

Male and Female Gender in Teaching: Between the Will to Progress and the Wish to teach Well- a Comparative Study of Portugal and Brazil

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Abstract

This paper introduces the results of a situational analysis that correlates the desire to teach with the wish to progress in the teaching career. This paper is based on reference literature, official data, as well as surveys, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews that we carried out with teachers. This study is based on the research findings on the male teacher figure working in public primary education in Portugal and Brazil. It envisages ascertaining the reasons and consequences of the professional choice to work in an area normally associated with women. Our findings - which are still partial - have highlighted the contingency of gender issues throughout the individual training process of the researched teachers, either arising from the school culture or from the culture underpinning their training. In this sense, the representations show “areas” occupied by both genders socially: men - either by pressure or privilege – tend to occupy the most prestigious positions in education; women, on the other hand, have assumed the added value of educating better or more widely. However, today still, in our Western societies, men continue to enjoy a dominant position, although the picture is changing in

certain areas of knowledge and work. Thus, the challenge of this research was to understand - from a gender perspective - some of the problems related to personal, social and professional training of teaching staff who are currently working in our schools. The objective is to obtain a differentiated narrative for the formation of teachers, including gender issues.

Keywords: *Teacher education; Gender; Teacher Employment; comparative study.*

Hombres y Mujeres en la Enseñanza: Entre la Voluntad de Progresar y el Deseo de Enseñar Bien- Un Estudio Comparativo de Portugal y Brasil

Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de un análisis situacional que correlaciona el deseo de enseñar con el deseo de progresar en la carrera docente. Este artículo es basado en literatura de referencia, datos oficiales, así como encuestas, cuestionarios y entrevistas semiestructuradas que realizamos con los docentes. Este estudio se basa en los resultados de la investigación sobre la figura del docente masculino que trabaja en la educación primaria pública en Portugal e Brasil. Prevé determinar los motivos y las consecuencias de la elección profesional de trabajar en un área normalmente asociada con las mujeres. Nuestros hallazgos, que aún son parciales, han resaltado la contingencia de los problemas de género en todo el proceso de capacitación individual de los docentes investigados, ya sea que surjan de la cultura escolar o de la cultura que sustenta su capacitación. En consecuencia, las representaciones muestran "áreas" ocupadas por ambos géneros socialmente: los hombres, ya sea por presión

o por privilegio, tienden a ocupar los puestos más prestigiosos en educación; las mujeres, por otro lado, han asumido el valor agregado de educar mejor o más ampliamente. Sin embargo, aún hoy, en nuestras sociedades occidentales, los hombres continúan disfrutando de una posición dominante, aun que la imagen está cambiando en ciertas áreas del conocimiento y el trabajo. Por lo tanto, el desafío de esta investigación fue comprender, desde una perspectiva de género, algunos de los problemas relacionados con la capacitación personal, social y profesional del personal docente que actualmente trabaja en nuestras escuelas. El propósito es posiblemente obtener una narrativa diferente para la formación del profesorado, incluyendo cuestiones de género.

Palabras clave: *Formación del Profesor; Género; Empleo Docente; estudio comparativo.*

1. Introduction

This study is based on the research findings on the male teacher figure working in public primary education. It envisages ascertaining the reasons and consequences of the professional choice to work in an area normally associated with women.

The idea is to discuss their choice to teach, based on gender representations in the educational field, while showing that there are individuals with teaching skills and capacities, regardless of sex, but who also endure teaching problems due to both gender issues and factors inherent to any teacher.

Our study focuses on the analysis of the motivations underlying career choice of male teachers working in public primary schools in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (RJ-BR), and in Aveiro, Portugal (PT-AV), based on questionnaires and interviews addressed to these teachers. We conducted semi-structured narrative interviews with six teachers chosen at random from a sample of 209 teachers in public education who had previously answered the questionnaire (objective and subjective) (60 from Aveiro District (Portugal) and 149 from the Rio de Janeiro State (Brazil)).

We note that the representations associated with the "allegedly female attributes", as well as other factors such as low financial and social status, (have) influenced greatly the career choice of respondents, who have chosen to work in this field which is highly feminized (the percentage of female primary teachers is very high compared with that of male primary school teachers). For the purpose of this analysis, we tackle several issues, starting with the wish to leave the teaching profession. Regarding this, however, we have proven that the interviews and the underlying reasoning point, on the contrary, to the strong focus on career progression, particularly in the area of educational leadership and/or in other segments of education.

As there were and still are few studies on the male teacher study, little present in primary education (see Rabelo, 2016) this study becomes important to demystify the representations that this is an area that would have the need for female attributes, fitting to emphasize that this feminization was an international phenomenon, but that it also had influences of thought since the colonization of Brazil by Portugal, so this study is also justified so that it also motivates gender equality policies in the profession.

The search for social recognition creates divisions. Rabelo (2016) points out that there exists a hierarchical distinction between the different professionals based on the division between care and teaching, involved with gender, sexuality issues, including the feminization of teaching. We have seen that this division also exists within all levels of education as a whole and we argue that at all levels of education, including elementary school, there also exists integration between caring and educating.

In addition, Rabelo (2016) states that initial and continuous training of teachers has not taken care of gender and sexuality issues, nor considered existing social binomials, like the separation between caring and educating, reason and emotion, common sense and science, men and women, theory and practice, which involve an over-evaluation of one of the elements of these dichotomies. That has severe consequences, for how are the teachers supposed to boost or teach this topic if they do not discuss it first-hand and overcome their own prejudice?

Some studies (see for example Reis, 2002) show that teachers, when questioned about gender and sexuality, show a lack of information and preparation about these issues. It must be noted that we define sexuality according to PAHO/WHO (2000), which includes: gender (values, attitudes, roles or cultural

characteristics based on biological gender); sexual and gender identity; sexual desire orientation; eroticism; emotional link (establishment of bonds with other human beings through emotions); sexual activity and practices; sexual relations and sexual behavior.

As foreseen in other studies (Araújo, 2000; Sarmiento, 2002; Williams, 1995; Yannoulas, 2001), that lack of information in teachers can lead to gender-based prejudice about the teaching profession; for example, that men are unable to take care of children and that only women have the required qualities for the profession, such as patience, affection and sensitivity, and the opposite also, that women do not have the capacity to command, so men are better in this area. In light of all this, it is necessary to discuss these issues and disclose them to teachers in order for them to understand better the gender and sexuality issues in life and pedagogical practice, because they are always present in a school context and in contact with all aspects of teaching functions.

2. Desire to leave teaching and professional aspirations

According to our research, on average, only 51% of male primary teachers in RJ-BR intend to continue teaching, compared to a higher number in AV-PT: 74%. The number of unsatisfied professionals is even higher among younger teachers, especially under those under the age of 29. In this age group only 41% aspire to continue in the profession in RJ-BR and in AV-PT 62% wish to go on teaching.

However, among the large number of primary teachers who revealed the intention to give up their profession, a minority intends to switch to another profession, aspiring to work in another area outside of education (5% of teachers in AV-PT and 14% in RJ -BR).

In the scenario studied, most male primary teachers do not intend to go on teaching, but they do wish to continue working in the general field of education in their countries: in RJ-BR, the majority (32%) want to be a teacher of higher education (another large group aspires to becoming post-primary teachersⁱ), and in AV-PT most (45%) want to be post-primary teachers. However, other areas are envisaged, such as education administration sectors.

One interviewee (RJ-BR) criticized the pay gap between primary and post-primary level teachers, which helps shed some light on the issue. In RJ-BR the primary education teacher is paid an hourly rate, whereas other teachers receive per lesson (which is less than an hour, usually 50 minutes). Moreover, in post-primary levels teachers work less hours (22 hours for primary teachers and 16 hours for post-primary). Furthermore, the same interviewee did not mention that primary school teachers, early in their career, also get paid less than post-primary teachers, because it is generally considered *a priori* that they do not have higher education qualifications. As a result, primary school teachers in RJ-BR aspire to becoming post-primary teachers.

Others justify their wish on the basis of greater affinity with older students or with their preference for a specific subject. In AV-PT, the fact that there are teachers who have a bachelor degree in primary education, and obtained an additional degree to teach post-primary levels can have supported their decision to leave primary school teaching; practically the same happens in RJ-BR where many primary school teachers received medium level training and later continued (or intend to continue) their studies in order to "further their career."

Braga da Cruz (1988, p. 1224) believes that the envisaged movement between educational levels is difficult to achieve, since most respondents would like to switch to teaching "more advanced students" (which is regarded as a

promotion), while the opposite direction, switching to "less advanced students", is regarded as less desirable and regression. We agree that there are probably not enough slots in the envisaged areas or segments, besides other constraints, for all who wish to climb (such as problems in completing the studies required for these positions and passing the contests for each segment). So many possibly remain unhappy.

As Fanfani (2004, p. 95) also mentions in his study of some Latin American countries, in most countries, only a minority of teachers expect to remain in their position "for the coming years." However, less than 10% of these teachers aspire in the future to performing other activities not related to education, which indicates that the absolute majority of the current faculty has a strong vocational orientation and a vested interest in their educational work. The other preferences include non-teaching activities in the strict sense in the education system, as in positions of leadership / management and other tasks in the field of education. Thus, the author mentioned above concludes that "the impression is that, given the objective structure of opportunities for advancement offered by the current teaching career, an educational professional wishing to improve their professional stance is forced to abandon his classroom work."

We also get this "impression" from the data we collected; that is despite teachers' deep desire to quit (a significant indicator of dissatisfaction), many of them want to continue working in education, although in our case most want to go on teaching, but in different levels of education. From what teachers describe in their interviews, this happens a little because it is easy to continue teaching, but mainly because they work in an area they like (teachers generally choose to work on what they like most, as described in Rabelo, 2010). However, they aspire to "progress" in their careers, which is very difficult for them in the position they occupy.

In brief, the teaching career must offer career improvement and upgrading opportunities, without forcing teachers to quit teaching (Fanfani, 2004; Gonçalves & Carvalho, 2017), which also includes the need for better salaries, so that the teaching profession may be an option for young graduates with higher academic qualifications and not only as a transitional experience. Better pay, especially early in the career, because as Jesus (2002) underscores, in Portugal the gap is proportionately wider compared to other European countries (which is also the case in Brazil).

3. Gender issues and male teachers' aspiration to career progression

Regarding the issues of male gender in teaching and the desire for professional development, another analysis can be made as mentioned by Cardoso in a survey conducted by himself (2006, p. 5):

movement in the teaching career is a trademark of male identity. Male teachers run away from literacy. During my research I noticed that men *prefer* physical education classes or education management, particularly fields which are still marked by experiences of manhood. Access to such positions available in schools seems to be easier for men than women, and they even count on the latter for this to be possible. So what we see is the reproduction of social relations of gender, in which men continue enjoying more privileges in the hierarchy of the most prestigious positions, in administrative functions of control and power allocation.

Like this author, others indicate that men enjoy privileges in the most prestigious positions of education. Williams (1995) points out that men who do "women's work" are affected by symbolic dynamics and are treated differently from women: they tend to receive special treatment during hiring, they are channeled to certain "male-specific" specialties (associated with stereotyped male qualities, like strength, technical proficiency and control), they are pressured to take on tasks that are identified as major, they earn on average

more than women in each of these occupations and are more represented in management positions (stereotypes of femininity leave women out of these positions and stereotypes of manhood are used to defend the trend of hiring only men for administrative positions). This is a gender issue that must be analyzed: for women to have disadvantages in the labour market, men must have advantages, i.e., beliefs about gender hinder women's opportunities and enhance men's occupational success.

Bertelli (2006, p. 5-6) also mentions that "women's work" is tagged as being uninteresting by nature as far as wages are concerned, which makes it unattractive to men". This weighs negatively between available and possible career opportunities. (Some even argue that women should not have paid professional work as a necessity and that women's inferior position in the social structure of gender is what created this link with unattractive pay for jobs held typically by women.) Having said this, due to these gender issues, some narratives suggest that the positions of power and leadership should be occupied by men (because women "are not good at them"), even when women are larger in number in the profession.

Pincinato (2004, p. 7) explains, similarly, also through field research, how teaching acquired feminine meanings throughout its history:

according to the reports collected in this research, the responsibility felt by men in this profession is even greater. Not only because teaching is a profession where the majority of the professionals are, in fact, women, but also because it was not socially valued, salaries are low and bears the prejudice against individuals who allegedly chose to become teachers because they did not have the skills to perform any other activity which would confer greater prestige. [...] Such representations are confronted therefore with the set of attitudes usually awarded to men, like being powerful, brave, and obtaining success and recognition.

Thus, as the author shows, male teachers may feel the need to assert themselves as men, since they hold feminized jobs, without prestige and that pay poorly. This need is usually turned into strategies. According to the author, one such strategy is the search for the positions that offer higher pay and status, which in representations are regarded as most appropriate for male professionals, because in them men exercise greater authority and earn more respect from students and staff. Finally, gender stereotypes led to this search for senior positions, making them more "powerful" (Pincinato, 2004, p. 7-9).

The percentage of male primary teachers in administrative positions is slightly higher than the number of them teaching in primary schools both in AV-PT and in RJ-BR. In AV-PT men account for about 10.8% of all teachers in public education. In the administrative, or non-teaching, areas of this segment, on the other hand, the school had 17.7% male teachers. In RJ-BR, male teachers accounted for about 2% of all practicing teachers in public education, whereas in the administrative areas of the school 2.6% of the staff was male.

We also calculated the ratio of "teachers in primary education occupying administrative functions in schools", against the "total number of teachers teaching in primary schools." In AV-PT there were 9.7% women and 15% men, and in RJ-BR 28.55% were women and 33.08% men. This percentage shows that, despite the smaller number of male teachers who previously taught in primary schools and currently occupy non-teaching posts, proportionately, men still enjoy advantages when competing for these positions.

However, the ratio is no longer that "overwhelming." Catani, Bueno and Sousa (2000, p. 48) even outline that the picture portrayed by Demartin and Antunes (1993) - that women are mostly teaching while the majority of men occupy the top positions in the bureaucratic hierarchy - does not match entirely the reality

of our education systems. In fact, currently, there are less and less men in these settings (which is also mentioned in other countries, like the Netherlands, by Driessen, 2007). Pincinato (2004) indicates that this trend towards the feminisation of administrative career had already been pointed out in São Paulo since the 1970s. Moreover, Vianna (2002) notes that currently 90.1% of these positions (directors, coordinators and supervisors) are held by women. Although in Brazil the ministers of education have been almost exclusively men (and the highest offices in education are occupied by a large percentage of men), most school managers are women. We also realize that there is a big difference in the origin of these managers for a particular segment, since according to the Education Census (Brazil, 2006, p. 40), about 27% of teachers in RJ-BR (from all segments) perform non-teaching functions.

In Portugal, most school managers who left teaching did not come from primary education levels and are men (Batista & Costa, 2007; Pestana & Martins, 2007). In 1988 the Braga da Cruz report (1988, p. 1231) stated that "despite the overwhelming majority of female teachers in pre and primary education, managerial duties in these levels of education are mostly performed by men (66.4% v. 54.8%)." However, Lume (2006, p. 408) outlines a gradual increase in women applying to "inspection offices" (more visible from the 1970s onwards). He also notes that women currently account for 44% of all inspectors. In addition to male teachers being in advantage when accessing prestigious positions, some authors report that they are "pressured" to "progress in their career". As, for example, Williams (1995, p. 12) states, some men who prefer to work in predominantly female professions are relentlessly pressured into "moving" and they must strive to remain in the lower levels of their professions. Demartin and Antunes (1993) describe that male primary school teachers (until the mid-twentieth century) received many invitations for promotions, sometimes coercive (often without holding any specializations, as was required

of women). Besides, they had spent less time in the classroom. Anyway, despite this being a female profession, men held teaching jobs in the Regular Schools, they were education network managers, school group directors and the intellectuals who discussed educational trends.

However, male teachers' strategies and the pressure to move up the career ladder are not only associated with administrative careers and of power. Men teachers also aspire to or are pressured into teaching more advanced student levels.

As noted above, these are the preferences of respondents who intend to leave primary school education, but most of our interviewees were not entirely in tune, although they also had their views.

Vinícius (RJ-BR) mentions that he is afraid of teaching young children, because he is too "clumsy" (but he cannot choose, because seniority is one of the selection criteria and he is the youngest teacher in the school). Nonetheless, he does not have preferences (although he does know a teacher who prefers to teach the last two grades of primary education). Paulo, (AV-PT) if he could choose, he would prefer to not teach the first grade. Roberto (RJ-BR) recalls that at the beginning he preferred the final years, "for chauvinist reasonsⁱⁱⁱ", but the school director gave him a literacy class as if to test him and he loved it. Never again did he prefer to teach older students.

André (RJ-BR), José (AV-PT) and Joaquim (AV-PT) showed no preference for one or other levels. However, the latter (AV-PT) notes that women might prefer some subjects; while men might rather teach Maths, women prefer Portuguese language, because most women teachers studied humanities and stopped

studying maths very early in their training; consequently, they are attracted to teaching Portuguese.

Sayão (2005, p. 138) describes that while the school directors try to, beforehand, remove these men from the classroom, it is also common to submit male teachers to tests or "ritual examinations" to see if these men are fit for female occupations, which is usually done by awarding them the younger or more undisciplined classes (although some women teachers are also submitted to these tests), as was the case of teacher Roberto.

Only after passing this "Rite of Passage", and being collectively approved by the women, are these teachers considered as such, and gender (which initially identified and marked relationships) is gradually put in perspective by the experience gained and their adherence or not to the culture. Only then can they break with the institutional culture, seeking to "be different" and choosing their own path in the profession.

Yet, as Williams (1995) argues, most jobs in the prestigious and best-paid specialties of "female occupations" are held by men. But besides administrative or management work, primary school teachers typically teach older classes and offer support to training in education.

Carvalho (1998, p. 14-15) indicates that almost all respondents said they had been pressured into ascending in their careers, whether by teaching higher grades or by occupying management positions. Almost all had planned to leave primary school in the future, even the ones who felt committed to the children. Most justified this desire with economic needs, but also manifested the will to leave the classroom, the lack of time and the attraction to a new activity. The

only teacher who did not mention this plan had three different jobs, which made up for economic issues.

Most teachers we interviewed, either have a sideline to teaching or wish to have one, although none intend to leave primary education. We also observed pressures described by the interviewees. Teacher Vinicius (RJ-BR) has been away from classroom teaching once to perform pedagogical coordination (since this was considered to be the best role for this teacher). Roberto (RJ-BR) received some invitations to assume administrative and coordination positions, André (RJ-BR) also received several calls, Paulo (AV-PT) was appointed the teachers' representative at meetings and class coordinator. Respondents from AV-PT also note that parents prefer them, because they are men and are, therefore, deemed better disciplinarians.

However, as Sarmiento (2002, p. 12-13) analyses "it is always the social actor, in this case each educator, who takes the initiative to seek other alternatives, however, without breaking completely from the field of educating young children." In other words, combining teaching with other activities (administrative, teaching also in another levels or other non-teaching functions) are strategies "for asserting themselves in the professional group, [...] while showing that they are different from the majority", they "are ways of saying that they are without actually being".

We also believe that these are ways of trying to distance themselves from prejudice, criticism, dissatisfaction, low pay and status, among others. However, many teachers reaffirm the prejudice they endure and the gender representations that produce negative or positive pressure.

4. Representations of men and women's teaching skills

When asked "Who is better suited for teaching primary levels", respondents and interviewees surprised us with their answers; although the majority of answers indicate indifference towards fitness by gender, a few male teachers (mainly in RJ-BR) found that women were better suited for primary teaching, although a few claimed that men were better.

However, many who stated that skills were irrelevant to gender continued to trace in their answers separation by gender (e.g. women are allegedly motherly, loving, while men are paternal, controlling and professional), which confirms that men in traditionally female occupations are not always devoid of prejudice (even the ones who manage to overcome difficulties and discrimination) and sometimes support hegemonic masculinity to assert their masculinity and competence.

Such answers express are "gender-biased" as far as the necessary/desirable teaching skills are concerned. Some statements we will discuss next.

4.1 Men are more professional and control children better

Some of the inquired teachers showed explicitly that men are favoured in primary education, because they are disciplinarian, and have more authority, control, and professionalism than women (the "fearful" father figure). Besides, some argue that children need a male figure.

As described by Carvalho (1998, p. 12), instating discipline is an assertion of manhood. Yet although in Brazil authority has been associated naturally with men (confirming their masculinity), when exercised by women (even physically) it does not involve contradictions, because the latter are even

socially connected with the maternal role, and care and femininity models, so they are found to play a very natural part in teacher-child relations.

Other male teachers attach some of schools' current issues to the characteristics of the female teachers (such as sensitivity and affection); they find that men enjoy more autonomy / independence, control / authority, professionalism, courage, and (even) affection in their teaching practice than women.

This information (except for the feelings that men are more affectionate) match Cardoso's findings that men teachers "are setting differences, manufacturing the other through their representations," which is inconsistent with the assertion that a teacher's work is independent of his/ her sex, because the difference awarded to teaching practice by men and women revealed that "although in the mind men and women are regarded as equals, in practice men teachers still regard themselves as different to women teachers" (Cardoso, 2006, p. 3-4).

As Williams explains (1995), men holding "female" jobs often redefine their position in such jobs as masculine to legitimize their occupation thereof. Generally, they support the presence of men in these professions, which does not always mean replacing the traditional distinctions of gender, because in several explanations they use gender stereotypes to justify the inclusion of more men and provide several reasons for this: the enhancement of male culture in the school (men are needed for the special qualities they bring to teaching practice, they have more authority, they bring different opinions, they tackle certain areas better, due to their paternal function), social reasons related to improving society (more men help deconstruct gender stereotypes), professional reasons linked to status and pay.

Sarmiento (2002, p. 12) also describes male pre-primary schoolteachers, noting that, often, they adopt an ambivalent discourse as a strategy of assertion:

they emphasize they are happy they are educators, but [...] they find that it would be very useful to have a more evenly heterogeneous group to improve the organizational climate of institutions and to foster professional development in 'more scientific' ways.

These male teachers do not always add male attributes to teaching practice, nor make certain activities easier. For example, Sayão (2005, p. 261) does not prove that male teachers in early childhood education foster greater involvement and appreciation of body movements and games, mainly because the intense day of work and fatigue would not allow it.

We know that there are historical-social-cultural differences in the roles and positions held by men and women, but the very assertion of such differences, in most cases, leads to an exaltation of male superiority and female inferiority. It is necessary to reflect, as Welzer-Lang (2001, p. 461) indicates, that we should even question the concept of inequality, because it tends to show men and women status as neutral products; but rather the inequalities experienced by women are produced by the advantages that men enjoy, i.e. through equality men will always have less than they have.

Therefore, Catani, Bueno and Sousa's (2000) analyses are correct: male narratives about the teaching profession, often, rather than denaturalizing masculinity, reinforce the representations of male leadership, that students respect more the male figure, who enjoys more authority. However, these were not the only representations we found.

4.2 Women are the best teachers because they are sensitive / patient / caring or motherly

In our study, in the assessment by the players surveyed, not only do male teachers consider themselves better teachers, but we also find the opposite, i.e. men who believe women are better at teaching.

The teachers surveyed, who indicated women as better suited professionals for teaching, gave similar reasons for this, namely that skills are indifferent to gender. These answers highlight "feminine" characteristics essential for teaching, such as sensitivity, patience, kindness, dedication, attention, gentleness, affection or motherly features.

Many of the men teachers inquired believe that teaching is a female profession and / or is better performed by women; statements by teachers from both AV-PT and BR-RJ are very similar in nature and reasoning. One might ask then what makes a man choose and pursue this profession if he does not believe that it can be performed by men? Do men not have the features that were praised?

4.3 Women are better at teaching certain segments/cycles

The "maternal side" has sometimes been linked to a particular grade / level of schooling which would be more appropriate. Some teachers even said they prefer a particular segment / cycle (such as kindergarten or first grades of primary education), because they believe that they are more suitable for women and require a "maternal gift".

According to Williams (1995), men working in female professions and who highlight the alleged male features of the job strategically opt to teach higher grades that suit better the "natural way of men". As highlighted by Carvalho (1998, p. 11) "the dividing line between what would suit men" and what is

female can vary, dropping to pre-school or even to nursery depending on each teacher's performance level". We realized then that some of our interviewees and respondents believe women have the best professional profile for early childhood education; other men, however, found they performed better in the early years of primary education. Thus, interviewees and respondents produce all kinds of reasons and separate what is male and female in each educational stage.

4.4 Men and women each have their gender role

Throughout the study, several and different postulations by interviewees suggested that each sex plays its gender role, pointing out that there is need for both men and women in teaching, because individual characteristics, such as sensitivity, patience, affection versus control / authority, professionalism, autonomy, are essential in the profession.

Such reasoning combines the two explanations, i.e. that which praise men or exalt women as top professionals, analyzing the fact from the perspective of the suitability of each gender for the profession, while focusing on the importance of seeking gender-specific skills inherent to childhood teaching and learning.

Catani, Bueno and Sousa (2000) also found this division between exalted/ relevant features of male teachers. Favero and Salgado (2006) concluded in their research (with male and female teachers, higher education students and the fathers / mothers of primary school children) that these characteristics were associated with both male and female teachers.

Again we ask: can we not find such features in both sexes?

We agree with Williams (1995) when he analyzes that adopting a kind of "multi-culturalist" perspective, in which men and women have different views / skills and both should be represented in these professions, does not always mean that the traditional gender distinctions are replaced. Some ideas for integrating men in female occupations may result in less gender stereotypes, but others use stereotypes to justify the recruitment of more men. Thus, these arguments (and men in female occupations), ironically, instead of increasing gender equality can perpetuate it.

4.5 To teach one must have female attributes: "vocation", a profile or "innate" skills

Many male teachers find that to teach it is necessary to have a "calling" or an "innate" skill / profile. This statement alone is not gender-biased, because Catani, Bueno and Sousa (2000, p. 58) state in their research that in the case of men "it is not until the profession has been chosen that the discourse of "vocation" and excellence in teaching arises and not before that, as in the case of women, as if it were a natural destiny". We cannot, however, confirm this statement in the course of this research, so we just wish to underscore that this issue should be better analyzed.

We do not deny, however, that there must be a skill for teaching, but we emphasize that to state this without further analysis can conceal the representation that teaching is a female profession and / or calls for female attributes.

One must be careful about this statement, because it may encompass a contradiction in relation to the calling for teaching, often associated with allegedly female qualities, which consequently only a woman could have (with rare exceptions), as Cardoso analyzes (2006, p. 5):

Although professionals are appointed and they do not accept the representation of the feminisation of their work, male teachers continue invoking references to calling, mother, and wife linked to teaching by women in schools. Thus, the characteristics historically assigned to men and women continue to be used by male teachers.

Concluding, in order to change gender representations in the teaching profession, male and female teachers should not distinguish male and female features, to avoid gender-specific features and vocations.

4.6 Gender-independent skills - power, love, dedication, commitment, professionalism and training is what matters

Although there are explanations that still segregate gender in the teaching career, as we saw in the previous point, most of the interviewees and respondents' answers clarified the need for a choice based on taste / interest / love (including for children), without gender-specific aptitude. Many also claim that quality in teaching depends on the individual, good training, skills, professionalism, dedication, responsibility and commitment.

This reasoning suggests that there are male teachers who go beyond the social differentiation between gender and believe that there are no gender-specific jobs. On the contrary, all it takes is to love the profession, undergo training, engage in it, commit to it and seek competence in what we do.

One explanation provided by an interviewee in this sense underlines that times have changed and that it no longer makes sense to divide the teaching profession by gender. Teacher José (VA-PT) adapts this analysis to another reality to "transpose today's slightly less male chauvinist thinking" and says that in the past (20, 30 years ago) it was almost unthinkable for a husband to come home from work and help the wife. Today, house chores, in almost every home

are shared. In José's home he cooks, his wife does the washing, the children make the beds and help with the cleaning.

Thus, as Carvalho points out (1998, p. 17), the idealized image of the "new man", widely disclosed in the media in recent years, is still contradictory. In addition, these male teachers do fit entirely into the idealized model, and generally they did not seek teaching as a form of contesting the hegemonic standard of masculinity, not even as a way to convey to students, new models (of men who care for children without losing their masculinity), but:

By sticking to the career and seeking reasons for their choices, these men are certainly also introducing contradictions and redefining practices and behaviours [...] They are showing that there are, in men's personality, features which the common sense regards as feminine. In conservative social contexts in which the division of roles and functions by gender is extremely rigid, these attitudes are certainly innovative and represent waves of change (Carvalho, 1998, p. 18).

Finally, although the representations that we quote in the paragraphs above do exist and we know that the strategies to keep their masculinity (usually insisting on their difference from women) make men in non-traditional occupations support hegemonic masculinity (Williams, 1995), in these explanations about the irrelevance of gender applied to teaching skills (which were most of the answers), we realize that these teachers are introducing contradictions and redefining gender relations; these men are in school rethinking the parts men and women play in professions.

5. Final remarks

Most male teachers who participated in this survey said they like teaching, yet they want to "develop in the career" in both financial and social matters, so most of them still aspire to leaving primary teaching practice, because they

experience prejudice or wish to improve their social status (men are considered incapable of dealing with primary school children, so teaching “more advanced pupils” is regarded by society as a promotion, as is holding management/administrative functions). For this reason, it is necessary to demystify these biased gender representations, but it is also crucial that the teaching career offer progression opportunities, improved wages and working conditions, without forcing teachers to abandon teaching practice.

This wish to "climb the career ladder" can be analysed according to gender, because men enjoy privileges in the most prestigious positions in education. This can be explained by the representations in society, according to which men do not have the ability to deal with children and would be more disciplining and authoritarian (actually relevant features for occupying positions of leadership and for teaching youth and older children), as well as representations which of men as unfit for teaching young children, because they could be "dangerous" or unable to teach them due to the lack of sensitivity / affection.

Such representations still pressure, albeit less strongly than previously, male teachers into leaving primary teaching. Thus, we understand that the need for asserting one's masculinity in a feminized profession, without prestige and that pays little, can become strategies of assertion, for example, the search for occupying more prestigious and better paid positions, which are predominantly regarded as better suited for male professionals, and grant greater respect, authority and power. In other words, gender stereotypes may create pressure and increase demand for senior positions.

Men's advantage in the teaching profession is that it is easier for them to hold leadership positions in education. Case in point is the higher percentage, proportionally speaking, of male teachers who occupy such positions, compared

to women, although the latter are reversing this trend, both in AV-PT and in RJ-BR.

Our results show the contingency of gender issues throughout the process of individual training of the researched teachers, whether arising from the school or from the culture underpinning their training. In this sense, the representations of the interviewees and respondents show that, considering the "places" occupied by both genders socially, men - either by pressure or privilege – still occupy the most prestigious positions in education. Women, on the other hand, are regarded as carrying the added value of educating better or more widely.

However, today still, in our Western societies, men continue to enjoy a dominant position, although the picture is changing in certain areas of knowledge and work. Thus, the challenge of this research was to understand - from a gender perspective - some of the problems related to personal, social and professional training of teaching staff who are currently working in our schools. The goal is to obtain a different narrative for teacher training.

Notes

ⁱ Post-primary teachers are teachers who work with specific subjects (Portuguese, mathematics, history, among others) and not in mono-teaching as the teacher of the 1st. to the 5th. year that works with all subjects for a class.

ⁱⁱ The teacher in his interview mentioned this term because he considered that he had prejudiced reasons against taking classes with younger ages that would be more suitable for women.

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