

Masculinities, femininities and playful dimension: reflections on gender and teaching in Early Childhood Education¹

Masculinidades, feminilidades e dimensão brincalhona: reflexões sobre gênero e docência na Educação infantil²

Masculinidades, feminidades y dimensión lúdica: reflexiones sobre género y docencia en la Educación Infantil

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Abstract:

The article presents a link between gender and teaching in Early Childhood Education, through reflections on the masculinities and femininities present in these institutions, which are the result of a meticulous process that, throughout life, leaves marks on the bodies of girls and boys, female teachers and male teachers. Considering the playful dimension as the main requirement of this teaching profession, marked by female social patterns of behavior, a case study was made, in a university nursery/preschool, through the observation of the educational journey of a group of children and teacher; collective moments with the other children and professionals; semi-structured interviews with the teacher and with the only male teacher, revealing bodily availabilities and different ways as the marks of socialization distance and/or approach the playful dimension of both and questioning the passivity and the submission that may characterize the femininities in nurseries and pre-schools.

Keywords: *Early Childhood Education, gender, play dimension, teaching profession*

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Resumo:

O artigo apresenta uma articulação entre gênero e docência na educação infantil, por meio de reflexões acerca das masculinidades e feminilidades presentes nestas instituições, resultado de um minucioso processo que, ao longo da vida, deixa marcas nos corpos de meninas e meninos, professoras e professores. Ao considerar a dimensão brincalhona como principal requisito desta profissão docente, marcada por padrões de comportamento sociais femininos, foi realizado um estudo de caso, em uma creche/pré-escola universitária, com observação da jornada educativa de um grupo de crianças e professora; momentos coletivos com outras crianças e profissionais; entrevistas semiestruturadas com a professora e com o único professor, revelando disponibilidades corporais e formas distintas como as marcas da socialização distanciam e/ou aproximam a dimensão brincalhona de ambos e questionando a passividade e a submissão que possam caracterizar as feminilidades nas creches e pré-escolas.

Palavras-chave: educação infantil, gênero, dimensão brincalhona, profissão docente

Resumen:

El artículo presenta una articulación entre género y docencia en la Educación Infantil a través de reflexiones sobre las masculinidades y las feminidades presentes en estas instituciones, que son el resultado de un proceso exhaustivo que, durante toda la vida, deja marcas en los cuerpos de los niños y niñas, profesoras y profesores. Teniendo en cuenta la dimensión lúdica como el requisito principal de esta profesión docente, marcada por patrones de comportamientos sociales femeninos, se realizó un estudio de caso, en una guardería/preescolar universitaria, con observación de la jornada educativa de un grupo de niños y profesora; momentos colectivos con otros niños y profesionales; entrevistas semiestructuradas con la profesora y con el único profesor, revelando disponibilidades corporales y formas distintas como las marcas de la socialización distancian y/o acercan la dimensión lúdica de ambos y cuestionando la pasividad y la sumisión que puedan caracterizar las feminidades en las guarderías y preescolares.

Palabras clave: educación infantil, género, dimensión lúdica, profesión docente

Introduction: playful dimension and the teaching profession in Early Childhood Education

The playful dimension, which contemplates bodies, movements, gestures, theatrical and dance languages, among many other forms of expression and communication, seem to be increasingly distant from the adult world and, consequently, from teachers' actions in educational institutions, making necessary a discussion on the ways and possibilities for its (re)construction together with the children, as this is one of the key requirements for the profession (also in construction) of Early Childhood teacher.

One of the ways to (re)construct it is considering young boys and girls from Early Childhood Education (the first phase of Brazilian school system) as social actors and subjects of rights which not only reproduce but also construct culture and history, as well as establish their positions in society. As permanent and dynamic structural elements of the social structure, children, since their birth, experience and live their childhood in different and diverse ways. Thus, the observation of children, their productions, and knowledges, with free eyes (Gobbi, 2007), accepting their proposals of games, inventions, and tips (Vieira & Gozzi, 2010), becomes a reference for teachers to incentivize and provoke new creations for themselves and for children, besides reconstructing their own playful dimensions and the bases of this teaching career.

It underlies the educator's role and it is a fundamental condition of the work, the observation of children, their knowledge, and the contact with their culture. Not an abstract child, but a variety of concrete children that present themselves in the everyday life of school (Marcellino, 1990, p. 111).

We can then search ways in the own creations of boys and girls, not only observing but been entirely with them. The discussions raised in this article continue the researches we have been making which point to the need of future reflections and to deepen the debate on gender, playful dimension, and teacher career in Early Childhood Education, based on experiences that happen to us and touch us, beyond the fragmented "packages" that are pushed to children, thought through an adult logic, but that they, fortunately, insist on transgressing. Reconnecting bodies and minds of girls, boys, and teachers as complete beings has been shown to be a potent way to meet and construct a playful pedagogy, unique as is childhood (Larrosa Bondía, 2002),

non-sexist (Calaresi, 2011), not heteronormative (Finco, 2010), or adult-centric, having as a reference the children themselves (Anselmo, 2013).

It is not about just seeing and listening, but feeling and being, in the relations with our own bodies and with the children, teaching ourselves in their multiple languages. It is a disposition to observe, listen, teach, and (re) learn to play, with children or as children (Prado, 1999).

Thus, we bring to this discussion the analysis on data collected in a master research, a qualitative case study that aimed to portray a reality in action, in a complex and contextualized way (Lüdke & André, 1986), that took place in a nursery and preschool located in a Brazilian university, which wanted to investigate the possibilities of recapturing a playful dimension and the communication through the bodies of the professionals that work with small children and through children themselves. The field research was done through the observation of the daily routine of a group of young children and their teacher, besides the collective moments, with other children and professionals, especially highlighting informal conversations with the children and the proposals involving body languages and games, which were later written on the field notes. We also held and recorded semi structured interviews, with some guiding questions, with the researched teacher and the only male teacher of the institution.

Masculinities, femininities and playful dimension: reflections on gender and teaching in Early Childhood Education

It is important to consider that masculinities and femininities are not natural, but naturalized and used as a starting point to search certain characteristics and expectations (Gobbi, 2015), and that the professional career, in any area, carries traces of socialization in men and women (Vianna, 2013), as is the case of childhood education, revealing questions of gender and power (Vianna & Finco, 2009).

When we met Marcelo³, whom we interviewed in the research and the only male teacher in the nursery and preschool, we were observing the arrival of some children in the beginning of the day and the staff movement to welcome them, with a quick greeting, carrying them in the arms, or a chat. He arrived in the covered patio where workshops were taking place and sat with a group of boys and girls which, quickly, invited him to choose one of the plastic animals for a playfight they were having. The commitment and involvement of the teacher in that moment called our attention, as well as the gradual approximation of many other children, that climbed over him with the animals while imitating their sounds.

Through our daily observations and informal conversations with the faculty, we discovered that in the year the research started, this teacher was not responsible for any specific group of children, but worked as an “itinerant teacher”, giving support to the different groups and substituting teachers. Even though he was not responsible for any class, we observed that he was an important reference to all children, with connections explicitly established on each talk, look, laugh, or game.

Throughout the days, it was possible to observe more attentively his relation with the children in different moments of the school day, witnessing different situations in which he would respond to the children’s playful “provocation”, involving himself, making fun, laughing, and playing with them, I highlight here some scenes described in the field notes:

Scene 1

I arrive in the patio and hear many laughs coming from a plastic house in the patio. Teacher Marcelo is the wolf, five girls and three boys are the little pigs. One of the pigs escaped from the house, while the wolf excitedly chases him. The other little pigs follow him, laughing and saying: “You can’t do it wolf! We won’t let you! Come back here, now!”. Two boys who were observing the scene join the group, running around the house, either running away from him or trying to catch him. Some that caught him, grabbed him, provoked, made fun, and ran away again, laughing, imitating the characters of the famous story *The Three Little Pigs* and transforming them based on the many participants and characters (field notes, November 17th, 2015).

³ All names are fictitious.

Scene 2:

While observing the workshops, prepared to receive the children, I see there is a space with plastic fruits that can be assembled or “cut” in half. Teacher Marcelo is sat as if working on a street fair, very excited, creating new fruits and names together with a group of boys and girls of different ages. “ Look a beetbery! Beetberry, very cheap, who wants it? And the lemapple? Come on, come on, who wants it?” The ‘clients’ of the fair get closer and quickly take part in the game, creating new combinations and proposing others. “ Hun....I want to eat waterapple” said one. “ I prefer a ‘orangelon’, see it!” said another laughing excitedly (field notes, October 29th, 2015).

Both in the first scene in which the teacher runs, jumps, dodges, grabs a ‘pig’, holds him in a shoulder, with an intense body involvement, as well as in the second in which he is sitting during the whole game, with a more relaxed body, what is at stage is his availability and commitment to involve himself in children’s creations, besides creating and bringing up his ideas with them. It is the teacher’s playful dimension at stage, using his own body and ludic creations as “resources for plays and games, offering children the opportunity to show feelings, acquire concepts, or satisfy their desires to explore and know” (Ghedini, 1994, p. 200). The author adds that “ adults not always feels available to involve themselves in these games, as children do; regarding the perception of our own body, I believe we have much to learn with children” (p. 201).

The teacher was also very available to get involved in many situations with the children through the days, singing, creating word games, climbing trees, collecting sticks with them for a bonfire, proposing games and participating of others when invited. Considering this involvement and the importance of perceiving one’s own body considered by Ghedini (1994) as essential to resume a playful dimension, we started to articulate gender issues and teaching for young children, based on the following assumptions: if the socialization of women and men interfere in the way they related professionally (Vianna, 2013), and the teaching for young children is strongly marked by feminine social patterns of behavior, be it for the presence of women and its function related to the production of life in the career, in what ways the marks of this socialization distance (or not) the playful dimension of preschool teachers in the everyday lives of the institutions?

Considering the teacher career in Early Childhood Education as an occupation of women (Ávila, 2002; Cerisara, 1996; Finco, 2010; Saporoli, 1997; Silva, 2003), it becomes key a reflection that analyzes in what ways female teachers' corporealities, when working with young children, are marked by a female socialization guided by certain standards of behavior, influencing the way they act.

Vianna (2013, p. 174) affirms that considering it as a profession with a feminine social sense is not only related to the fact that the majority is female, but that the feminine refers to “*a priori* perspectives in society and not only to the sex and/or to women”. She also quotes Rosemberg and Saporoli (1996), who affirm that the profession of childhood teacher becomes a feminine work because it exercises a function of this gender, connected to the sphere of reproductive live, caring, and educating small children.

Being a teacher of Early Childhood Education is historically associated in people's imaginary as a person that “likes children”, in a romantic perspective from last century that continues today (Kishimoto, 1999), together with two axes according to which women are socialized: domestic work and mothering (Rosemberg & Amado, 1992). Loving and caring for children are mentioned, by the teachers themselves, as the main characteristics and requirements to teach young children, according to Finco's (2010) doctoral thesis, which affirms that the higher education formation and the proposals of in-service training were not enough to break with this mentality that, for long, has been part of the identity of childhood education teachers. Fúlvia Rosemberg and Tina Amado (1992) affirm that:

educational agencies and academic reflection seem to implicitly assimilate mothering to teaching, in the didactic discourse as well as in the mechanisms of teacher recruitment, in which the professional qualifications seem to limit themselves to, or at least include, components considered inherent to socialization. (Rosemberg & Amado, 1992, p. 72).

Carvalho (2015, p. 98) analyzes the discourse on Early Childhood teacher training which “when naming teaching, construct it, produce it and invent it”. According to him, the ‘genderification’ of teaching children presented in the books and their discourses assign “naturally and indelibly to women the role of an educator who is moved by vocation, affective, versatile, passionate to the profession and apt to answer all the demands of children and families” (p. 101).

Besides the components considered inherent to women's socialization and that, when teachers, especially of young and very young children, are still representative of their professional identity, there is a cultural and historic condition of excessive protection of women's bodies and sexualities. According to Scraton (1992), there is an imposition on women, from an early age, to avoid physical contacts and games that oppose the ideals of femininity, besides other expectations of social behaviors that can follow them during life and, therefore, also in their way to relate professionally. According to her, since childhood, women learn not only to protect their bodies, but also to occupy a very limited personal body space, developing, during their lives, a sort of "corporal shyness" (Scraton, 1992).

Then, how would be the meeting of this corporal shyness with a profession marked by feminine socialization with children who express the world with an intense corporality? How is it possible that these ideals of protection and corporal control, which were part of teachers' life formation, are not reproduced or imposed to girls in the everyday life and practices in the institutions? And the playful dimension, a human dimension guided by gestures, games, and movements, how is it established in this context in the relations between children and adults in Early Childhood Education?

Considering the hypothesis that male teachers could have more corporal availability in their educational practices, as they were not submitted to a socialization that indoctrinated their bodies to be preserved and considered "fragile" for more intense movements and games, we present some elements of our field observations, aiming to analyze if this hypothesis is confirmed and reflect on the potentialities of this under-construction profession. However, it is important to highlight the need to be careful not to do a "linear transposition of the analysis" (Sayão, 2008), as if the presence of men in children's educational context was enough to establish a freedom of gestures and movements in the institutions.

Ramos (2011), Sayão (2008), Fernandes (2014), and Silva (2014) portray practices, reflections, and positions of several male teachers in childhood education, though field research and interviews with them. In the perspective of everyday corporealities, some speeches and actions point to postures permeated by the ludic and an availability to children's demands. Ramos (2011, p. 120) highlights a male teacher who says that "it is no big deal to spin, shake, put the children on the shoulders and that those things are never done by women". The author considered that, supported by the coordinator of the institution researched, "it is not possible

to ignore the differences in the physical interaction between teachers and children” (Ramos, 2011, p. 85), exemplified by the fact that, sometimes, the different ways of acting were used as “bargain chips”, for instances, when a male teacher assumed two classes during a corporal practice and the female teacher did, in his place, the handwork activities.

Fernandes (2014, p. 52) highlights that during her research it “was possible to notice that, in fact, the interviewed men have their mobility favored and are in advantages regarding plays/games”, what can be seen by a speech she highlights in which one of the teachers say that some proposals were easier for him because he was a man, such as “run, play, tag, or do an obstacle track in which you have to crawl, jump, make a back flip... There is a ‘mega’ difference when the child has as a reference the adult doing it with his body what they are been asked to do.” The author also highlights the fact that male teachers consider playful female teachers as exception, naming them tomboys and showing in their discourse how these women extrapolate the expectations on the behavior standards considered feminine.

Sayão (2005, p. 250) presents the report of a female teacher who worked with a male auxiliary teacher, who said that “the masculine in preschool is also good because of the actives in the patio, it helps a lot, mainly in the games which they love and it is difficult to find female teachers that take part of them. They try, they do a bit, but soon they give up and he doesn’t.”. The author presents Williams’s (1995) argument to highlight that one of the reasons for this model of masculinity to be taken to the work with children is related to the fact that, for most men that work in feminine professions, the awareness of themselves is strictly associated to the technical competence, as a “proof” of masculinity.

I believe that the way to prove teachers’ competences [in the describe corporal practices] is in transferring to the work in preschool significant elements of the experience of masculinity outside school. The soccer game and other games, the creation of toys, significant experiences of the teachers that were also experiences he allowed to the boys and girls. (Sayão, 2005, p. 252).

The researches pointed out so far also show some few examples of teachers that do not confirm in their practices this hypothesis of more corporal availability of men, by following the institutional culture, based on disciplining the bodies, gestures, and movements, over the pleasures of games. Besides this, some, when fitting into a profession considered feminine, subscribe to the socially accepted models for the gender, as tenderness, affection, and care, as the essential characteristics.

However, this is not the case of most man interviewed and researched in those studies, confirming Badinter's (1993) thought that men seem to have a slight advantage when the theme is play/games, as, according to the author, researches point to their greater corporal involvement with babies and more stimulating corporal games with young children.

In the researched nursery and preschool, the male teacher was a very important playful reference to the boys and girls, not only in the moments dedicated specifically to plays/games, but also in the ways to communicate and relate with them. In the several meetings observed, it was as if Marcelo, with his actions, sent out a "message" for the children to get closer, as many of them greeted him in a special way in the beginning of the day, excitedly telling him something, inventing a funny word, or hanging on his neck for a hug or even "climbing" him. His receptivity to these forms of communication, not always based on words was clear, what was also highlighted during his interview when he talked about his first day at work in the nursery and preschool that, according to him, was very special:

I used to climb the trees in the other preschool I've worked before and when I arrived here I was presented to everyone... Suddenly, we were at the patio, the children there playing and I, in this situation, just observing. Imagine, first day at work and I observed, and when visiting the space with the coordinator I asked: " Ah, cool, there are many trees...do they children climb them?" And she said they did. "Ah, so you can climb?" "Yes". So, I was there, on the patio, a bunch of children playing, they would come talk to me, ask who I was and left, then returned, I was trying to understand that whole dynamic, trying to remember the names of those who came to talk to me and, suddenly, I started to climb the tree! I was playing in the tree by myself and then a bunch of children got together! "Oh, he climbs the tree! Ah! I want to climb too!". About 10 children were there and I just played with them in the tree. I remember that after a teacher came to talk to me and said " Oh, they [other teachers] were worried that you climbed the tree, if you were going to fall and all, then I told them 'Look! He is happy, he is with the children, let him be!'" So this was something that marked me, my first day of school here, my first contact was this, it was one of the body!" (Marcelo, May 23rd, 2016) [interview given to the authors].

As described by the teacher on his first meeting with the children, it was also possible to observe many situations in which his contact was “of the body”, such as playing “tickle tag” piggyback rides, make-believe canoe (while singing), dances, ball games, and others. Children got closer, even when not orally invited, involved by the chants and corporal games, revealing their abilities to experience and express themselves through multiple languages when producing their childhood cultures.

Fabiana, the other teacher interviewed in the research, also talked about the day she climbed the tree in the preschool:

One of these days, I was up in the tree when the coordinator came to tell me something and said: “Fabi, just two educators climbed this tree until today, you know? You are the second!” And I said “Who was the first?”. I expected the answer when she said “Marcelo!” (Fabiana, March 17th, 2016).

Thus, the teacher already had an expectation of who would have “dared” to climb the tree as she did. When explaining why she expected this person to be Marcelo, she said:

There is more corporal freedom, it really does! Much more in Marcelo, who is an educator, than in us, teachers, who are women....Sometimes we see the children jumping on him, climbing on his neck, you know? And he uses that body more or less the same way children are using! I think it is cultural, it is built this way, since very early women are submitted to a heavier control of movements, on how to behave, how to dress, how to sit...and culture is powerful, isn't it? It is a powerful force! The good thing is that you can always see yourself again and these places, these people, these children they end up taking you away from this place, demanding this, then you end up reflecting on your culture through these little ones!” (Fabiana, May, 23rd, 2016).

One day, a former trainee in the institution researched visited the children, who were very excited with this presence. All wanted to sit next to him during the snack time, he received many invitations to play during the day, and there was a great commotion among the boys and girls. Seen that I was observing, Luciana, one of the teachers, got closer and said:

You see how a masculine presence is strong to the children? We are a bit kicked to the curb, forgotten, useless (laughs). Do you remember teacher Marcelo last year? Amazing! It is a pity we have so few men in teaching. When we do, they end up teaching the older ones! (Luciana, 2016).

Fabiana's and Luciana's speeches reveal a perception of the easiness that many male teacher have to relate with plays/games as, even though Luciana did not directly referred to play or the body, she attentively observed a soccer match between the former trainee and a group of boys as we talked. Fabiana, by saying "the good thing is that you can always see yourself again" highlights the importance of overcoming limitations imposed by our socialization marks. According to her, children provoke a reflection on the "powerful force" that ends up influencing our actions and professions. Carvalho (2015, p. 110) points that it is possible to break "with the horizon given, with pedagogical prescriptions, with the models and the "pasteurized" practices present in the books of teacher training", as well as the own discourses disseminated on the (male and female) teacher of Early Childhood Education. According to him, we need to relearn how to position ourselves in different ways, avoiding clichés that insist in defining teaching for this schooling phase as a "profession exclusively feminine and naturally guided by the imperative of tenderness" (p. 110).

A way or relearning, overcoming, and position oneself in different ways is to provoke a reflection on your own corporal and childhood memories, strongly marked by social roles we have occupied in our live. As affirmed by Silva (2014, p. 158), "the experiences from adults' childhood modify the relation between teachers and young children". The challenge, then, is to break with the logics that inhibit and limit one's playful dimension. In this way, you need to be open to observe, listen, be together, teach and (re) learn to play.

During the interview, when asked about his corporal experiences and his playful dimension, Marcelo brought some stories from his childhood memories, as when he remembered the games he played with his cousins:

I believe there is more freedom for boys, since they are young. I had... I remember that we were raised together, three cousins, I and other two. One of my cousins had 4 older sisters and one of them was closer to our age, she was older than us, we played a lot together. Maybe there, among us, with no adults, there was not much of this boy and girl stuff. But I remember that there were many things that she did not follow us, that she didn't do with us, and sometimes the explanation was that she was a girl, you know? I remember hearing those things (Marcelo, May 23rd, 2016).

When telling the episode of the tree climbing, he also told a childhood memory:

The day I climbed the tree in the preschool was a type of rescue of my childhood too! I remember when I was a child, in my grandma's house...Until today there is a huge tree, with entangled branches, very easy to climb, like stairs! I spent hours climbing, going down, jumping, swinging, those things, so, it was like rescuing my childhood to be there, to show them [children], to talk to them about this, (Marcelo, May 23rd,2016).

Besides reconstructing corporal memories from childhood as a way to retake a playful dimension, which has been limited and inhibited or intensively lived, as is Marcelo's case, another key question in overcoming the marks that limit the corporal action in Early Childhood Education is related to the pre-service and in-service training given to the professionals who will deal with young children, beyond the beforementioned reflection on femininities and masculinities in the educational context. These two branches are highlighted by Rosemberg and Amado (1992), even though not specifically dealing with childhood education:

The strategy of taking into account the determinations of domesticity in female socialization, when observing female teachers, could lead to identify and understand recurrent behaviors in the classroom. It could also allow to point current representations among the agents of the higher scales of the educational system- as well as among researchers- regarding female teachers and their actions, or show gaps between expectations; or yet suggest possible shortcomings of the different programs or teacher training courses, related to not knowing, or not considering, the specificity of female students' previous socialization (p. 72).

An important shortcoming on the courses that train teachers for childhood education is related to the place of the body and their experiences, as there is a predominance of proposals that privilege bodies/minds controlled, aligned, conditioned, and sitting (Prado, 2011), very distant from the necessities we point here.

Larrosa Bondía (2002, p. 21) proposes thinking education from the duo experience/sense, considering experience as what effectively "passes through us, happens to us, touches us", differently and even in opposition to the concept of information, so engrained in our reality. The obsessive search for information and the emphasis on learning everything at the same time, ends up annulling our possibilities of experience, of feeling, of been touched and transformed. Consequently, we are more and more bombarded by information and less and less feeling what passes through us.

Thus, thinking an education that involves multiple languages, with involvement and availability in a shared experience with all those in childhood education institutions, adults and children, imply a reflection on the formative experiences that effectively touch and transform

the professional who works with young children. Courses, lectures, workshops, meetings and other activities proposed to pre and in-service teacher training have prioritized information over transformative experiences that are, literally, incorporated to everyday educational practices with children.

Another issue is the approach of themes such as gender, education, and sexuality in the training programs which allow a reflection on the children as well as on aspects of teachers' actions. Silva (2003) analyzed five universities that train professionals for childhood education, in aspects related to the history of the courses, curricula, and programs. She concluded that the space for these themes were very reduced and in only one of them there was a specific subject on gender, education, and sexuality. Finco (2010) highlights that

discussing gender relations in the training of childhood education teachers means considering the space of childhood education as a place where differences are confronted and coexist; thinking teacher training courses, considering that most of them are women; reflecting on pedagogical proposals considering the characteristics of the work of caring and educating young children and their relations with characteristics socially and culturally built, through the feminine work, and, above all, problematize the adult-centric, androcentric, homophobic values of our society. (Finco, 2010, p. 161).

Reflections on gender and teaching on Early Childhood Education

There are diverse and complex factors and reflection that involve issues of gender and the construction of teaching on Early Childhood Education, from what is brought by young boys and girls and their childhood culture, inscribed in their active and inventive playful dimensions and their ways of living in differences, not only of gender, but also social class, race and ethnicity, age and generation, etc. (Prado, 2006). From the concept of childhood of those who act directly and indirectly with them to the life experiences of teachers and their training, the gender relations as social constructions are essential to understand the professional development of everyday work with children.

When talking about his work in the nursery and preschool, Marcelo referred to another important point in the discussion on gender relations in childhood education: male work on situations involving education and care of young children.

Silva (2014, p. 92), in his master research, when analyzing the practices of two male teachers of Early Childhood Education, noticed an excessive care and a guarded attention in the relation between one of the teachers and the children. One of the examples told by him was the bath moment, that was given only by the female teachers and other female personnel, what, according to him, “configured the context of gender inequality”.

During the interview, Marcelo told about situations in which he heard or participated of moments that reinforced those inequalities:

I've heard about many situations: “Ah, I want to go to the restroom”, “Come here, I'll take you”- says the female teacher. “Don't go with the (male) teacher!”, or “Are there (male) teachers in your school?”, “Are you a teacher of Early Childhood? But what age do you work with? Do you change diapers?”. And (male) teachers who say: “No, diapers, I don't change!”. It could be different! Even when there are (male) teachers in this context, sometimes by his choice, others by the institution choice, sometimes by both, he is also removed from this position of care (Marcelo, May 23rd, 2016).

According to Silva (2014, p. 85), male teaching in Early Childhood Education still creates a strangeness, leading to silenced prejudices and a discomfort that, in his opinion, “extrapolates the spaces of nursery and preschool. The ways of caring and educating are interconnected by control and/or monitoring of children's bodies, by the fear of sexual abuse, of pedophilia”. Thus, the marks of inequality/discrimination of gender that permeate male and female socialization and their professions affect not only women that, by working in a profession considered feminine, are framed into expectations connected only with mothering, caring and affection, with a love that would be enough to supply children's need, but also the men that, often, find limitations on the spaces they can occupy in these relations of care and affection.

It is key, then, to question the sexist ways that permeate the expectations of a teaching profile, based on an artificial ideal of femininity, imposed to women and denied to men. As appointed by Silva (2014, p. 160), “a universal type of masculinity and femininity have to be discussed, as they are present in the construction of teaching for Early Childhood as dispositives that we have to face and question, bringing them to the debate”.

It is not about excluding affection or imagining a teaching without activities connected to motherhood, as care is an essential part of the work with young children, but that

it is necessary to open space for men to deal with affection, feeling, mothering, as well as open space for professional practices of male features within the institutions of Early Childhood Education as part of a movement that aims the integration and complementarity of female and male aiming to help to stop gender discriminations in the occupations connected to care/education of children between 0 and 6 years old, and the process of socialization of boys and girls itself (Cerisara, 2015, p. 12).

Teacher Marcelo highlighted, in his interview, how he positions himself with the children when dealing with segregating situations:

It makes a big difference when you show the children: I'm here to take care of you too. I'm here to hold you in my arms. I'm here to play, to climb the tree, but also to hold you in my arms. I'm here to change your diaper, but also to play ball. To jump, to run, but also to sit down and tell a story, to do make-believe food, play with dolls, play...I'm here to be with you, in whatever you need." (Marcelo, May 23rd, 2016).

This availability to be with the children, in an educational context, presented by the teacher, with them, for them, and from them, is what constitutes being a teacher of young children, explicated by him in the examples of the various actions that are part of his job, the plays/games, the care, the invention, the boldness, the rupture, the attention to children's needs and desires, consolidating a full-body Early Childhood Education pedagogy (Prado, 2015).

When thinking the gender issues in teaching Early Childhood Education, considering the historic concept of gender approached by Scott (1995, p. 86), who defines the term through the connection of two proposals: "a constitutive element of social relations based on the perceived differences between sexes" and "a first way to signify power relations", we also need to reflect in the relations established by girls and boys in the experiences they live in Early Childhood institutions and outside them, paying attention not to reproduce the imposition of limitations and the control over their bodies, as has been historically done. Marcelo was surprised by the corporal possibilities he had observed in the plays with girls:

I remember some, not few, situations in the school when we offered possibilities for boys and girls. We are surprised by what happens. Girls with an incredible ability to climb trees, jump, challenge the body. Some boys more apprehensive with this challenge, they want to hold hands and all, and the girls are more “daring”. And some boys with a high sensitiveness for plays, let’s say, “of girls”, more collected plays, not only playhouse, but the type of play itself... plays that involve a symbolic game even (Marcelo, May 23rd, 2016).

According to Finco (2007, p. 4) “gender marks are engraved in the bodies of boys and girls according to adults’ expectations, which are a part of how certain societies understand what it means to be a boy and to be a girl”. The teacher’s surprise show how his expectations were marked by the dominant view of what it means to play for boys and for girls in our society that, often, limits the experimentations of “make-believe” that permeate children’s plays and that are fundamental for them to know, experience, express, and also create based on what they discover.

The teacher also makes explicit an expectation for different “performances” and “abilities” between girls and boys by saying how surprised he was in several situations in the nursery/preschool. As he finished, however, he analyzed his posture faced by what he observed, highlighting the sexism that permeates education, using a word that reveals a lot about the place occupied by our prejudices, which mark views and proposals, assuming and facing the permanent need to reflect on our teachers’ expectations and actions to overcome this sexist “baggage” mentioned by him; “ ah, but we are only surprised because we also have this baggage of sexist education, there is that...We get surprised because this is already incorporated...” (Marcelo, May 23rd 2016).

Daolio (2000) highlights that aptitudes and abilities are also part of a cultural transmission process, contrary to the arguments that are often raised in the attempt to naturalize behavior from masculinities and femininities, as when someone says that boys are, naturally, more aggressive or have more energy than girls. An example used by the author is that boys “are born” knowing how to play ball: “well, the first toy a boy gets is a ball. If the material stimulus was not enough, there is a social reinforcement incentivizing his first kicks, contrary to the girl that, besides not been stimulated, is forbidden to play with the ball with her feet” (p. 40).

Thus, it is not enough to see only the marks of socialization, of the limitations and control over the bodies of female teachers, but also of the practices and expectations that still mark girls' bodies, from an early age, in Early Childhood Education institutions and outside them, trying to resist the normative standard highlighted by Silva (2014, p. 121): "it is possible to observe that the hegemonic system of society, of the ideal of men and women, have been thought/produced from an early age, framing the subjects of our society into a normative standard of obedience to the demands of the capitalist system".

Therefore, the articulation among, gender, Early Childhood teaching, and the data raised in this study and other works presented question the passivity and submission which characterize the femininities present in nurseries and preschools, in which characteristics connected to mothering and domestic work are predominant, often over so many other which could establish the identity of these professionals and provoke the reconstruction of playful dimensions, also taking into consideration the, equally important, relations of care and affection that already permeate those relationships.

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