

Sex Education as a Transversal Subject

Amanda Oliveira Rabelo, *Universidade Federal Fluminense, Brazil*

Graziela Raupp Pereira, *Universidade Federal Fluminense, Brazil*

Maria Amélia Reis, *Coimbra University, Portugal and Federal University of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*

António G. Ferreira, *Coimbra University, Portugal*

ABSTRACT

Currently, sex education is in many countries a transversal subject, in which the school becomes a privileged place for the implementation of policies that aim at promoting "public health". Its design as a cross-cutting subject envisages fostering the dissemination of these subjects in all pedagogical and curricular fields; however, we seek to understand whether such strategy is presented in the national curricular parameters (Brazil) as an attempt to mask the intention to control and to dictate education standards (to control and to submit teachers and students), or if it objectifies critical, reflexive and participative sex education that can perceive sexuality from a broader perspective (not only as a social problem to be solved, but also as life, pleasure and understanding of the other).

Key Words: *Sex Education; Transversal Subject; Educational Policies; interdisciplinarity.*

Introduction

The findings in this paper were drawn from the correlations established between sex education and probable transversalityⁱ of studies as the axis of the curricula in Brazilian schools. Against the backdrop of educational policies which focus on sex education in the school environment and feature discourses on social change, although they embody something akin to behaviours, our purpose is to understand how such policies still tend towards social control through surveillance and body discipline, and how these assumptions also extend to the subjective education of children and teenagers in the school environment.

Note that we have been attracted by easy speeches and preconceived meanings of a given transformation and deep change, either in terms of moral, values, decisions and specific options, and of one's own freedom to judge others and things.

Regarding sex-oriented educational policies promoted by the Brazilian state as established discourses which are reinstated in the national curricula, we review these policies to the extent that they are vested with generalised contents, which ignore the multiculturalism of the Brazilian territory and the country's geographical size.

Some issues have exposed the need for radical change that those who are relegated to the margins of an allegedly harmonious society have claimed through freedom battles. Such issues include sex and correlated matters, men-women asymmetric relations, prejudice, and discrimination. From this perspective the indispensable need to deny the comfort of impervious subjects, and to link multiple knowledges, either local or global, is paramount: established and establishing as dimensions capable of consolidating subjectivities and intersubjectivities that discourage conservative and standardising solutions and answers.

The "National Parameters for the Curricula" (*Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais* - PCN) are official documents that in 1997 submitted ideas for the national curricula in Brazil. In other words, as part of a school curricula "enhancement" policy, they brought "novelty": the "transversal topics" as topics that alone cross the disciplinary boundaries to connect the subjects.

However, as Deleuze and Guattari underline in "A thousand plateaus" (2000, p.22, apud Reis, 2002, p.292), the alleged curriculum of this anticipated new school should replace concentrated systems of hierarchical communication and pre-established and tree-like connections of human knowledge which crystallise identities, so that one can write "an open map oriented towards experimentation anchored in reality" (critical approaches). This paradigm of the school and the curricular model is different to the one suggested by the above-mentioned PCNs in their guidelines, since the mainstreaming designed by the parameters is limited to the hierarchical dimensions of knowledge and is manifest in the activities involving vertical networks of knowledge described in a complementary book (traditional approaches).

Consequently, our challenge in this paper is to characterise the policies underlying sex education in schools and the relevant assumptions submitted in the *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais* (PCNs), particularly in the document *Orientação Sexual e Ética* (ethical and sexual "orientation"), as policies that envisage maintaining the historic controlling and streamlining motifs of current socialist societies.

We also intend to discuss the following issues: What are the PCNs' intentions? Have school administrations reflected upon them? Do teachers apply these goals in their daily school activities? Can they be used as guidelines and be debated? What are we missing for sex to be further discussed in schools?

The Framework of Sex Education in Brazil

In Brazil there is no law devoted to Sex Education, but by contrast since 1997 Brazilian schools have counted on the innovative proposal of the *Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais* (PCNs), developed by the Ministry of Education (*Ministério da Educação* - MEC), formerly published in book format. This set of official documents indicates that transversal topics, like sex, should be taught in an integrated manner, continuously and systematically, incorporated by existing areas and the educational work conducted in schools “These are procedures which society, communities, families, students and teachers have been intensely engaged in (Brazil, 1997b, p. 26)”.

Understandably, the Ministry of Education (*Ministério de Educação* - MEC) does not yet have a tool to assess the responsiveness of these proposals, nor to indicate how many schools have included in their curricula concrete records of debates, reflections, and projects on this topic. Furthermore, there are no signs of possible change from a tree-model paradigm to one with a network-based knowledge model.

We also underscore that the cross-cutting topics discussed in these policies pervade all educational practice and extend to different levels of relations in the educational space, while they do not outline the links that are required for these topics to be applied in teachers' educational practice. The following assumption described in the document is, therefore, not enough:

Transversality entails an integrated approach to the areas and interpersonal and social school engagement in the issues underlying these topics, to ensure coherence between the values experienced by students at school and the intellectual contact with such values (Brazil, 1997b, p. 45).

From this perspective, we must look into the shifts built into the educational curriculum of the different subjects, in view of promoting a pedagogical practice which eliminates isolated

teaching actions in teacher's formal activities and fostering the transdisciplinary treatment of contents. Such practice is perceived from its plural dimensions: cultural, social, gender, generational, and sexualⁱⁱ.

From the historical-cultural perspective, sex is one of human beings' dimensions, which develops and is learnt as an intrinsic part of personality growth. School is the ideal place for developing knowledge, skills and behavioural change, as it provides a friendly and appropriate context for conducting emancipatory educational activities triggered by exchanges between different areas of human knowledge.

Sex in the present paper is a complex and dynamic concept which is subject to several interpretations, as it depends on the relevant social and cultural context. Foucault (1978) discovered that this term arises in the 19th century. This should not be underestimated nor overinterpreted, since it does not mark the development of sexuality itself, but of something that appears with the word and develops from several fields of knowledge that establish rules and standards (some new and some traditional), supported by institutions and which produce changes in the ways individuals give meaning to their behaviour, feelings, and duties.

Currently, sexuality is the word used to express the capacities linked to sex. Yet sex alone has several meanings and multiple visions, some of which are positive, since they regard sex as the potential for multiple pleasure, desire and sensuality, and other negative, connecting sex with disease, death, and therefore must be disciplined, repressed, and controlled. Sex is sometimes regarded as an impulse, energy, or something natural and deemed almost "untameable" (because we need satisfaction); on other occasions it is somewhat sinful.

In spite of all of these meanings, sex is linked with the biological dimension of human beings, with physical features, with the sexual act itself. Consequently, as sexuality is strictly

related to sex in the common sense, it is also often circumscribes this dimension.

However, sexuality (which is the study object of historians, philosophers, social scientists and psychologists), although linked with sex, is not limited to it. Quite on the contrary, sex refers us to the social, cultural, and historical scale of human action, i.e. something constructed that exceeds largely this biological dimension and which includes eroticism, affections, desire, feelings, emotions, experiences, behaviour, prohibitions, models and fantasies, and even concepts of health, reproduction, technologies, and the exercise of power. It is difficult to distinguish in human sexuality what is owed to biology, culture, society, the individual, and history.

According to the PAHO/WHO (2000) sexuality includes: gender (values, attitudes, cultural roles, or features based on biological sex); sexual identity and gender; orientation of sexual desire; eroticism; emotional ties (ties with other human beings established through emotions); sexual activities and practices; sexual relations; and sexual behaviour. We agree with this point of view, but we add something which must also be highlighted and that involves sexuality: controlling power.

To understand the development of this sexuality as we see it today, Foucault (1978) analyses the history of sexuality and explains that the device in which it falls is a discursive practice developed slowly, which he calls *scientia sexualis*. The discursive practice matches the functional requirements of a discourse that should produce truth, while connecting with the body and its pleasures, behaviour, and socially developed and historically represented and shaped identities and relations. In other words, it is not limited to a single representation, ideology, or ignorance caused by interdictions; rather, it is a global social, historical and cultural construction.

Understandably, sexuality is not perceived as such. As Foucault shows us, sex education, sex, and sexuality are all part of

logical models of knowledge and of social discipline in place since the 18th century: a model which, according to Reis (1999, p. 7), puts the intellect first and disregards emotions, feelings and pleasure construed by the flourishing *bourgeoisie* as relevant to idleness (socially despised as partly the denial of work). Therefore, sexuality was entrusted to doctors and scientists, and in the early days it is tied to repression, interdiction, so defined from the moment sex shifts from being natural to becoming cultural, symbolic, and individual.

In other words, when sexuality becomes part of these logical models of knowledge and social discipline entrusted to some specialists, a traditional discourse on the forms of normal and abnormal sexuality develops: a discourse that draws the latter away from being a "mere" biological-natural force inherent to the human species, and includes it in the individual's life-long learning of his social-historical-cultural environment, which produces a series of sexual behaviours (and consequently gender identity and sexual orientation)ⁱⁱⁱ.

As the capitalist society and the search for markets and profit consolidate, a new way of thinking arises. The State then must take on functions that support and foster profitable activities, like private property protection and worker protection arguments. The human being earns personal rights (of independence, autonomy and freedom), as well as individual and un-natural ones. From this perspective theories of human behaviour develop, in which *work* is the antithesis of *pleasure*, the work/pleasure dichotomy being part of modern society. This is where an economy of pleasures begins: "an education of sexual pleasures develops under the primacy of silence and restrictions. Bodies and sex are subdued [...]. Adults and children are separated. The couple's bedroom is strategically polarised. Boys' and girls' activities are relatively segregated" (Reis, 1999, p. 8).

Rules are established for everything that is related to youth sexuality: looking after babies, infants and teenagers,

masturbation and early pregnancy. Concerns arose in bourgeois society, and according to Foucault (1978, p. 128):

at the end of the nineteenth century it sought to redefine the specific character of its sexuality relative to that of others, subjecting it to a thorough differential review, and tracing a dividing line that would set apart and protect its body. This line was not the same as the one which founded sexuality, but rather a bar running through that sexuality; this was the taboo that constituted the difference, or at least the manner in which the taboo was applied and the rigor with which it was imposed. It was here that the theory of repression – which was gradually expanded to cover the entire deployment of sexuality, so that the latter came to be explained in terms of a generalized taboo – had its point of origin.

Foucault highlights further that there is a differential game of interdictions, by social class. Yet that repression is only one of the features of sexuality. Society comes forward under the work/pleasure dichotomy and sets up a network of fragmented and mobile sexualities, enforced through surveillance, exhortations, fears, presence, and secrets that build/shape the human being. The medicalization of sexuality becomes the core narrative underpinning prejudice against extramarital, non-heterosexual and non-monogamic forms of sexuality, which are tagged as impure. Consequently, science-oriented sex education responds to capital interests, i.e. “(T)he greater the attempt to hide sex, the more we see it” (Reis, 1999, p. 7).

The strategies unveiled by Foucault (1978) indicate that how sexuality is represented is not fixed, but rather depends on the culture at a given time and the producers of specific devices of sexual practice, the institutional control of such practices, and the social organisation of sexuality. Therefore, sexuality is perceived as a set of effects on behaviour, body, and sexual relations, by means of complex mechanisms and techniques – techniques that include educational procedures. Furthermore, one can assume that sex education in school fundamentally inhibits critical awareness, which prepares a few to give orders and trains many to obey.

Brazil is in this context a developing country that suffers from controlling policies emanating from international organisations. To ensure greater efficiency of such power the births and deaths of the more deprived strata of society need controlling so that they may work and consume. Such control is also encouraged by international organisations which promote changes in sex education and sexual habits (Reis, 1992, p. 268), organisations like the IMF, UNESCO, to name a few. From the 1970s, but more intensely from the 1980s onwards with reinforced "sexual freedom", sex education in Brazil is enhanced by health education trends coming from international concepts based on the logical models of knowledge and social discipline, described before (Galindo, 2004), where "the doctor's discourse, matrix of biological interpretation, reinforces the same conservative and institutional discourse already present in Brazilian society" (Nunes, 1997, p. 141).

This sex education values the biological aspects and healthy habits, instilling in children from an early age (considered asexual) orderly customs, making them accountable for practicing good hygiene and living conditions, but without conducting any social reflection of these problems. At school teenagers are expected to be taught plant, animal, and human reproduction, and the concept of sexuality is reduced to these aspects. Once again, it is not connected with pleasure, but rather with the control of sexually transmitted diseases and early pregnancy, which are considered prevalent among poorer populations. These are clearly characteristics of a growing population; a viewpoint that expresses the control of the bodies and of the poor population's living conditions, and aims at preserving the "status quo" associated with eugenic practices for preventing "undesirable" and "unsuitable" reproduction^{iv} (Reis, 1992, p. 269).

As Reis explains (1999, pp. 6-7), in the 1970s, constructivism supported the analysis of human action and creativity in sexuality, with the inputs of anthropology, sociology and other areas, which perceive sexuality as being mediated by historical and social factors, albeit with reproduction, genitalia, and

biology still at the heart of it. However, we see that schools as cultural spaces featuring complex relations of domination and resistance do not open up to constructivism and preserve the official speech that depoliticises the idea of culture and denies resistance.

With AIDS and the propagation of sexually transmitted diseases, new concerns about sexuality and sexual behaviour arise. These become "Public Health" issues, which suggest the lack of research in the field. From then onwards, some medical fields turned to this study, although in the end these fields reduce women to their pathologised bodies and insist on the idea that children are asexual, innocent and un-erotic. Education (like most human and social sciences) has been almost entirely indifferent to the topic (during early teacher training it is practically not mentioned), while focusing on the biological features and/or denying the study thereof in the educational context. Sexuality, in education, is confused with sex and, when studied, it is supported by the behavioural theories of sexology, itself a medical category (Reis, 2002).

For the aforementioned reasons, more than ever, there will be investment in issues of intentional sexual education and concomitantly of HIV/AIDS prevention, understood as a right to sexual health, hereby demystifying prejudice and taboos existing in people's education. Consequently, the sexual education that we aspire for requires appropriate pedagogical strategies applied to teacher life-long training, as pointed out by the parameters studied:

The educator must receive specific training for teaching sexuality to children and youth at school. Such training will help develop a professional and conscious attitude when tackling the subject. Teachers have to come in touch with their own struggles with the topic, theoretical issues, readings and discussions on sexuality and different approaches to it. They must prepare for action with students and have access to group space for the production of knowledge through these actions, if possible while receiving expert assistance (Brazil, 1997c, p. 303).

Schools have always separated sexuality from social matters. In other words, they have silenced the links between sexuality and class, culture, and gender issues. Did the latest curricular reference in Brazil (the PCNs) make changes to this structure by introducing “*sexual orientation*” (sex education) as a cross-cutting topic? Or is this strategy an attempt to mask the intention to control and dictate education standards?

School has to provide an input to invert this spectrum, to turn sexuality, and HIV/AIDS within it, into something that is discussed and debated calmly, so that the human being may relate better to themselves and others. However, we also know there are few academic spaces where teachers can work on further training in general, and sexuality in particular (as described Pereira, 2007).

Based on the assumption that the curriculum “is social construction, i.e. it is something that people have built at a given moment in history” (Coppete, p.16, 2003), it must provide teachers and students the means to understand their world, thus granting widespread experience, inclusive of the dimension of their sexuality. If each educational institution has its own identity, the “National Parameters for the Curricula”, used for reflection and discussion of sex education, may provide the guidelines - in contrast with traditional education - for the development in teachers and students of several skills, either technical or social, that target their autonomy, democracy, and solidarity, supporting the rescue of “life's interdisciplinarity” through transversal topics.

Sexuality in the PNCs: Control or debate?

Society has several control mechanisms and tools (such as books and laws) which establish/dictate rules of conduct and provide “guidelines” based on the alleged need to behave according to social acceptability (or religious) standards. The National Parameters for the Curricula (PCNs) are produced by the Brazilian Ministry of Education (*Ministério da Educação* - MEC), on the basis of constructivist principles for replacing the

common minimal curriculum enforced in Brazil until the PCNs were published. Since it realised that there were emerging social issues that were not tackled by the traditional subjects, the Ministry innovated by introducing “transversal topics” which are not organised into subjects, although their core propositions are absorbed by the latter (Sayão, 1996). The “transversal topics” are set out in the PCNs as important topics for discussing the school and, subsequently, developing equal *citizenship* in the country. These are ethics, the environment, cultural plurality, health, and “sexual orientation”, which “must be incorporated in the existing areas and in schools' educational work” (Brazil, 1997a, p. 5). However, do these documents have the intention to control and establish rules^v for education and, subsequently, society?

Maranhão (2000) asks ironically whether the acronym PCN does not stand rather for “National 'Civilizing' Procedure,” since the PCNs are considered as providing the grounds for education, although the general idea is that it is *not necessary/mandatory* to comply with these procedures: “This task (to grant everyone the right of citizenship) entails the assertion of a set of democratic principles that govern social and political life” (Brazil, 1997a, p. 5). These principles, which are described in the PCN, demonstrate that the intention is indeed to “govern social and political life” through education. The search for “citizenship for all” thus becomes the reason for controlling the members of a society. As Uberti (2000, p. 1) puts it:

The 'transversal topics' envisage shifting contents around the different aspects of exercising citizenship, which becomes the moral subject matter of childhood that is tackled using several techniques of people governance. This discourse includes definitions of how social relations should be shaped for the citizen, thus putting in place a type of moral regulation.

Uberti (2000) also underlines that the PCNs envisage the subjugation of scholars by subjecting them to others (through regulation and dependence) and to themselves through their identity as *citizens*. Therefore, the PCNs try to explain and understand individuals and their subjectivities through the logic

of psychological theories which attempt, at all times, to establish systems of truth about these individuals' subjectivities. Who is this citizen/individual who is not even the owner of his own truths; who needs others to tell them what they think and should think; whose actions are controlled by a greater end that is citizenship and whose issues and problems are translated simply into *transversal topics*?

This kind of discourse in the PCNs disguises a network of depreciation of the student as an individual and of the teacher as the educator who enjoys "freedom" of creativity and self-sufficiency. The PCNs was not a document resulting from school discussion; so it excludes those who are *on the school fields* designing educational policies. Simultaneously, it conceals the plundering of public education: teachers and students are blamed for education's failure, since, according to the document, they are "jointly responsible" for social life and should have democratic attitudes of "solidarity, cooperation and repudiation of injustices, while respecting the other and demanding respect for oneself" (Brazil, 1997a, p. 8). How can this document evoke democracy if its own authors do not respect it? They describe a competitive and unfair environment, where '*every man for himself*' seems to be the motto; an environment where the unjust go unpunished and there is no respect for "others" (beginning with the main stakeholders in education who were denied involvement in these discussions) (Reis, 1998).

Rules in schools are regarded by the PCNs (Brazil, 1997a, p. 34) as necessary and students should be explained/taught the meaning of complying with such rules (because understanding is not spontaneous). If schools need rules, who should be dictating them? Although they do not say this, the parameters set several rules governing relations and classes in school. These rules exist so that teachers who implement proposals may control their students, so that they may become the "ideal" students (as if this were possible) and may, simultaneously, be controlled by the rules they are subjected to and by the school's assessments (Reis, 1998, p. 6).

To tackle sexuality in the PCNs, we wish to start by questioning the use of "Sexual Orientation" therein (a concept usually understood in terms of attraction standards. For example, see Kinsey et al, 1948; APA, 2012b), in contrast with the expression "Sex Education", which we find more appropriate. Consequently, it is important to position the meaning, similarities and differences, of the concept "Sexual Orientation," in relation to "Sex Education".

We are constantly receiving information, observing attitudes and experiences relating to sex, in an on-going process of sex education. Our contact with the "world", through symbols, prejudice, values, pictures, and sounds, is an informal manner of assaying sexual behaviour. Even in family relations, where we show affections, we are educated.

The child's daily contact with its parents, the subsequent socialisation process, and media and social group influences, are all part of Sex Education. Sex Education is a life-long process, which allows the individual to change themselves, to recycle themselves, or not, and only death can put an end to it. Whereas "Orientation" can be identified to some extent as the educational environment, insofar as it influences, shapes opinions, and changes values. The two concepts differ on some fundamental points: "Orientation" is formal, systematised and temporary.

"Orientation" has a specific agenda in the school and a set purpose. When it is formalised, it is no longer the continuous and unplanned process we call education. "Orientation" is a systematised knowledge transmission process that proposes to fill in the information gaps, eradicate taboos and prejudice, and open to discussion new values, knowledge and uses.

Using the resources of "Sexual Orientation" we intend to provide information about sexuality issues. But how does "Sex Education" fit into these parameters after all? In effect, the expression "Sex Education" does not exist. The PCNs call it

“Sexual Orientation,” as if the latter could encompass all of the taboos and prejudices against sexuality that exist in schools and society.

The PCNs apparently distinguish between *Education* and *Orientation*, and find the word *education* unsuitable to tackle sexual issues, as the following statement illustrates:

Sexual Orientation in school must be perceived as a process of pedagogical intervention, which aims at conveying information and debating matters of sexuality, including attitudes, beliefs, taboos and values linked to it. Such intervention occurs in a collective environment, as opposed to individual work, it has a psychotherapeutic imprint and focuses on the sociological, psychological and physiological dimensions of sexuality. It also draws away from education delivered by the family, since it allows different points of view of sexuality to be discussed, without imposing personal values on others (BRASIL, 1997a, p. 15).

Why can education delivered by parents be called by the PCNs *Education* and not *Orientation*^{vi}? Would a teacher not be fit to teach sexuality? Sexologists explain that this word is more suitable because the sexual issue at school is not systematised nor formal. So we ask: Can education only be described as something formal and systematic or does it refer to learning in general? According to this explanation, would the expression *Environmental Education*, also in the PCNs, not have to be *Environmental Orientation*? According to Reis (1998), the latter would only make sense if sexual were a deviation that had to be “put on track”, something that needs “orientation”, since the dominant knowledge has to control other knowledge and only the former can be made legitimate.

Sexual Orientation, according to the PCNs, “envisages the possibility of exercising sexuality in a responsible and pleasurable manner” and students must recognise which “manifestations of their sexuality can be expressed at school”. Meanwhile, they elect three fundamental axes to guide

teacher's actions (*the human body, gender relations and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases/AIDS*)^{vii}. By choosing these axes one may conclude that the PCNs are intended to control and one of the most important objects of control is the *body*^{viii}. When discussing the body and STDs (Sexually Transmitted Diseases) PCNs underscore the need to control the body^{ix}. The teacher acts as a player who is expected to tell right from wrong, so that students may know what is suitable to do in society and what is forbidden.

The PCNs contemplate the exercise of sexuality in a responsible and pleasurable manner, but this is an empty speech, since it is not present in the PCNs' other indications. In other words, the student is primarily submitted to the meaning of responsibility, which he is denied by the teacher the moment he possesses the scientific information. Pleasure is always tied to responsibility, albeit a responsibility which students are denied, since sex is forbidden, undesired, related to disease (There is apparently the belief that the more one knows about sex, the greater the sexual activity, which is not desirable, since we must protect ourselves from it). If he is not responsible where does pleasure stand?

The share of the PCNs dedicated to *Sexual Orientation* (Brazil, 1997b) justifies, from the start, the need to introduce this topic in schools, because of the large number of teenagers with unprogrammed pregnancies and AIDS. These students' parents also claim the need to include^x *Sex Orientation* in the school curricula (since it is not easy to discuss it). All the more reason for controlling a society where to speak of sex is both *taboo* and is *sponsored* by the media and the Government that wish to control citizens better.

The PCNs insist on the need for school to discuss sexuality, since the family is not solely responsible for it, and this very same sexuality invades the school, which is incapable of leaving student sexuality outside. The PCNs underscore the importance of discussing the biological body, and the *cultural*,

affectionate and social dimensions of this body (Brazil, 1997b, p. 5). Yet, do not forget that sexuality's core axes are: the human body, gender relations, and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases/AIDS. Where do the cultural, affectionate and social dimensions fit into these objectives? The only objective that mostly embraces the social issues – gender relations – does not express these dimensions. As Altmann (2001) realises, the PCNs mention gender relations as social and cultural constructions, but they do not elaborate upon those constructions.

By analysing the PCNs we realise that their intention is not to educate for the cultural, affectionate, and social aspects of sexuality in school. On the contrary, all systematic work conducted in school in terms of *Sex Orientation* is associated with the promotion of infant and teenage health, with *orientation* towards a healthy living (highlighting the absence of disease and/or pregnancy, and not “mental health”). The cultural, emotional, and social dimensions are in the end used only to complete a document that intends to control teenagers and teachers, whom are expected to follow strict rules.

Sex is exalted as being independent of the reproductive capacity and tied with the human being's need for pleasure. Concomitantly, we do not find in the PCNs any demonstration of the importance of pleasure, but rather precautions related to sex. Sexuality is “something inherent, that reveals itself from the moment of birth until death [...], and is necessarily marked by history, culture, science, and by affections and feelings, and expresses itself idiosyncratically in each individual” (Brazil, 1997a, p. 8). Is sexuality something inherent, historical, cultural, and scientific, if the exalted values are the physical ones, disease, and reproduction?

Contradictions abound; school action should be informal and non-systematised (which also justifies the use of the word “Orientation”), but elsewhere we read that “this is a formal and streamlined procedure occurring within school walls, it requires

planning and proposes the intervention of education professionals" (Brazil, 1997a, p. 8). We find many other contradictions when we look closely at the PCNs^{xi}, which indicates, according to Reis (1998, p. 14), that, although camouflaging a speech filled with "good proposals", they translate palliative measures that are ill adjusted to modern school curricula, which are active, dynamic and potentially sexualised under the "orders" of those who apply them (students, teachers, parents, and decision-makers). They are in reality counter-ideological and resist dominant interests, which have embedded in their discourses and actions ways of living and of experiencing sexuality entirely estranged from what large segments of the excluded population think and experience.

We agree with Altmann's (2001, p. 584) conclusion that the topic of "Sexual Orientation" in the PCNs is not only informative in nature; it also impacts on the school environment and, as a cross-cutting topic, it extends over the pedagogical field and replicates its effects, prompting the school to encourage students to take ownership of their own care. Briefly, the PCNs put sex into discourse and enhance the control over the individuals, achieved not only through prohibition and punishment, but also through mechanisms, methodologies, and practices that envisage producing self-discipline in the way individuals experience their sexuality.

Finally, we need not a document that brings rules and standards that hide the real needs, but an entire policy that enhances education and teaching in which teachers are instrumentalised theoretically and methodologically to engage in the discussion of a variety of topics with their students, but not in a routine, transmissive fashion. On the contrary, the policy should foster dialogue and learning on both sides: teacher and student.

Final remarks – Did the absurdities in the PCNs produce positive actions for Sex Education in the school environment?

“About sex education, much is said but little is done” (Cafardo, 2006). This sentence summarises the current stance of sex education in schools; although the school census conducted in Brazil found that 43% of teachers believe they have the skills to tackle sexuality in the classroom, 52% of schools replied that they deal with teenage pregnancy, 60% teach STD/AIDS and 45% sexual and reproductive health; the reality is far from bright. Only 5.5% of the schools engage in this topic on a weekly basis and 29% every month: possibly because it is believed that a talk every six to twelve months is enough. Furthermore, not many specialisation or post-graduate course curricula include this topic (Cafardo, 2006). Early teacher training hardly ever tackles this subject matter and the census in teaching (Brazil, 2006, p. 292) shows that in 2003 in Brazil further education in this area only accounted for 0.25% of all training programmes attended by teachers. How can teachers boost/teach the subject without discussing it previously to overcome their own prejudice?

The transversal topics proposed by the PCNs have not been easy to put into practice (Altmann, 2003; Marques & Knijnik, 2006). As Altmann (2003) shows, teachers owe these constraints to the absence of specific training, the lack of structure, materials, and conditions for engaging in interdisciplinary work. Teachers who work in different places find it hard to make time to meet, show a lack of commitment, and express fear regarding discussing the subject, to name a few. Many teachers ignore the document (which did not have a large impact on their classes). Nonetheless, the PCNs did produce some effects because of their dissemination (in the media, schools, the Secretary of Education and training programmes), which seem to have ensured some level of absorption. In other words, teachers do not read the PCNs, but they listen to people speak about them in the media, in courses, at talks, and elsewhere.

Consequently, the impact of the PCNs in most cases does not translate into practice, though many schools say they work on the topic in an on-going and integrated fashion (as stated by Rabelo, 2007; Reis, 1998; Pereira, 2007), which is not quite what we see happening. Altmann (2003) only saw the science teacher take up the topic, with some help from the Portuguese teacher. (Most generally feel that the “pedagogical project”^{xii} takes up time and ends up disturbing classes).

So, sex education is still mostly taken up in the science/biology classes (where heterosexuality is the standard and homosexuality is practically unmentioned), particularly in the 8th year of Elementary Education and in middle school, as was provided for in the curricula even before the PCN. Generally speaking, it is tackled from the perspective of the biological sciences under the chapter of the reproduction of species^{xiii}, which includes the following core topics: STDs/AIDS, contraceptive methods and puberty, which are used as criteria for the correction of tests, and prevention for women (Altmann, 2003).

Besides, as Altmann (2003) describes, this topic was included in the last chapters of books, so some teachers conveniently did “not have time” to tackle it or discussed it only briefly, whereas others would refer it to the beginning of the following year, claiming that students were very much interested in it^{xiv}.

To this day we continue debate appropriate teacher training, while criticising the lack of discussion - in initial training - of governmental policies and the engagement in higher education dissociated from research and greater criticism. Otranto (1999, p. 76) says for example that the proposal to train teachers in teacher-training colleges (ISEs^{xv}) is an interference in the citizenship of the subordinate classes, and carries forward the discussion of university education (specially public education) not being for everyone; of elementary education delivered by well trained teachers being a privilege of elite classes. The least-favoured social classes, it is presumed, do not need

teachers who criticise society, build their own knowledge, and are capable of helping students engage in their own development of knowledge. Instead, all they need are deliverers of content! This is the same logic that creates separate systems, for vocational and academic training: a dual logic that the concept of quality social education does not condone.

Markedly, when the teacher is not simultaneously researcher and thinker (author and reader) and does not produce knowledge; they only apply what their "superiors" tell them and does not reflect, nor tries to turn education into a more equal, intercultural, and actually, cross-cutting practice. Consequently, the PCNs only serve to prescribe, particularly since - as many authors (like Marques & Knijnik, 2006) highlight - the PCNs do not discuss the fact that in Brazil there are no educators capable of engaging in this.

The current situation of schools reflects information society and its cultural, political and economic conflicts. Such society values hierarchical (scientific) knowledge and practically despises traditional knowledge, which it often does not even recognise as knowledge (teacher knowledge included). According to Tardif, Lessard, & Lahaye (1991), teachers need to value their own knowledge, particularly that which is drawn from experience that is deemed so important in teachers' own narratives. The appreciation of one's own knowledge comes from the research into individual experience, from the reflection on practice that causes "experts"^{xvi} and teachers to merge in the same search: for a better school and turning it into a place of "true" democracy and equality, which would involve the enhancement of the different sorts of existing knowledge.

The appreciation, or lack thereof, of different types of knowledge comes in the form of "technologies of dominance"^{xvii} that target the preservation of inequalities: power and wealth for some, submission and poverty for others. Likewise, teacher

research (when it exists and can deceive what is expected of it) is diminished in relation to academic research, following the logic of dominance that considers thought dangerous: school is the only space/time legitimately created for learning (Alves, 2000), where students are expected primarily to learn to behave, since discipline is the school's purpose.

We thus seek to collect support for sexuality - included in educational practices - to be acknowledged in all of its complexity, overcoming the dominant biological-reproductive approach, and to be identified as social development. We believe that all of the change occurring in schools must involve teachers' actions. Which is why we are focused on triggering teachers' thoughts about the sexuality hidden in school curricula, and on bringing to light the sexuality that is silenced inside each of the stakeholders, by fostering critical thought about it and its educational practice, which involves modern issues and facts that have become the on-going concerns of families and the Government as HIV/AIDS grows (Pereira, 2010).

We must think about the organisation of society into subjects, a society that is outlined as a set object (scientific method) and appears in society in the form of political strategies for submitting the body to a strict regime that frames it in industrialization /use of technologies. This organisation impacts school and society in all of its aspects, since it establishes truths, and validates and fosters knowledge as the exercise of power. Currently, the division into subjects is being questioned. Some suggest interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary education. However, while these are innovative proposals and attempt to eliminate subjects, they are still based upon disciplines, by integrating them, because to preserve subject curricula is the same as to preserve political dominance.

One of the proposals that change that school structure is *transversality*^{xviii}, as Gallo (2000) illustrates in his texts. Transversality comes with the curriculum, while school

relations develop in networks, where knowledge is formed by multiple threads and knots of interconnections (like the rhizome), without hierarchy, but there being more freedom and countless opportunities to move within them. Pursuant to that proposal, pedagogy should put scientific claims aside, and the educational process would start from multiple references without the result in sight, an education that involves the learner, the teacher, and relations linked with life. The fields of knowledge would be open and borderless, but there would be horizons.

For this, both school and teachers must demystify mistakes and adjustments (since error can be signs of wisdom and logic) and transmute education and listen to the most disregarded sections of the population. From this perspective, teachers' knowledge must be valued, as should learners'. We must seek to build teaching-learning not upon the foundations of order and obedience, but upon a changing world, one embracing of diversity and invention.

After all, is it possible to use the PCNs as "parameter" and to reflect upon them?

One can always think that the PCNs brought some innovation^{xix} and they can be used as tools for analysis and discussion, but they must be combined with reflection. In view of enhancing the students' historical and social knowledge, and the reflective analysis thereof, as all knowledge (like sex education itself) is tied with the context of society, and is no stranger to time and culture. Looking at the history of sex education we see a whole structure of techniques of political and social control, and perhaps, by understanding that history, we may attempt to feint such control. And, as Foucault underlines, this is also where resistance is located.

ⁱThe curricula in Brazil (*Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais* - PCNs) indicates that transversal topics, like sex, should be taught in an integrated manner, continuously and systematically, incorporated by existing areas and the educational work conducted in schools

ⁱⁱ We consider that "Sex" refers to a person's biological status and is typically categorized as male, female, or intersex (i.e., atypical combinations of features that usually distinguish male from female). There are a number of indicators of biological sex, including sex chromosomes, gonads, internal reproductive organs, and external genitalia. And "Gender" refers to the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex. Behavior that is compatible with cultural expectations is referred to as gender-normative; behaviors that are viewed as incompatible with these expectations constitute gender non-conformity (APA, 2012a)

ⁱⁱⁱ Contrary to this thought, according to Apa, agreed that "Gender identity" refers to "one's sense of oneself as male, female, or transgender". When one's gender identity and biological sex are not congruent, the individual may identify as transsexual or as another transgender category. "Sexual orientation" refers to the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted. Categories of sexual orientation typically have included attraction to members of one's own sex (gay men or lesbians), attraction to members of the other sex (heterosexuals), and attraction to members of both sexes (bisexuals).

^{iv} For example, one of the reasons provided by eugenicists for the backwardness of Brazilian society is its complex and plural ethnic composition. Consequently, they support racist solutions (as the sterilisation of the black and the poor population), in the name of science. Thus, eugenics had strong anti-Semite intents that envisaged fighting social deviations, through discrimination against homosexuals, juvenile offenders, the mentally ill and alcoholics.

^v Rules which exceed the boundaries of the subjects that have always been taught at schools and that include topics like sexuality in school.

^{vi} Sexual orientation is already a term used by the APA (2012a) for refers to the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted.

^{vii} They explain it as follows: "The approach to the body as a matrix of sexuality envisages giving students knowledge and the respect for one's own body and the fundamentals about the *care* that requires *health services*. The discussion about gender sets the stage for questioning the strict parts that men and women are expected to play in society, the value of both and the flexibilization of such parts. The work towards the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases/AIDS enables the dissemination of updated *scientific information* about ways to *prevent these diseases*. It must also combat discrimination of which HIV and AIDS patients are victims in view of promoting youth preventive behaviour" (BRASIL, 1997a, p. 15, our italics).

^{viii} As Foucault clarifies (1975), essential disciplinary techniques became widespread, as if intending to cover the entire social body; detailed techniques that established a certain form of political and detailed investment in the body, hereby controlling society.

^{ix} This is the part that is most expanded in the PCNs, pushing into second place gender, infant sexuality and homosexuality issues.

^x This is based on research by the DataFolha Institute, conducted in ten Brazilian capitals and published in June 1993, concluding that 86% interviewees were in favour of including "Sex Orientation" in school curricula (Brazil, 1997b, p. 5).

^{xi} Galindo (2004) also subscribes to this.

^{xii} The transversal topics are mostly tackled in the form of pedagogical projects.

^{xiii} Which does not mean that teachers only work from the perspective of biology, but this is the channel through which the topic enters schools.

^{xiv} The focus on sex education and its part in boosting educational attainment has also been outlined by Marques & Knijnik (2006), and in some of our work, like (Rabelo & Reis, 2007)..

^{xv} The teacher training colleges (*Institutos Superiores de Educação, ISE*) are institutions that educate teachers, which were created in Brazil in 1996 by the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases* act and were the object of plenty of discussion among supporters and critics.

^{xvi} Advisors, directors, supervisors, psychologists, psycho-pedagogues, researchers and other professionals who work in schools are authorised to research and discuss their speciality and they often enjoy a higher status than teachers.

^{xvii} According to Foucault, for example in *Microphysics of power* (1979).

^{xviii} Quite different from the proposal of the "Transversal topics" in the PCNs.

^{xix} Sayão (1996) highlights that they also brought progress to education in Brazil, since they approach substantial issues of subjectivity as relevant for school knowledge. However, teacher training has still a long way to go as far as these topics are concerned.

Reference List

- Altmann, H. (2001). Orientação sexual nos Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais [Sexual Orientation at the National Curriculum Parameters]. *Revista Estudos Feministas*, 9(2), 575-585.
- Altmann, H. (2003). A construção social da orientação sexual na escola [The social construction of sexual orientation in school]. In *26.ª Reunião Anual da ANPEd*. Poços de Caldas: Brazil.
- Alves, N. (2000). Espaço e tempo de ensinar e aprender. [Space and time to teach and learn]. In *Linguagens, espaços e tempos no ensinar e aprender*. 10.º ENDIPE. Rio de Janeiro: DP&A.
- American Psychological Association (2012a). Guidelines for psychological practice with lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients. Vol 67(1), Jan 2012, 10-42.
- American Psychological Association (2012b). *Sexuality, What is sexual orientation?* Retrieved March 29, 2012, from <http://www.apa.org/topics/sexuality/orientation.aspx>.
- Brazil. (1997a). Parâmetros curriculares nacionais: introdução aos parâmetros curriculares nacionais. [National Parameters for the Curricula: introduction to the National Parameters for the Curricula] Brasília: MEC/SEF, Secretaria de Educação Fundamental.
- Brazil. (1997b). Parâmetros curriculares nacionais: apresentação dos temas transversais, ética (Vol. 8). [National Parameters for the Curricula: presentation of cross-cutting themes, ethics (Vol. 8)]. Brasília: MEC/SEF, Secretaria de Educação Fundamental.
- Brazil. (1997c). Parâmetros curriculares nacionais: pluralidade cultural, orientação sexual (Vol. 10). [National Parameters for the Curricula: cultural diversity, sexual orientation (Vol. 10)]. Brasília: MEC/SEF, Secretaria de Educação Fundamental.
- Brazil. (2006). Sinopse do Censo dos Profissionais do Magistério da Educação Básica 2003. [Synopsis of the

- Census of Professional Teaching of Basic Education 2003] Retrieved June 01, 2007, from http://www.inep.gov.br/basica/levantamentos/outroslevantamentos/profissionais_magis/default.htm.
- Cafardo, R. (2006, March 27). Educação sexual ainda está longe da realidade das escolas. [Sex education is still far from the reality of schools]. *O Estado de São Paulo*.
- Coppete, M. C. (2003). *Currículo. (2nd. Ed.)*. [Curricula]. Florianópolis: UDESC/CEAD.
- Foucault, M. (1979). *Microfísica do Poder*. [Microphysics of power]. Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal.
- Foucault, Michel (1978), *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley, Pantheon, New York.
- Foucault, Michel (1975). *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, New York: Random House.
- Galindo, C. J. (2004). Orientação Sexual no limiar do século XXI: propostas para o 1º. Ciclo do Ensino Fundamental [Orientation on the threshold of XXI century: proposals for Elementary Education]. In *27.ª Reunião Anual da Anped*. Caxambu: Brasil.
- Gallo, S. (2000). Disciplinaridade e transversalidade [Disciplinarity and transversality]. In *Linguagens, espaços e tempos no ensinar e aprender*. 10º. ENDIPE. Rio de Janeiro: DP&A.
- Kinsey, A.C., Pomeroy, W.B., & Martin, C.E. (1948). *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male*. Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Co.
- Maranhão, H. P. (2000). A diversidade e seus sentidos nos parâmetros curriculares nacionais (5ª a 8ª séries do ensino fundamental): questões prévias. [The diversity and their meanings in National Parameters for the Curricula (5th to 8th grades of middle school): preliminaries]. Paper presented at the ANPED, Caxambu, MG, Brasil.

- Marques, L. D., & Knijnik, J. D. (2006). Interfaces entre orientação sexual e Educação Física: reflexões a partir de uma proposta de intervenção na escola pública de ensino fundamental ciclo II [Interfaces between sexual orientation and physical education: reflections from a proposal for intervention in the public schools of middle school] [Electronic Version]. http://www.efdeportes.com/Revista_Digital. Retrieved March 29, 2012, from <http://efdeportes.com/efd103/orientacion-sexual.htm>.
- Nunes, César (1997). *Desvendando a Sexualidade. (2nd Ed.)*. [Revealing Sexuality]. Campinas: Papirus, 1997.
- Otranto, C. R. (1999). A Universidade Rural e a discussão sobre os Institutos Superiores de Educação. [The Rural University and the discussion of the teacher training colleges]. In *Pedagogo ou Professor*. Rio de Janeiro: Quartet.
- Pan American Health Organization-PAHO, World Health Organization- WHO, & World Association for Sexology-WAS (2000). *Promotion of Sexual Health: Recommendations for Action*. Antigua Guatemala.
- Pereira, G. R. (2010). Decursos Educativos e Conhecimentos para uma Educação Sexual Emancipatória Intencional. [Educational paths and knowledge for an intentional emancipatory sexual education] *Revista Linhas, 11*, 36-52.
- Pereira, G. R. (2007) Desenvolvimento de um Programa de Intervenção Psicopedagógico de Suporte à Criança Infectada pelo VIH. 286p. Tese de Doutorado em Ciências da Educação, Universidade de Aveiro, Aveiro.
- Rabelo, A. O., & Reis, M. A. (2007). Educação e Sexualidade: elos promotores do sucesso escolar. [Education and Sexuality: links promoters of school success]. *IX Congresso da Sociedade Portuguesa de Ciências da Educação*. Funchal: Portugal.
- Reis, M. A. (1992). *A sexualidade, o ensino de ciências e saúde nas escolas pública pela busca do exercício da cidadania*

- [Sexuality, the teaching of science and health in public schools in the pursuit of citizenship]. (Master's thesis).UFF, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
- Reis, M. A. (1998). Educação Sexual nos PCNs: o feitiço e os feiticeiros. [Sex Education in PCNs: the spell, and sorcerers] In *21ª Reunião da ANPED*. Caxambu; Brasil.
- Reis, M. A. (1999). *(Re)Invenção da Escola Pública: A Sexualidade e a Formação Continuada dos Jovens Professores*. [(Re) Invention of the Public School: Sexuality And The Young Teacher Training] Projeto de pesquisa. Rio de Janeiro: UNIRIO.
- Reis, M. A. (2002) - *(Re)Invenção da Escola Pública: Sexualidade E Formação Da Jovem Professora* [(Re) Invention of the Public School: Sexuality And The Woman Young Teacher Training] (Doctoral dissertation). UFF, Niterói, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
- Reis, M. A. (2012) Brincadeiras Infantis Sexualizadas: Um Turbilhão de Emoções à Serviço da Ordem. [Sexualized play Kids: A Whirlwind of Emotions in the Service Order]. Reis, M. A., & Alevato, H. (Ed.) In *Nexus & Sexus na Educação: Perspectivas Instituintes* (pp.89-126). Petrópolis: Editora DePetrus.
- Sayão, Y. (1996). A Orientação Sexual nos Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais. [Sexual Orientation in the National Curriculum]. *Boletim GTPOS - Grupo de Trabalho e Pesquisa em Orientação Sexual*, 8.
- Tardif, M., Lessard, C., & Lahaye, L. (1991). Os professores face ao saber - Esboço de uma problemática do saber docente. [Teachers meet to learn - Sketch of a problem of teacher knowledge]. *Revista Teoria e Educação*, 4.
- Uberti. (2000). A Sujeição moral do infantil-cidadão no currículo nacional. [The Subjection moral of citizen child in the national curriculum]. *23ª Reunião Anual da Anped* Caxambu: Brazil.

Authors' bios

Amanda Rabelo

Professor Doctor of UFF. Post-doctorate in Education, in Coimbra University. PH.D. at Educational Sciences by the Aveiro University (2009), master's at Social Memory by the UNIRIO (2004) and Degree in Pedagogia by the UNIRIO (2000). Has experience in Education (elementary teacher and higher education teacher), acting and published several articles on the following subjects: teacher' training, professional choice and history of education.

Graziela Raupp Pereira

Professor Doctor off UDESC. PhD in Educational Sciences by the University of Aveiro (2007), Specialized in Clinical Psychopedagogy by the University of South Santa Catarina (2003) and Degree in Pedagogy Educational Habilitation and Orientation by the University of the State of Santa Catarina (2001), is Post-Doctorate in Education, under contract do the University of the State of Santa Catarina/Brasil, with projects regarding Teacher Training and Sexual Education.

Maria Amélia Gomes de Souza Reis

has completed a bachelor in Natural History followed by a Master, Doctorate and Post-Doctorate in Educational Sciences. Is director of Fundacentro, Assistant Professor in UNIRIO, Researcher of CEISXX, associated in projects with Coimbra University and Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (FIOCRUZ/ENSP). She teaches courses in Education and Science, where she focuses on interdisciplinary and cross-cutting issues (sexuality, cultures) and teacher training. She held positions in numerous public institutions including: President of State Counselling Education Commission, undersecretary of the State Education, Coordinator of Distance Education, Director of the faculty of Education and ONU counsellor for the School of Sexual Education Studies. She invests in university extension,

research and didactic teaching in sciences, ethnic/racial education, sexuality, gender and socio educative actions. She has published instructional books in Natural Sciences (present and distance), chapters and articles written in English.

António Gomes Ferreira

PH.D. at Science Education by Coimbra University, Sub director of "Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação - FPCE" (of Coimbra University), Editor of "Revista Portuguesa de Pedagogia", editorials commissions member of various academic journal nationals e internationals.