters) is vital; since if not everyone is being included, the school is not reaching all students in an isonomic fashion; that is, providing ample and complete education for all students. Although those situations may generate estrangement or discomfort at first, the participants of the study report that without these initial steps of breaking of paradigms it would not have been possible to advance in the fight to turn their schools into more welcoming environments.

Something that all educators who took part in Beck's study (2019) share is the will to pass forward the practices adopted in their schools to neighboring ones and to other professionals of Education. These multiplying attitudes ensure that good practices reach groups outside of their own communities and teach them how to act, considering that even though several professionals feel the desire to take stance against prejudice, they lack the necessary tools for it. The four interviewees claim that having been nationally recognized by their work adds credibility to the average listener.

However, it is everyone's role to take a stance, particularly to ensure that the habit of not remaining silent keeps going forward.

It is paramount to become acquainted with the mission and vision of the teaching institution, as well as the culture and values of the school community. When the teaching staff takes the initiative to transform the school in a safe and welcoming place to differences, that is the easiest path for change to occur. The four interviewees, by taking a stance, spreading their ideas to colleagues and giving not only voice, but also creating spaces for the LGBTQIA+ students inside the school environment, started a movement of change that ends up becoming part of the culture of that institution. As the counselors and teaching staff converse and instruct the student body that certain attitudes must be reflected upon, not in a confrontational or aggressive way, but coming from a place of empathy and communal wellbeing, the chances of results being positive notably increase.

Beck's study (2019), carried out with those professionals of North-American Education, shows how four individuals started a change in their school communities, taking information to colleagues and thus allowing people who might have been teaching for years and had never been in touch with that kind of debate to understand and help solve the problem.

When it comes to professionals in training, future educators, a study was conducted in Israel by Glikman and Elkayam (2018). Israel has a conservative scenario similar to Brazil in several aspects, with strong religious influence. However, in the study that had as its objective exploring the desire of teachers in training to work with their future students at school age topics related to sexual orientation, the response was extremely positive. In that study, 264 people were interviewed, with the average interviewee being 31 years old and 85% of them being women.

When questioned about the appropriate age to start the discussion of sexual education in the classroom, 32% believe that it would be when students are in Primary and Secondary levels, 8% in the 1st or 2nd year (Elementary), 13% in the 3rd or 4th year (Elementary), 21% in the 5th year (Elementary) or 6th year (Middle School), and 26% in the 7th year (Middle School) or older. About where that topic should be broached, in a scale of 5 points, 4.42 believe it should be in the homeroom class, 4.15 believe it should in a specific Sexual Education class, 3.63 believe it should be done in individual conversation, among other options. In regards to which professional is the most qualified to broach that subject with students, in a scale of 5 points, 4.48 believe it to be the school counselor, 4.3 the Primary and Secondary level teacher, 4.23 a guest lecturer, among other options.

Most participants of that study, when asked what the teacher should do when witnessing a situation of homophobia, claimed that the teacher should act emphatically against such behavior. However, participants also claimed having less than the desirable level of knowledge necessary to deal with subjects related to sexual orientation with their students; while also not having the formal tools to help students dealing with problems of that nature. In conclusion, they considered important to hold seminars or courses about sexual identity in the graduation program of future teachers, so that it clarifies how they can help students in that position.

The final reflection that the interviewees arrived at was that the tool they currently possess to help students was their interpersonal relationship with them: having open communication, being empathetic with the reported situations, and reinforcing LGBTQIA+ students that they are normal and loved, just like everybody else. The offering of emotional support, which was also given by the participants of Beck's research (2019), is the tool used by the participants of Glikman and Elkayam's research (2018).

In England, Kurian (2019) points out a curious fact: teachers count on governmental support in the shape of inclusive policies and initiatives, in a way that they are defenders of the rights of their students. However, it is quite common that the teachers themselves are the disseminators or facilitators of discriminatory practices in the school environment. Having classified the teachers that commit/facilitate discriminatory acts in four groups – ignorant (lacking knowledge about the

matter), apathetic, reluctant and prejudiced – Kurian shows how such attitudes normalize violence and stimulate, even if indirectly, the suppression of the identities and individualities of students.

With England leaving the European Union, which formally occurred in January 2020 after 3 years of negotiation, it also ceases being a part of the European Convention of Human Rights (1950), which causes a weakening of the resolutions regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. However, it is valid to highlight that the International Human Rights Law can and should be used as a tool for social justice and the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child can be used to deal with discriminatory practices that come from teachers. With the UN's Committee on the Rights of the Child, article 29, it is declared that the child's education must be based on developing their personality to its full potential, besides imbuing respect to the human rights and fundamental liberties – this document is also recognized by Brazil.

On an online survey done in China with LGBTQIA+ students, whose goal was to examine the relationship between school experience and the students' mental health, Wei e Liu (2019) reported illuminating results.

A total of 732 LGBTQIA+ students from 29 Chinese provinces took part in this study and considered the majority of Chinese schools as non-inclusive for them. Despite the lack of inclusion and representation in their curriculum, adequate staff training, and very few policies related to LGBTQIA+ students, most of them claimed not feeling unsafe in the school environment.

It was revealed on the survey that the participants felt comfortable with their sexual identities and had revealed them to someone, though their family or teachers were not among those people. Those Chinese students also claimed 85% of them felt depressed and 40% had already had suicidal thoughts. Wei and Liu found a significant reduction of suicidal intentions in LGBTQIA+ students whose school environment was more inclusive, whose school resources were employed in the well-being of said students and especially, whose environment possessed a positive example of LGBTQIA+ people.

CONCLUSION

The subject of pedagogical practices employed for the improvement of a student's life in the school environment definitely lacks larger studies and investment. According to the data replicated here, it is notorious that professionals of Education need guidance in that matter, including as part of their curriculum in teacher graduation courses. In Brazil there are still several barriers so that a safe and welcoming school environment can exist for a LGBTQIA+ student nationwide; such as conservative movements (religious or otherwise), lack of both information and media representation, which leads to difficulty in accepting these people. Educators have legal backing to work on those topics in the classroom, but lack tools to do it in the best possible way. Foreign teaching institutions with the most positive results when it comes to generating a safe and welcoming environment to LGBTQIA+ students were the ones where dialog was frequent, empathy was worked on, the teaching staff had positive examples of LGBTQIA+ people and the school made an effort to be inclusive, providing emotional and social support to those students.

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