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Sexuality education at the itinerant school of MST: students' perceptions[I]

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Abstract

Sexuality education should be understood as a educational intervention process aimed at imparting knowledge and discussing issues related to sexuality, sexual and reproductive health, sexual rights, gender relations, sexual diversity, and sexual and affective desire. Nevertheless, many paradigms hinder such education at school. However, since the itinerant school of Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST – Landless Rural Workers' Movement) is an educational school based on Paulo Freire's assumptions, do the same taboos, social interdictions, and prejudice have an effect on sexuality education in this setting? This descriptive and qualitative study has aimed to answer this question. It was developed with eighteen students from the itinerant school of MST in Paraná state, and it sought to present their perceptions on sexuality education at school. Based on the material produced in focal group meetings and on field diary notes, which were ordered by categorical analysis, it is possible to conclude that sexuality education at the itinerant school is conducted in a medicalized and biologized way, emphasizing the health-disease binomial, and that there is not transversality between sexuality teaching and the other disciplines. Thus, even though this school uses Paulo Freire's theoretical and methodological contribution, it has proved to be paradoxical when dealing with sexuality education.

Keywords

Sexuality education – Itinerant school – MST.

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A educação em sexualidade na escola itinerante do MST: percepções dos(as) educandos(as)[I]

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Resumo

A educação em sexualidade deve ser entendida como um processo de intervenção pedagógica que tem como objetivo transmitir informações e problematizar questões relacionadas à sexualidade, à saúde sexual e reprodutiva, aos direitos sexuais, às relações de gênero, à diversidade sexual e ao desejo afetivo-sexual. Todavia, muitos paradigmas impedem a efetivação dessa educação no ambiente escolar. Entretanto, sendo a escola itinerante do Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) um espaço educacional pautado nos pressupostos freireanos, existiriam os mesmos tabus, interditos sociais e preconceitos agindo sobre a efetivação da educação em sexualidade neste cenário? Com intuito de elucidarmos essa questão, elaboramos este estudo. Com método qualitativo descritivo, o estudo foi desenvolvido com dezoito educandos(as) de uma escola itinerante do MST no estado do Paraná, objetivando apresentar suas percepções sobre a educação em sexualidade na escola. Com base no material produzido durante a realização de grupos focais e anotações em diário de campo, sistematizados por análise categorial, é possível concluir que a educação em sexualidade na escola itinerante é promovida de forma medicalizada e biologizada, com ênfase no binômio saúde-doença, e que não há transversalidade sobre o ensino da temática entre as diversas disciplinas. Assim, mesmo utilizando aporte teórico metodológico freireano, a escola, ao tratar da educação em sexualidade, neste estudo, revelou-se paradoxal.

Palavras-chave

Educação em sexualidade – Escola itinerante – MST.

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Contextualizing sexuality education

The historiography of sex education in Brazil shows that, since the early twentieth century, physicians, psychologists, educators, and even priests devoted themselves to the study and dissemination, in academic and lay circles, of works on sexuality, sexology, and sex education (CARRARA, 1997; RIBEIRO, 2004).

However, the foundations for a pluralistic school which respects diversity were not established until 1996, when Federal Law n. 9.394/96 enacted *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional (LDB)* [Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education] (BRASIL, 2014). And, in 1997, with the advent of *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais (PCN)* [National Curriculum Parameters], the proposed inclusion of sexuality education was made effective, which, in the *PCN*, was named sexual orientation, and was to be included as a cross-cutting theme in school programs, that is, as a subject taught within the various fields of knowledge, permeating each of them (BRASIL, 2001).

According to the *PCN*, work on sexual orientation aims to provide young people with the possibility of exercising their sexuality in a responsible and pleasurable way. Therefore, its development must offer criteria for discerning behaviors related to sexuality which require privacy and intimacy, as well as the recognition of sexuality manifestations that can be expressed in school. To guide the intervention of teachers, three fundamental frameworks are proposed: human body, gender relations, and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases (STD) and HIV/AIDS (BRASIL, 2001).

It is noteworthy that the *PCN* did not imagine that, by proposing the term sexual orientation, in the future, they would produce an etymological confusion. This confusion was due to the 2000 European Conference with the title All Different, all Equal: From Principles to Practice, in which the multiple discrimination suffered by some people due to "race, color, ethnic or linguistic background, sex, and sexual orientation" (COMISSÃO EUROPÉIA, 2000, p. 137) was cited.

In 2001, Brazil proposed discussing the issue at the preparatory meeting for the Third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance and, in 2004, launched *Brasil sem Homofobia* [Brazil without Homophobia], a program to combat violence and discrimination against LGBT[1], and to promote homosexual citizenship, which determined the use of the term sexual orientation to define the "Affective and sexual attraction a person feels for another" (BRASIL, 2004, p. 29). Therefore, the inadequacy of the term sexual orientation proposed by the *PCN* became evident.

Moreover, by proposing the inclusion of the discussion on sexual orientation by means of cross-cutting themes, the *PCN* suggest "educational guidelines based on an intentionally and politically constructed conception of education regarding sexuality based only on the prevention of adolescent pregnancy and DST/HIV/AIDS" (SANTOS; ARAUJO, 2009, p. 18).

According to Santos and Araujo (2009), it is impossible not to recognize the documentary and historical importance of the *PCN*, or the discussion of the essential elements which direct the approach to sexual orientation, as these are urgent in schools. However, as indicated by the authors, one cannot remain restricted to the factors which are often consequences of two much broader factors: gender relations and affective and sexual desire.

Therefore, for this work, we have assumed not the term sexual orientation, but sexuality education, because it is an educational intervention process, which must be continuously present in the school environment, aiming to convey information and discuss matters related to sexuality, sexual and reproductive health,

1- Translator's note: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual citizens.

sexual rights, gender relations, sexual diversity, affective and sexual desire, among other themes that may be necessary.

Such intervention should be devoid of attitudes, beliefs, taboos, and values associated with sexuality education, and it should occur on a collective level, differentiating itself from individual psychotherapeutic work, and focusing on the cultural, sociological, psychological, and physiological dimensions of sexuality (UNESCO, 2010).

However, the literature related to the theme (PARANÁ, 2009; FIGUEIRÓ, 2009) indicates that the inclusion of new sexuality education practices has been very difficult, for the transversality proposed by the *PCN* has not been fully consolidated yet. Thus, the school fails to provide a forum for continuing debates on sexuality, gender relations, sexual diversity, sexual and reproductive health, mainly due to the lack of teaching resources and educators previously trained to develop such activities.

It is noteworthy that Brazilian universities have not addressed this content in their undergraduate courses, for, among the various degree courses, there is no training for sexuality education, and there are only optional courses on the subject, and only in a few universities (FIGUEIRÓ, 2009).

However, students feel more the need to talk, share experiences and ask questions about emerging issues of sexuality due to the greater democratization of bodies, to the influence of the media, and to great access to new information technologies, as well as to the intense manifestations of sexuality, typical of adolescence and youth. Nevertheless, this opportunity is not always democratically offered in schools.

In this study, it was evident that the MST itinerant school faces the same difficulties the other schools nationwide face to include sexuality education in the curriculum, and understands its implementation based only on a biologized conception.

The school community – students, parents, educators, managers, and employees – generally have distinct views on the implementation of public education policy. Since their perceptions relate to the viewpoint from which they socially operate or interact, there are frequent conflicts and diverse forms of adherence to new ideas and actions regarding sexuality education.

The study setting: an MST itinerant school

The itinerant school is an achievement of the Movement's[2] struggle, which, since its inception, has fought for schools in camps and settlements, from the perspective of the awareness of the right to education guaranteed by the Federal Constitution. Thus, seeking to guarantee this right, the Landless[3], since the beginning of the Movement, have fought for the right to public school that is free, high-quality and for all, a school focused on the interests and needs of the individuals it serves (MST, 2006, p. 28).

These assumptions are the result of reflection developed over the years in the camps of land reform, seeking to include an educational doing that is different from traditional practices. So much so that they incorporate the reality experienced by students, the elements related to the countryside reality, and the trajectory developed in the struggle for land into the educational process.

Although the school practices within the camps organized by the MST existed intertwined with their struggle, not until 1996 was the first MST itinerant school actually approved, in Rio Grande do Sul state. The school's proposal meets the schooling needs of children, which were associated with the changes that could occur in the camp, because it is a moving space (MST, 2009).

2- We have adopted this spelling throughout the text in view of the perspective indicated by Caldart (2004). Therefore, whenever we use the term Movement (with a capital letter), we mean the MST.

3- *Sem Terra* (Landless), with capital letters, is the name that identifies the landless of the MST. The term landless indicates the social category of workers in the countryside who do not have land and who now require it as a right (CALDART, 2004).

Thus, a new type of school was born. Besides its educational functions, it has the task of accompanying families in case they move to other camps, work fronts, and along demonstration marches. Therefore, the itinerant school is organized to teach how to read and write and educate Landless children, youth, and adults in an itinerant situation in the camps (CALDART, 2000).

In Paraná state, itinerant schools were not established until 2003, as a development of the struggles for rural education. This was due to the existence, at the time, of 13 thousand families distributed in 67 camps, in which there was a large number of children facing difficulties to attend school (MST, 2009).

Because of the need for educating children and in response to the MST struggle, by means of Law no.1344/03 and Opinion No. 1012/03 of December 8, 2003, the State Board of Education, in 2003, authorized the establishment of itinerant schools in the camps in Paraná state and provided:

> [...] The Itinerant School as an alternative proposal that seeks to meet and guarantee the right to schooling of children, adolescents, youth, and adults living in adverse situations and who, therefore, cannot study in the way schools are organized. This is the context of the landless workers who are in camp situation, who can move at any time, until they are settled [...] (PARANÁ, 2003, p. 8-9).

Thus, the itinerant school operates by means of a primary and secondary base school, responsible for school documents and records of students, and for legal and pedagogical support. It is guided by Paraná State Education Department, under the Coordination of Rural School Education and Teaching Department, by means of Education Regional Centers.

Approved by the respective State Education Councils, under the jurisdiction of which they are, based on Federal Law No. 9.394/96 (BRASIL, 2014), itinerant schools seek to develop education taking into account the particularities of life in the countryside, as well as to discuss the matters that pervade everyday life and the struggle for land reform.

Therefore, the MST itinerant schools are public schools organized by the MST inside its camps, and the State Education Departments are tasked with providing infrastructure and learning materials for the development of the classes. The overall goal of this school is to provide children and adolescents from the communities camped with access to education, making use of a differentiated pedagogy which corresponds to early childhood, primary and secondary education (CALDART, 2000).

Educational activities are developed based on the interests, needs, and levels of knowledge of children, and aim to provide learners with space for them to constitute themselves as subjects able to understand and interpret the historical process experienced, seeking to transform reality.

The itinerant school is an investigative, participatory, and reflective space which, through action research, promotes the reunification of theory and practice, overcoming the dichotomy between teaching and research, rooted in the positivist tradition (MST, 2009). Thus every effort is made in order to build knowledge from the reality experienced by campers. Therefore, if the march is part of the lives of the men, women and children camped, it should be used as content; more than that, the march should enable different content to be grasped by concrete experience, mediated by systematized knowledge.

From this perspective, the principle of pedagogy underlying the educational practices in that space is based on Freire's approach, added to the contributions of Florestan Fernandes, and the socialist foundations of José Martí and Che Guevara, among others, which, parallel to the struggle for land, or along with the struggle for land, allow standing up for the right to education (MST, 2001; MST, 2009).

The main contribution of Paulo Freire (2008) comes from *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,

which brings the concepts of a humanist and liberating education, and reflects on two different times. In the first, the oppressed gradually unveil the world of oppression and commit, in the praxis, to their own transformation; in the second, once the oppressive reality has been transformed, this pedagogy is no longer that of the oppressed and becomes a pedagogy of men in process of permanent liberation (FREIRE, 2008).

Thus, the itinerant school, founded in educator Paulo Freire's teachings, is concerned with the humanization of the Landless workers, with providing them with conditions to understand and unveil the world in which they live, and with the importance of land reform for the development and inclusion of the workers excluded from the labor market, in both rural and urban areas.

For Freire (2008), more than transferring knowledge, education should provide a way to intervene in the world, from which reality can indeed be grasped and seen with criticality and ethics. The MST, in turn, understands that the intervention in the reality in which they live requires political disalienation based on the struggle for individual and collective rights (MST, 2001).

Therefore, the pedagogical proposal of the school and the formative ideological conception of the MST contributed to the preparation of the guiding questions of this study. Our first question was: "Since the itinerant school is guided by the pedagogical proposal of the absence of oppressors, how do educators behave in the face of the questions asked by students about sexuality?" And also "Are the themes brought by students about sexuality considered 'generative themes' for discussions in the classroom?".

Thus, we seek to identify whether there are paradoxes regarding the Movement's ideology and its educational proposal, in the face of the knowledge and learning about sexuality in their school setting. The perceptions of students on the theme enable us to understand this process, which will contribute to present proposals to the MST Education Sector for the resolution and problematization of the emerging issues.

Methodological approach

This qualitative research with a descriptive approach was developed in an itinerant school of the MST, located in the rural area of a municipality in the north of Paraná state, which, during the period of research, had students of two camps.

The school where the study was conducted is located 16 kilometers from the urban area. It was built using the efforts and volunteer work of campers themselves. Since it was legalized in 2009, the school has been supported by the solidarity of the families of the Landless of the camps, who collaborate in the production of school meals, in joint efforts for the construction and renovation of classrooms, and in the participation in debates to ensure that the school keeps the pedagogy of the Movement enlivened. Such pedagogy is grounded in volunteer work. Additionally, it receives support from the Education Regional Centers and the Municipal Education Department.

During the period of the study, the school offered early childhood, primary, and secondary education. In its professional staff, the school had a pedagogical coordinator, eight educators, and two meal cooks, members of the Movement, as well as a pedagogue and eight teachers linked to Paraná State Education Department.

Educators are campers chosen by the community, have a minimum level of schooling (preferably secondary education) and are available to teach. They are usually young people who have completed primary education and who, being educators, undergo a process of teacher, technical, and professional education in the MST schools, or in courses of Paraná State Education Department (PARANÁ, 2009).

External teachers, who, in the itinerant school, are also called educators, work in the second phase of primary education and in secondary education, are appointed by Education

Regional Centers, and can be permanent public servants, or employees hired through Simplified Selection Processes using ranking criteria.

According to the documentary survey conducted in the school, in February 2012, there were 45 students aged 12 to 18 years, which is consistent with the age cohort previously established (BRASIL, 1990).

The definition of the participants followed the criteria below: to be regularly enrolled and attending school; to reside in one of the two camps; and to have the permission of parents or guardians to take part in the study. Failure to gain permission from parents or guardians resulted in the exclusion of 27 adolescents. Therefore, eighteen adolescents took part in the research.

The research was conducted from February to July 2012. Data were collected by means of focus groups with a semi-structured script and field diary notes. The guiding question was: How do you perceive sexuality education at school?

It is noteworthy that, to define the guiding question, we applied a pre-test to a heterogeneous group. The perceptions of this moment showed that students in mixed groups gave monosyllabic answers, which did not allow expanding the debate, and that, in groups, female students felt embarrassed to talk about sexuality education. We emphasize that religion was not a limiting factor for the composition of groups or the involvement of students during the debates on the subject.

Therefore, for data collection, two homogeneous groups were formed: one with ten male adolescents and another group with eight female adolescents. We conducted three meetings of at most 50 minutes with each group in order to prevent participants from getting distracted. Focus group meetings were held in a classroom of the itinerant school, outside school hours, and educators were not present.

The meetings were recorded by an MP4 electronic device: 290 minutes of audio were later fully transcribed, in compliance with all the characteristics of the reports. To preserve the anonymity of the adolescents, they adopted pseudonyms inspired by people with historical relevance for the MST.

The data were organized using content analysis techniques, focusing on category themes (BARDIN, 2010). The organization of the material covered: pre-analysis; exploration of material; and treatment of results by inference and interpretation. This led to outlining three categories: the biologization of sexuality; the non-transversality of sexuality education in the itinerant school; and the oppression of students' desire to know about sexuality.

The research has met the national and international recommendations of ethics in research involving human subjects, and was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Universidade Federal de São Paulo through Opinion 1997/11.

Findings and discussion

Study participants

The eighteen adolescents in this study were aged between 12 and 18 years. Ten of them were male and eight were female. Most of the participants, eleven out of eighteen, were aged 14 years or less.

As for color, twelve adolescents declared that they were white, three said they were brown, and one girl said she was black. As for religion, eight of the adolescents stated they were Catholic, seven said they were protestant, one declared she was a spiritualist, and one of the adolescents said he had no religion.

Regarding marital status, all adolescents said they were single, and none was dating at the time of data collection. Rose, a 13-year-old, was pregnant. As for affective relationships, only two girls – 18-year-old Sônia and 14-year-old Salete – and a boy, 16-year-old José Roberto, said they had dated.

Nevertheless, except for 12-year-old Iraci and Paulo, all the other adolescents stated that they had already "made out with someone". As for schooling levels, fifteen adolescents

attended the late grades of primary education, and three attended secondary education.

Regarding family arrangements, eleven adolescents have families with a "father and mother" family nucleus; the others inhabit different nuclear family forms, with the presence of stepfathers, stepmothers, and grandparents.

Categories of the perceptions of students about sexuality education in the MST itinerant school

The biologization of sexuality

In the daily life of schools, sexuality as knowledge is still something detached from reality. Despite being a cross-cutting theme of the curricula of early childhood, primary and secondary education, it is centered on biology and science subjects. From the reports of adolescents from the itinerant school, it is clear that sexuality is treated as a theme of biology only and focuses mainly on matters of the health-disease binomial.

By listing knowledge related to the theme of sexuality in school, its structure is built on knowledge historically addressed in the medical field. Thus, topics such as pregnancy, STD prevention, and the functioning of genitals are usually covered without taking into account the social, political, and affective dimensions of the subjects (SANTOS, 2009).

That sexuality education in that environment is limited to functional knowledge, to nomenclatures, and to the relation between health and disease, reinforces the biologized view of its field of knowledge and power. This perception is present in the accounts of adolescents in the itinerant school, which confirms the representations of the biologization of sexuality education:

> There are diseases, so when you get to the part of the book on this, the teacher begins to explain them to us. (José Roberto, 16 years old).

> All the schools where I studied in the city offered some lecture at least once a year. I've studied here since the first year [of secondary education] and up to now there's been nothing... Only what's in the books. (Sônia, 18 years old).

> They teach, but don't teach much... Only when I ask the science teacher what penis is, stuff like that, then she teaches. (Dorothy, 13 years old).

> The only time I've heard about sex and sexuality stuff was when I lived in Arapongas. But here I've never heard... Only the things in the book... Nothing else! (Arnildo, 13 years old).

> She [science teacher] talks about menstruation... How you get pregnant... Those things. (Solange, 14 years old).

> We rarely talk about things that are not in the book... Hardly ever... Only if you ask, and even so... (Marcos Tiaraju, 17 years old).

Through the speeches of the adolescents, one observes that the educational arsenal is immobilized in biological content. The perception of students is reaffirmed by a science teacher who speaks about how she works on the contents related to sexuality: "I do address sexuality... Actually, this week I'm going to start the content on male and female reproductive systems" (field diary note – science educator).

The narratives of the students and the teacher's account corroborate the idea that sexuality education, within the itinerant school, has also been carried out with a biological and medicalized approach, and summarized to the contents found in school teaching materials such as textbooks and brochures. Therefore, this content is not a "generative theme" to be systematized in the classroom, which demonstrates that teaching contents are

the result not of a dialogic practice, but of a discourse structured in syllabuses.

It is noteworthy that this medicalized and limited view of sexuality education is not restricted to the MST itinerant schools. We believe that such difficulty goes beyond using cross-cutting themes and is the result of a teacher education that does not include content related to body, gender, sexual diversity and sexuality in a broader and biopsychosocial view.

Through the speeches of the students, we found that, even when there is the possibility of talking about sexuality in science or biology classes, it does mean that there is a broader discussion that goes beyond biological aspects. Nevertheless, according to Freire (1996), the transmission of content structured outside the student's social context is considered a "cultural invasion" or a "deposit of information" because it does not emerge from popular knowledge.

This fact may be grounded in the absence of the theme during initial and continuing teacher education, and in the practice of sexuality education as determined by teaching materials. Thus, educators' poor performance, in addition to teaching material below the needs, provokes discontent on the part of students, as it does not allow a wider debate.

We understand that this discussion cannot be superficial, as it has been throughout history, addressed only by "Project Methodologies", which imply a beginning, a middle, and an end, focused only on issues of prevention of STD/AIDS and pregnancy, without consistent theoretical depth (SANTOS, 2009).

Foucault (2009) pointed to the school's historical trend of seeking knowledge in medical knowledge grounded in scientific discourse. Gonçalves, Pinto, and Borges (2013), in addition to observing the medicalized view in science and biology textbooks, stress that there is a discourse of words and images which centralize heterosexuality as the only form of sexuality, and understand it as a synonym of reproduction.

This way of conceiving sexuality education results in numerous vulnerabilities. Sexuality unfolds in the social environment through the interaction of the subject with the group, with the affective content of these relationships, with different agents, and media of information. If these matters are not present in the dialogues about sexuality, individuals feel that there is hardly any relation with their lives, which hinders the appropriation of knowledge and skills on the theme.

Non-transversality of sexuality education in the itinerant school

The greatest teaching about the transversality of education comes from Freire (1996), when he says that educators, contrary to the traditional view that assigns to them the privileged role of holders of knowledge, are called hosts of debates and have the role of coordinating such debates, problematizing the discussions so that opinions, reports, and conflicts may arise. However, in this study, we found that this is not the role played by educators when sexuality is the theme of the debate.

Thus, regarding sexuality education guided by transversality, the *PCN* (BRASIL, 2001) propose that, in primary education, it must be provided within the various fields of knowledge, in Portuguese, History, Geography, Mathematics classes etc. – presented as proposed in the syllabus – and as something extra. Also according to the *PCN*, each school, in its organization, can create specific spaces and times for students to have, weekly or fortnightly, for example, specific classes of sexuality education (BRASIL, 2001).

However, we emphasize that sexuality education should not be addressed only in occasional actions and on previously scheduled days. Educators should be ready to welcome students' questions whenever they arise. This enables the exchange of knowledge and learning with orientation that promotes the awareness and problematization of their personal views, taboos, myths, and prejudices rooted in society.

Nevertheless, contrary to this conception and what is presented by the *PCN*, in the

accounts of the students, we found the non-transversality of sexuality education in the itinerant school:

> In our classroom, we can ask about these things [sexuality] only in science class. (João, 14 years old).

> In science class, you can ask... But if you talk about it in the others, depending on who it is, you're in huge trouble [laughter]. (Natálino, 16 years old).

> One day Valmir asked a question to the teacher, and he said: This question is not to be asked here. You have to ask the science teacher. After she'll answer. (Dorothy, 13 years old).

In the discourse presented by the students, it can be seen that it is impossible to ask educators questions about sexuality in other curriculum disciplines and that students may be subject to restrictions to solve doubts about the body, sexuality, and emerging questions on the theme. We noticed the matter is restricted to a specific discipline and its syllabus, which reduces the theme to the content of biology or science only.

Failure to discuss sexuality outside science and biology disciplines is understood by Santos (2009) as an option of many educators, and is supported by the "providential" absence of the theme in school curricula and by the educators' admitted difficulty of addressing the matter (GATTI, 2009; FIGUEIRÓ, 2009).

According to Figueiró (2009), we are the fruit of a society that represses sexuality, in which associations of sex with, on the on hand, ideas of sin, ugly and banned, or, on the other hand, the ideas of promiscuity and immorality, still linger. Also according to the author, due to our cultural backgrounds, "we end up carrying with us a range of taboos, prejudices and feelings, which are frequently negative, in relation to sex, which accentuates our difficulty to speak openly about it" (FIGUEIRÓ, 2009, p. 142).

The difficulty of educators to talk about emerging themes of sexuality was also observed in the accounts of the students. To illustrate how they verbalize this perception, we present Marina's report:

> We can ask the teacher of the third grade [of secondary education] about something, but he only answers the basics and that's all. Then he says that he gets too ashamed to talk about these things with us, and that it's best to talk to the biology teacher. (Marina, 16 years old).

In addition to feeling shy, when approached with questions about sexuality, educators feel ashamed to deal with certain topics, as elucidated in the speech of 12-year-old Iraci: "the teacher does not explain certain things... she gets very ashamed [laughter]".

In contrast, student's demand, will and need to "talk about it" shows that the themes pertaining to sexuality education pervade the personal and discipline relations of educational content, because they are constituents of the subjects and their identities (FURLANI, 2009). In this sense, Louro (1997) states that:

> The presence of sexuality does not depend on manifest intentions or explicit discourses, the existence or absence of a discipline [...], on the inclusion of these matters in the school bylaws. Sexuality is at school because it is part of the subjects; it is not something that can be turned off, or something that someone can "undress". (LOURO, 1997, p. 81).

Thus, contrary to the spontaneity of the theme among students, Castro, Abramovay, and Silva (2004) found that primary and secondary teachers very frequently admit their difficulty of working on sexuality and affectivity in the classroom.

Corroborating this discussion, Suplicy and collaborators (2004) point out that, although educators should be prepared to engage in polemics, and deal with values, taboos, and prejudices, most of them still lack adequate support to work on these matters and just give them a totally biological focus. This is due to lack of knowledge on the theme and self-preservation in the face of the class of students regarding educators' own questions, fears, and anxieties.

The oppression of students' desire to know about sexuality

For Freire (2008), oppression – concrete historical reality of which part of humanity is a victim – is the denial of man's vocation for "being more" and "being for himself," is the denial of human freedom, which also denies humanity's creative character, promoting alienation. Also according to the author, it is a dehumanizing reality which affects those who oppress and the oppressed. In this study, oppression is present in authoritarian relations between educators and students regarding the denial, which is understood as oppression of the desire to know concepts about sexuality.

Thus, in this study, despite using Freire's theoretical and methodological contribution, the itinerant school proved paradoxical when dealing with sexuality education. On the one hand, the itinerant school recognizes access to knowledge as an essential for its political dimension of struggle and education for students; and, on the other, it believes that the knowledge of the world, which it emphasizes so much, can be considered without discussing sexuality matters.

In this sense, Freire (1996, p. 30)[4] argues that it is the school's and teachers' responsibility "not only to respect the kinds of knowledge that exist, especially among the popular classes – knowledge socially constructed in communitarian praxis – but also [...] to discuss with students the logic of these kinds of knowledge in relation to their contents".

The curiosities of the students are educational opportunities to problematize socially constructed knowledge, and should be assumed as generative themes. Each person, each group involved in the pedagogical action has in itself, albeit in a rudimentary form, the necessary content. What is important is not to transmit specific contents, but to awaken a new form of relation with the experience lived (FREIRE, 1996).

It is noteworthy that curiosity about the knowledge on sexuality was equally expressed by all the students, regardless of age, sex and religion. The denial of that curiosity is the same as counteracting three important fundamentals of the pedagogy presented by Paulo Freire (1996) throughout his writings: (i) teaching is not a synonym of transferring knowledge; (ii) respect for the knowledge of students; (iii) educators can never be the oppressors of students.

However, contradictorily to the assumptions of the pedagogical matrix of the itinerant school, the oppression of the desire to know about sexuality emerges prominently in the narratives of students:

> I asked the [Portuguese language] teacher what *tesão* was: He drew a big letter "T" on the board and that was it![5] [laughter]. If you keep asking him, he may even call your mother and tell her. (Marcos Tiaraju, 17 years old).

> My friend asked the geography teacher what penis was, and then the teacher went talk to the pedagogical coordination of the itinerant school, and then he [the coordinator] went to the classroom and told her off, and said these questions should be asked to the science teacher. (Solange, 13 years old).

4- Translator's note: Excerpt in English extracted from FREIRE, Paulo. *Pedagogy of freedom: ethics, democracy, and civic courage.* Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2001, p. 36.

5- Translator's note: *Tesão* is vulgar slang for sexual desire. But its sound may also be interpreted as a big letter T.

> You can't keep asking, they call the pedagogical coordination of the itinerant school, go there and talk to your mother... They tell your mother everything and we risk being beaten up at home. (Salete, 14 years old).

The statements show that some educators and the pedagogical coordination of the itinerant school where this study was conducted break the bond of trust that should be maintained so that the dialogue about sexuality occurs at school. In this direction, the *PCN* argue that:

> For doing good work on Sexual Orientation, it is necessary to establish a relationship of trust between students and teachers. For this, teachers must make themselves available to talk about the questions presented, not deliver value judgments on the points made by the students, and answer questions in a direct and enlightening way. (BRASIL, 2001, p. 84).

One of the possible reasons for the determination not to talk about sexuality and the restriction of this discussion only to the syllabus of biology and science in the itinerant school can be rooted in what was reported by José Roberto:

> The school says that there are many children who do not know what these things are, and if you talk about them, then they will want to do them! So the *pedagogical coordination* of the *itinerant school* banned questions... You can't talk about it. (José Roberto, 16 years old – emphasis added).

The external control over "talking about sexuality" can be understood from Foucault's (2009) approach of sexuality as a technique produced by historical, cultural, and even subjective events that make up our language and our practices and representations.

Thus, knowledge about sexuality circulates in many areas and cultural instances, not by imitation and repetition of its biological character, but by permanent tensions which bring about new interpretations; we can say that the old and historical meanings constituted by the cultural environment are projected, as we see in this study.

Grounded in César (2009), who discusses the establishment of techniques for disciplining the bodies of children and youth in the school, and in Louro (1997), we can say that the school, along with other social institutions, is one of the many institutions that exercise a pedagogy of sexuality and gender constructions. This study has corroborated the assumptions of the authors, since it pointed out how much the researched itinerant school occupies a privileged place in the disciplining of bodies, highlighting how the education "of sex" finds its place in school.

The study also gives indications that the reproduction of "patriarchal" thoughts is projected into the school environment. In the itinerant school, there is an understanding that addressing sexuality matters in the school environment is a form of encouraging early sexuality of children and adolescents. However, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasizes that

> [...] research from around the world clearly indicates that sexuality education rarely, if ever, leads to early sexual initiation. Sexuality education can lead to later and more responsible sexual behavior or may have no discernible impact on sexual behavior. (UNESCO, 2010, p. 9)[6].

We understand that, by solving students' doubts, we empower our adolescents to take better decisions, which may delay the start of sexual practices.

6- UNESCO. *Internacional technical guidance on sexuality education: the rationale for sexuality education.* UNESCO, 2009.

The accounts of the students evidenced that, in some cases, the desire to know about sexuality is reproached and acquires the status of prohibited. The position assumed by the pedagogical coordination, in the cases mentioned in the students' discourse, exceeds the normative and legal protections for sexuality education to occur at school. Therefore, such position does not comply with legal aspects such as those provided by the *LDB* (BRAZIL, 2014) and in particular by the *PCN* (BRASIL, 2001), which are not taken into consideration.

Hence, besides being in non-compliance with the regulations for the implementation of sexuality education, during this study, the itinerant school broke with the Curriculum Guidelines for Gender and Sexual Diversity of Paraná State Education Department (preliminary version), which propose "a set of fundamental reflections which problematize consolidated truths about gender, sexuality, and sexual diversity" (PARANÁ, 2010).

The document presents curriculum guidelines based on reflections on pedagogical practices. Such reflections were built as criticism and resistance to school normative knowledge. The document questions the "knowledge" established, through which the unequal relations of gender and sexes circulate, and aims to destabilize the truths which have built prejudices, phobias, and violence against subjects (PARANÁ, 2010).

In the itinerant school where this study was conducted, the matter was treated only as possibility, imposed by the teaching and curriculum materials, but the broadening of the debate in this environment was almost nil, even in the face of all the aforementioned legal apparatus, which directs the implementation of sexuality education activities in the school environment.

In Foucault's perspective (2009), the knowledge that we consider to be truth stems from power relations, confirming the non-existence of neutral knowledge. Therefore, knowledge about sexuality and its formulation are filtered by the power which promotes domination and oppression (FOUCAULT, 2009). It is on these nuances that educators, as oppressors, subtly impose their culture on the oppressed, their students.

Power and the relations that it reverberates are the knowledge which legitimizes and determines our sexuality and the oppression of the desire to know about it. These demonstrations of power over knowledge on sexuality are mentioned in the account of Francisco, a 14-year-old student, who expresses his opinion:

> I think that the school should warn the school teens and not coerce us not to ask about sex. (Francisco, 14 years old).

In the adolescent's account, one observes that, in the face of the sexuality theme, they experience an impossibility of the "politicity of knowledge" (FREIRE, 1996).

According to UNESCO (2010), sexuality education refers to an approach that should be appropriate for age and culturally relevant to the teaching of body, gender, sexuality, and relationships, providing information that is scientifically accurate, realistic, and devoid of pre-judgments. Sexuality education provides opportunities not only to explore one's own values and attitudes, but also to develop skills for decision-making, communication and risk reduction with regard to many aspects of sexuality, some of which promote vulnerabilization.

Final thoughts

We believe that, even though the school is one of the most favorable environments for the implementation of an educational practice in sexuality, in the researched school, the topic is still controversial, considered by the school community a non-school, non-political, and non-ideological theme. Thus taboos, beliefs and myths are perpetuated in the itinerant school and prevent it from performing the pedagogy of liberation and autonomy when it comes to sexuality.

We observe that the emerging discourses of sexuality education within the school reproduce a thought full of paradoxes and guided by components that are conservative and belong to the ruling order. On the one hand, the school cherishes a critical pedagogy, with progressive and political awareness. On the other, such school considers sexuality not as something political and ideological, based on power relations, but as a mechanism for the control of bodies.

The biologized and medicalized way of addressing sexuality education predominated during this study. Moreover, even in a Freirean conception, dialogicity on sexuality was practically nil.

The social representations of sexuality education of adolescents in this study proved to be "forbidden knowledge" and related to the disciplinary field of biology, in the relation of the health-disease binomial. This view presents a false idea of neutrality, which, rather than politicizing those adolescents, alienates them.

However, the difficulties observed regarding the approach to the topic and the theme of sexuality as a field of knowledge are not restricted to the MST itinerant school. They are also present in urban schools in Brazil and in many other countries.

This study has also made explicit that there is a great need to incorporate sexuality education as a curricular component, thus giving to the theme the same value assigned to the other knowledge which deals with freedom, autonomy and democracy. The definition of specific methods, continuing teacher education, the production of materials, and educational support to studies on the sexuality theme are needed to strengthen the ideological lines of the MST.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study are not generalizable to other MST groups and schools, which is the most limiting factor of this research. We understand that social representations are built in macro and micro contexts. This study refers to a very specific group, with individual and collective experiences, which can be very different from those of other groups of students and educators of other itinerant schools.

Fulfilling social responsibility, the researchers have presented the findings of this study to Paraná MST Education Sector, which, responsive to the data, has been carrying out, in partnership with Universidade Estadual do Norte do Paraná, an extension project called Sexualidade em Movimento [Sexuality on the Move], besides other activities on the theme. This inter-institutional project aims to develop sexuality education activities with students and educators of the nine itinerant schools in the state. When this article was written, three schools had been provided with project actions.

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