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THE CHALLENGES OF DEALING WITH SEXUALITY ISSUES BY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

OS DESAFIOS DO TRATO COM AS QUESTÕES DA SEXUALIDADE POR PARTE DE DOCENTES DA EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL

LOS DESAFÍOS DEL ABORDAJE DE LAS CUESTIONES DE LA SEXUALIDAD POR LOS DOCENTES DE LA EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL

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Abstract: Early Childhood Education - defined as the first stage of Basic Education in the Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education, Law number 9,394 - works with children aged from 0 to 5 years old, who are all citizens with rights. In this perspective, it is understood that addressing the theme of sexuality in Early Childhood Education is fundamental for the safety of children. However, to address this topic, scientific knowledge about sexuality issues needs to be guaranteed to educators. Therefore, this article aims to analyze the challenges of dealing with sexuality issues by Early Childhood Education teachers. The specific objectives were: to investigate the conceptions of sexuality in their conceptual, historical, and cultural aspects; explain the debates surrounding sexuality in the context of Early Childhood Education; and problematize the challenges faced by educators regarding issues of sexuality in the current situation. The methodology used was a bibliographic and documentary review. The results showed that in a modern and innovative world, with several possibilities arising from the increasing presence of technology in everyone's lives, discussing childhood sexual education still remains a subject that is often denied and, almost always, judged as inappropriate by society. It was also evident that the topic of sexuality remains absent in the initial and ongoing training of educators. Therefore, we concluded that there needs to be a movement

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towards the right to training in this subject, so that effective change in addressing sexuality issues with children in Early Childhood Education can be observed.

Keywords: Children's Rights, Sexual Education in Childhood, Teacher Training.

Resumo: A Educação Infantil, definida como primeira etapa da Educação Básica na Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação - Lei nº 9.394, atende as crianças de 0 a 5 anos, cidadãs e cidadãos de direitos. Nessa perspectiva, compreende-se que abordar a temática da sexualidade na Educação Infantil é fundamental para a segurança das crianças. Todavia, para que tal tema seja tratado, o conhecimento científico acerca das questões da sexualidade precisa ser garantido às/aos docentes. Sendo assim, este artigo teve como objetivo geral analisar os desafios do trato com as questões da sexualidade por parte de docentes da Educação Infantil. Os objetivos específicos foram: investigar as concepções da sexualidade em seus aspectos conceituais, históricos e culturais; explicitar sobre os debates acerca da sexualidade no contexto da Educação Infantil; problematizar os desafios das/os docentes com as questões da sexualidade na conjuntura atual. A metodologia utilizada foi revisão bibliográfica e documental. Os resultados mostraram que em um mundo moderno e inovador, com várias possibilidades advindas de uma tecnologia cada vez mais presente na vida de todas e todos, falar da educação sexual infantil ainda continua um assunto muitas vezes negado e, quase sempre, julgado como inadequado pela sociedade atual. Também ficou evidenciado que a temática da sexualidade permanece ausente na formação inicial e continuada de docentes. Concluiu-se, assim, que precisa existir um movimento em busca do direito à formação na temática, para que se possa assistir a efetiva mudança no trato das questões da sexualidade, com as crianças, na Educação Infantil.

Palavras-chave: Direito das crianças, Educação sexual na infância, Formação docente.

Resumen: La Educación Infantil, definida como la primera etapa de la Educación Básica por la Ley de Directrices y Bases de la Educación - Ley nº 9.394, atiende a niños de 0 a 5 años, ciudadanas y ciudadanos de derechos. Desde esta perspectiva, se comprende que abordar el tema de la sexualidad en la Educación Infantil es fundamental para la seguridad de los niños. Sin embargo, para que tal tema sea tratado, el conocimiento científico acerca de las cuestiones de la sexualidad debe ser garantizado a las/los docentes. Así, este

artículo tiene el objetivo general de analizar los desafíos de la atención a las cuestiones de la sexualidad por los docentes de la Educación Infantil. Los objetivos específicos son: investigar las concepciones de la sexualidad desde sus aspectos conceptuales, históricos y culturales; explicitar los debates acerca de la sexualidad en el contexto de la Educación Infantil; problematizar los desafíos de las/los docentes respecto a las cuestiones de la sexualidad en la coyuntura actual. La metodología utilizada es la revisión bibliográfica y documental. Los resultados muestran que en un mundo moderno e innovador, con varias posibilidades advenidas de una tecnología cada vez más presente en la vida de todas y todos, hablar sobre la educación sexual infantil sigue siendo muchas veces negado y, casi siempre, juzgado como inadecuado por la sociedad actual. También queda evidente que el tema de la sexualidad permanece ausente de la formación inicial y continua de los docentes. De ese modo, se ha concluido que es necesario que exista un movimiento en búsqueda del derecho a la formación en tal asunto, para que sea posible un verdadero cambio en el abordaje de las cuestiones de la sexualidad con los niños en la Educación Infantil.

Palabras clave: Derecho de los niños, Educación sexual en la infancia, Formación docente

INTRODUCTION

The Brazilian Constitution, in its article 208, stipulates that "the duty of the State with education will be fulfilled through the guarantee of '[...] IV - early childhood education, in daycare centers and preschools, for children up to 5 (five) years of age [...]'" (BRASIL, 1988, n.p.). The Law of Directives and Bases of National Education, nº 9.394 (LDB), promulgated on December 20, 1996, aligns with the Federal Constitution, recognizing in its article 29 Early Childhood Education as the first stage of basic education and establishing as its purposes "[...] the integral development of children up to 5 (five) years of age, in their physical, psychological, intellectual, and social aspects, complementing the action of the family and the community" (BRASIL, 1996, n.p.).

The Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education - Resolution nº 5, of December 17, 2009 -, in its article 6, establishes that:

> The pedagogical proposals for Early Childhood Education must respect the following principles: I - Ethical: of autonomy, responsibility, solidarity, and respect for the common good, the environment, and

> different cultures, identities, and singularities. II - Political: of the rights of citizenship, the exercise of criticality, and respect for the democratic order. III - Aesthetic: of sensitivity, creativity, playfulness, and freedom of expression in different artistic and cultural manifestations (BRASIL, 2009, p. 2).

Consequently, based on the aforementioned points, we emphasize that, as provided for in the current laws of our country, children have the right to "integral development," and all matters that affect their daily lives and the lives of the professionals who work in these collective spaces need to be discussed, debated, and brought to the forefront, because the construction of knowledge and practices in the daily life of Early Childhood Education requires, first and foremost, respect for the differences, singularities, and pluralities of all those who live there. In this sense, we emphasize that the approach to issues of sexuality should be no different.

However, children's questions are not always answered, and from this perspective, we highlight the account of the student Vanessa[1]: "This theme caught my attention because I have worked in the area of Early Childhood Education for 4 years, and early childhood sex education has almost never been addressed with the children during this time. Even though the teachers had already completed their undergraduate and postgraduate studies, I noticed that talking about the topic was complicated and difficult for them, and it seemed that many did not have the preparation to deal with the issues of sexuality, which is very important and brings benefits to children's lives. I understand that if children were sexually educated, many cases of childhood abuse, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), unwanted pregnancies, etc., in adolescence, would be avoided."

In accordance with these focuses, the proposal of our article was to address the challenges of teachers in relation to the theme of sexuality in Early Childhood Education. We listed the following questions: Do Early Childhood Education teachers address the theme of sexuality in the daily life of institutions? How do they approach the theme with children in their pedagogical practices? Is scientific knowledge about sexuality issues being guaranteed in the initial and continuing education of Early Childhood Education teachers?

We defined the general objective of the research as analyzing the challenges of dealing with sexuality issues by Early Childhood Education teachers, and the specific objectives listed were: to investigate the conceptions of sexuality in its conceptual, historical, and cultural aspects; to elaborate on the debates about sexuality in the context

[1] Vanessa Benites Loubert, co-author of the article, developed the research under the guidance of Professor Míria Izabel Campos during her undergraduate studies in Pedagogy - Licentiate Degree.

of Early Childhood Education; to problematize the challenges of teachers with sexuality issues in the current context.

The methodology chosen for the development of the research was bibliographic and documentary. For this purpose, we conducted surveys and studies of authors who dedicate themselves to the theme. Among them, we cite: Campos and Sarat (2021); Furlani (2011), Lourenção and Campos (2018), Louro (1997; 2011), Macedo and Campos (2017), Sarat and Cruz (2018), Torres and Campos (2021), Xavier Filha (2018). We also examined current legislation in Brazil (1988; 1990; 1996, 2009).

We chose to organize this article with this introduction, 3 sections, final considerations, and we conclude by presenting our references. With this stated, we invite you to read section 1, in which we will explain the conceptions of sexuality in the different authors studied.

CONCEPTIONS OF SEXUALITY IN THEIR CONCEPTUAL, HISTORICAL, AND CULTURAL ASPECTS

We begin by bringing to the debate the studies of Louro (2011, p. 64), when the author states that:

> Numerous researchers comment on how difficult it seems to admit that sexuality is also culturally constructed. The difficulty seems to lie in the fact that sexuality is usually associated (sometimes even reduced) to nature or biology.

Louro's (2011) assertion allows us to understand this construction of sexuality, and from it, we can admit that if it was constructed, it can be deconstructed and resignified by each of us throughout our lives. In other words, sexuality is not natural and/or determined by biology.

We delve further into the discussion, elaborating on Louro's (2011) perception regarding the learning of sexual orientations. For the author:

> [...] we learn to be heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual, to express our desires through certain behaviors, gestures, etc., in many instances - in the family, at school, through cinema, television, magazines, the internet, through religious sermons or media preaching or even medicine. In short, a multitude of spaces and instances exercise cultural pedagogies [...] (LOURO, 2011, p. 66, original emphasis).

Especially from this perspective, it is important to highlight, even briefly, Foucault's studies in his book History of Sexuality Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge (2009), to support the understanding of sexuality as a "social invention." For Foucault (2009), sexuality is constituted from various discourses about sex. Thus, it is essential to seek to

understand "[...] the reason for the prohibition of the subject of gender and sexuality in the daily life of daycare centers and preschools" (TORRES; CAMPOS, 2021, p. 185).

Thus, continuing with Louro (1997, p. 26, original emphasis), we bring that:

> [...] subjects can exercise their sexuality in different ways, they can "live their bodily desires and pleasures" in many ways [...]. Their sexual identities would thus be constituted through the ways they live their sexuality, with partners of the same sex, the opposite sex, both sexes, or without partners.

However, we need to discuss a little further, as the themes of sexuality and gender are often understood and treated in the same way. From this angle, it is worth noting how we are understanding the two concepts, because in Louro (1997, p. 27), we find that "[...] (sexual and gender) identities are deeply interrelated; our language and our practices very often confuse them, making it difficult to think of them distinctly. However, they are not the same thing."

To better assimilate this, it makes sense to go back in history and show that it was "through Anglo-Saxon feminists that gender began to be used as distinct from sex" (LOURO, 1997, p. 21, our translation). Thus, the same scholar, based on Scott (1995, p. 72), expands by writing:

> [...] we have that the creation of the term gender happened to "reject a biological determinism implicit in the use of terms such as sex or sexual difference." American scholars wish to emphasize, through language, "the fundamentally social character of distinctions based on sex" (LOURO, 1997, p. 21, original emphasis).

Having made these important incursions for our studies, we continue the debate by bringing in the researcher Xavier Filha (2018), who explains in her text, *Education for Sexuality and Gender in Childhood*, that "the sexuality of the child is not expressed in the same way as that of the adult. The child expresses it by wanting and desiring to know about their body, about their life, their existence, and their appearance in the world" (XAVIER FILHA, 2018, p. 145).

Addressing the same theme, Furlani (2011), in her book *Sex Education in the Classroom: Gender Relations, Sexual Orientation, and Ethno-Racial Equality in a Proposal of Respect for Differences*, helps us to reflect further on the subject when she shows that:

> It is recent, in human history, the understanding that the child possesses a sexuality that can and should be expressed. Considering that this is a phase of life in which sexuality is present necessarily means reviewing and rethinking the objectives of sexuality that, until then, we have

> learned and/or have been taught. The main paradigm to be deconstructed is the understanding that sexuality, for people, is justified by reproduction (FURLANI, 2011, p. 67).

In the same direction, Campos (2010) corroborates by discussing the challenges of caring for and educating children, when she highlights the

> [...] romantic view with which this phase of human life has historically been conceived. [...] it was characterized as a period of purity and innocence and, mainly, an asexual stage of life, and even with the contributions of Freud's studies[2] (1996), dating from the beginning of the 20th century, which brought to light the existence of childhood sexuality, relationships continue to be constructed from the perspective of denial (CAMPOS, 2010, p. 13).

And following this perspective, we return to Xavier Filha (2000), as her arguments are pertinent to our discussion here. The author points out that:

> Despite the theoretical existence of studies on childhood sexuality, it is still very difficult for adults to accept the sexuality of girls and boys, as they are imbued with their own received sex education and the masculine and feminine stereotypes present in society [...] (XAVIER FILHA, 2000, p. 82).

Having recorded all these concepts and positions of the scholars, and reiterating the statements described in our introduction, we emphasize how fundamental it is that children have their doubts and questions problematized and/or answered. We also emphasize that the denial regarding dealing with the theme of sexuality with girls and boys is probably linked to many scientific unknowns, taboos, conservatisms, etc., which reside and persist in our society.

We believe that it is still necessary, before entering section 2, to highlight the writings of Louro (2011), when she focuses on the Brazilian context, demonstrating that:

> [...] throughout its history, a norm has been produced based on the white, heterosexual, middle-class urban, and Christian man. This is our reference identity, the identity that does not need to be mentioned because it is assumed, it is implied. That is why the "others," the "different," the "alternative," or the "problematic" subjects will, in principle, be women, non-white people, non-heterosexuals, or non-Christians (LOURO, 2011, p. 65, original emphasis).

Given this, we understand that historical conceptions about sexuality affect families, communities, basic education institutions, higher education, as these are forged when "we assume, unreflectively, the naturalization of differences. And this is an efficient way to hide or silence the power relations that constitute them" (LOURO, 2011, p. 65).

From this focus, we perceive that there are many constituted challenges. We need to increasingly conquer spaces to hold the necessary discussions about sexuality issues. Hence, we infer those diverse studies, such as our own, are essential to envision changes

[2] Sigmund Freud (Vienna, 1856 – London, 1939), Austrian physician and founder of psychoanalysis. Born in Freiberg, Moravia (or Příbor, Czech Republic).

that can save lives, given the high rates of violence in our country against children, against women, as well as the violence that affects people who identify as LGBTQIAPN+[3].

Now we can proceed to our section 2, aiming to delve deeper into the challenges that are part of the daily lives of teachers and children in Early Childhood Education.

DEBATES ABOUT SEXUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

We conceive that in our country, in accordance with the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA), Federal Law nº 8.069/90, childhood is the period between "[...] 0 and 12 years of age, incomplete" (BRASIL, 1990, n.p.). A period of many learnings and significant experiences for the lives of all children, because from the experiences they have at this time, they may carry consequences for a lifetime.

Taking as a reference the studies of Sarat and Cruz (2018), we want and need to emphasize that:

> Childhood is a condition of the child; therefore, it is the space in which play, imagination, and fantasy are present as ways of understanding, questioning, and establishing relationships with the world around them. Children are producers of history, knowledge, and cultures (SARAT; CRUZ, 2018, p. 11).

Specifically in our research, we are focusing on children up to 5 years of age, who are served in Early Childhood Education spaces. Embracing the perspective of Kuhlmann Jr. and Fernandes (2004, p. 15, original emphasis), we understand "[...] childhood as the conception or representation that adults make about the initial period of life, or as the period lived by the child themselves, the real subject who lives this phase of life."

From this angle, we bring to our text another contribution from the National Curricular Guidelines for Early Childhood Education, which in its article 4 establishes that:

> The pedagogical proposals of Early Childhood Education must consider that the child, the center of curricular planning, is 1 a historical and rights-bearing subject who, in the interactions, relationships, and daily practices they experience, builds their personal and collective identity, plays, imagines, fantasizes, desires, learns, observes, experiments, narrates, questions, and constructs meanings about nature and society, producing culture (BRASIL, 2009, p. 1).

[3] LGBTQIAPN+ is an acronym that encompasses people who are Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual/Aromantic/Agender, Pan/Poly, Non-binary, and more. Orientando – Um espaço de aprendizado. Available at: https://orientando.org/o-que-significa-lgbtqiap/ Accessed on: Nov. 26, 2023.

Based on the legislation and the cited authors, we insist on pointing out that girls and boys are citizens with rights and, therefore, all and any knowledge accumulated by humanity needs to be addressed with them. Answering their doubts and curiosities is the primary condition for the development of quality, socially referenced work that allows for discussions and problematizations related to "[...] diversities about which truths have been forged" (CAMPOS; SARAT, 2021).

As Finco (2010, p. 134) well elucidates, we need to guarantee "[...] a pedagogy of differences, a pedagogy of relationships in which the child is the protagonist." That is, the commitment of all those involved in the care and education of children is essential for the implementation of an education that contemplates their realities and needs, taking into account how crucial a continuous dialogue and discussion is about "[...] the capacity of children not only to reproduce the social pattern, but also to compare and create new realities and meanings" (FINCO, 2010, p. 134).

Once again, we approach the studies of Xavier Filha (2018), as they help us to reflect on how to deal with sexuality issues in Early Childhood Education. According to the author:

> [...] children from a very early age ask how they came into the world; how they were born; how they ended up in their mothers' bellies and how they got out; how and why their bodies differ from each other [...]. They produce theories and dialogue with other people because they are social beings who are constantly constructing their knowledge (XAVIER FILHA, 2018, p. 145).

In view of this, we must emphasize that professionals working in the various Early Childhood Education spaces who do not engage in discussions about the theme of sexuality will be disrespecting the current laws in Brazil, as well as demonstrating a theoretical lack of knowledge regarding the research developed about childhoods and children by different areas, among which we cite: anthropology, history, pedagogy, psychology.

Regarding this silencing in/of institutions, it is worth bringing the research of Lourenção and Campos (2018). In a work entitled Gender, Sexuality and Early Childhood Education: Teacher Training and Pedagogical Practices, they undertook an investigation into the Pedagogical Course Project, Pedagogy - PCC/2009, of the Faculty of Education (FAED) of the Federal University of Grande Dourados (UFGD). The results indicated that few subjects address issues of gender and sexuality, leading us to perceive that there may be insufficient knowledge in the area as preparation for teachers who will need to deal with the learning and development demands of children.

And in this sense, we remain with the affirmations of Xavier Filha (2018), as they corroborate here, when the author concludes that the child "does not always find space for open and frank dialogue about their doubts in the family or in educational institutions" (XAVIER FILHA, 2018, p. 145).

Also, Macedo and Campos (2017), in a work entitled *Early Childhood Education, Gender and Sexuality: Study with Girls and Boys - Indápolis/MS*, whose methodology consisted of observations of play and toy choices in the daily life of pedagogical practices, noticed that children's attitudes were often interpreted in mistaken ways by teachers. The interventions almost always translated into a policing of the sexuality of girls and boys, giving the impression that the professionals believed that "[...] a simple game between children can define their sexual orientation in the future" (MACEDO; CAMPOS, 2017, p. 504).

With this stated, we analyze how the lack of consistent scientific knowledge about the theme can end up generating the perpetuation of prejudices in the daily life of Early Childhood Education pedagogical practices. From this point of view, we even highlight that many professionals may adopt a conduct of surveillance of children's free and spontaneous play for fear "[...] that children's sexuality will be defined and will not change throughout their lives" (MACEDO; CAMPOS, 2017, p. 504).

Perhaps they believe that by monitoring children, ensuring games and toy choices that are considered appropriate for girls and boys, they will not deviate from heterosexuality, that is, the norm defined as correct, as we were able to learn in Louro (2011).

For Furlani (2011, p. 65):

> If we consider that sexuality [...] is a human component and, therefore, a subject of interest to children and young people, then the school is expected to take an attitude in the sense of guaranteeing, at all levels of Brazilian education, its pedagogical assumption, enabling its discussion and curricular inclusion.

From this perspective pointed out by the author, we consider it fundamental to bring more contributions from her work to our text. Thus, we constructed Table 1 and present it below, based on Furlani (2011, p. 67), and we highlight that for her "all this makes sex education a permanently personal and political school action," a position with which we agree.

Table 1

Educating is not a neutral act
There is an intimate relationship between what we think and our pedagogical practice
Every teaching practice is supported by a theorization (even if we are not aware of it)
Teacher training (training courses) and continuing education should reflect these theoretical and practical assumptions
The pedagogical act is permeated by decisions, choices, and therefore, by disputes over knowledge and meanings
We need to study the educational process theoretically and politically to decide "what kind of sex educator I am going to be"

Source: Furlani (2011).

In this aspect, we once again seek the assertions of Finco (2003, p. 89), when the author points out in her research that:

> [...] Early Childhood Education can be the place where children find the space to live childhood. Not only a childhood that guarantees them the right to play, but one that allows them to be the protagonists of their desires and choices; that allows them to enjoy the right to difference and free expression, bringing new strengths, new voices, and new desires.

In other words, it is fundamental that teachers are guaranteed the possibility to study, train, and transform themselves, changing their lives and their actions as professionals in/of Basic Education, fostering new practices in the daily life of Early Childhood Education, which positively reverberate in the lives of girls and boys.

Having made these reflections, we move on to section 3 of the article, whose proposal is to highlight the challenges faced by education professionals in the current scenario of our country.

CHALLENGES OF TEACHERS WITH SEXUALITY ISSUES IN THE CURRENT CONJUNCTURE

For our proposal here, we understand it to be essential to address the historical moment experienced by everyone in our country in recent years. In this aspect, we chose to quote, in full, Campos and Sarat (2021, p. 237-238), when the authors highlight that:

> [...] the historical moment experienced by everyone in the social and political scenario of the campaigns in the first and second rounds of the elections for the position of President of Brazil - the year 2018 - was marked by the intensification of attacks and discriminatory speeches against women, black people, poor populations, as well as the entire LGBTQIA+ community. With the result confirmed at the polls, we experienced the continuity, expansion, and deepening of disrespectful, hostile, and truculent discourses, translating into an increase in the rates of violence and deaths of the aforementioned populations, restrictions of rights, successive cases of censorship of freedoms, etc. Specifically regarding the theme of diversities, we have been witnessing the resurgence of discussions and dismantling of already conquered policies, characterizing a significant setback, with repercussions that could/can be felt in the family, in basic education, and in higher education [...].

We perceive that the process related to studies on the themes of diversity suffered a forceful setback. Teachers, coordinators, professionals working in educational secretariats were significantly affected regarding the development of their work, which obviously directly impacted children, families, and the community.

Returning a little in time, we have the writings of Xavier Filha (2018), which allow us to consider how various and opposing forces had already been clashing in the sphere of the definitions of public policies that integrate the theme in our country.

> Recently, we were stunned amidst the removal of the terms "gender," "sexuality," and "sexual orientation" from the National Education Plan[4] and several state and municipal plans, in the vast majority of Brazilian locations. [...] These issues affect educational practices, especially when we talk about young children, their sexuality [...] (XAVIER FILHA, 2018, p. 135).

Given this statement by the author, it is crucial to affirm that every child has the right to education, has the right to know their body and its development, has the right to learn how to care for and protect it. If the family and the child's education and care institution remain silent on issues of childhood sexuality, who will speak?

In Brazil, we have seen priests, pastors, deputies, and senators speak, often contributing to perpetuating misunderstandings and false moralisms, as they position themselves in a way that is distant from the scientific knowledge produced in the area.

It is also worth noting that different media outlets have stood out in their pursuit of exploring these themes. Their productions bring discussions about the violence that affects, mainly, children and women. It is also necessary to remember television works in which problems concerning same-sex families, homosexual couples, cases

[4] The author refers to the discussions for writing the National, State, and Municipal Education Plans, approved for the period 2014-2024.

characterized as sexual reassignment [5], etc., are addressed. However, what is clear to us is the lack of a more solidified discussion, stemming from accumulated scientific knowledge, a role and responsibility that educational spaces should be occupying in the first place.

From this perspective, Xavier Filha (2018, p. 148) highlights:

> [...] we must study the national and international laws and documents that legitimize these themes to be discussed in school and give them due attention. The first issue to reinforce is that public school is secular, according to the Federal Constitution of 1988, guaranteed in its articles 5 and 19. Secularism allows us to think that public institutions, such as schools and early childhood education institutions, should have their pedagogical projects separate from religious values in general. Religious multiplicity must be respected, but no belief should be taken as exclusive. No religious belief has the right to interfere in matters to be pedagogically worked on in school.

Furlani (2011, p. 68) alerts us to the importance of a "[...] responsible and preventive sexual life attitude [...]" and, given everything we have studied and presented here, it is essential to emphasize that we still have a long way to go. Thus, we highlight that we cannot and should not remain silent, as we are the adults responsible for the education and care of future generations. Therefore, addressing the issues of sexuality, the focus of our study, is necessary and urgent.

To finalize our section 3 and express a hopeful position for the dialogue we have built here, we highlight the writings of Xavier Filha alluding to the Municipal Education Plan of our municipality, that is, Dourados, state of Mato Grosso do Sul (MS):

> In the Municipal Plan of Dourados (Law nº 3.904, of June 23, 2015), there is a differential in relation to that of Campo Grande [capital of MS], [...] which I will highlight. In goal 1, referring to early childhood education, goal 1.13 states that it is up to this stage to promote and guarantee "the continuing education of education professionals on children's rights and the confrontation of violence" [...] (XAVIER FILHA, 2018, p. 150, our addition).

From this angle, the author continues, pointing out that:

> If the proposal for teacher training exists, it is because it is thought that the teachers who work in early childhood education in the city will be able, after the training process, to discuss children's rights with the children themselves. One of the basic aspects of their rights is the possibility of free expression. They will therefore be able to speak and ask everything they want, and the agenda may include topics such as gender and sexuality.

[5] Article by Camila Cetrone (2021). Available at: https://queer.ig.com.br/2021-04-04/como-sao-as-cirurgias-de-redesignacao-sexual-realizadas-por-pessoas-transgenero-.html Accessed on: Nov. 26, 2023.

We understand that, in the letter of the law, the need for the training of professionals has been recognized so that children's rights are effectively guaranteed. In this sense, it is fundamental that we remain vigilant, demanding compliance with the law.

CONCLUSION

Our article addressed the issues of sexuality, bringing to the debate the challenges faced by teachers in dealing with these issues with children in Early Childhood Education. The work was developed based on bibliographic and documentary studies, which provided fundamental information related to the theme.

The research we undertook showed how, in a modern and innovative world, with various possibilities arising from an increasingly present technology in everyone's lives, talking about early childhood sex education still remains a subject often denied and, almost always, judged as inappropriate by current society.

We must emphasize, as we incorporated from our investigation, that "children are intelligent beings and produce culture, they are in constant interaction with everything in the social environment. They gradually construct their ways of thinking and being in the world" (XAVIER FILHA, 2018, p. 146). Thus, we understand that there is no way to close our eyes and plug our ears, pretending that children are not attentive and seeking information and answers to their questions.

In view of this, and still reflecting with Xavier Filha (2018, p. 146), we should value that:

> Families and educational institutions are important spaces to question and mediate other ways of thinking about what is circulating in the culture for children. Educational institutions can be spaces to teach thinking, to think freely about all subjects that are of interest to the child [...].

We agree with the author's statement; however, we understand that for sex education to be approached/addressed by professionals in the daily life of Early Childhood Education pedagogical practices, it is necessary to guarantee the presence of the theme in the initial and continuing education of everyone, which we perceive is not happening effectively.

We highlight Furlani (2011, p. 40), when the author asserts that "educators committed to social change should seek to disturb, to shake up the ways of positioning themselves regarding discussions of sex education that have traditionally been carried out

in Brazil." We understand, from this, that the movement needs to include, first and foremost, the pursuit of the right to training on the theme, so that we can witness undeniable changes in the way sexuality issues are dealt with, with children, in Early Childhood Education.

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