CHARACTERIZATIONS OF TEACHERS REGARDING GENDER AND ETHNIC-RACIAL RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT
According to this article, the legitimate pressures of social movements contributed to insert the implementation of public policies on diversity into the official agenda of the Brazilian State. This topic is increasingly present in the debate on education. The article presents assumptions, perspectives and challenges to break with a monocultural and homogeneous curriculum by implementing pedagogical practices turned towards recognizing and respecting gender diversity and ethnic-racial differences, aiming to overcome all forms of discrimination and prejudice. Results of surveys performed at three public schools in the state of Mato Grosso (MS), Brazil are analyzed. We use theoretical-methodological procedures for document analysis, focusing on questionnaires applied to schoolteachers. The studies by Quijano (2005), Maldonado-Torres (2007), Gomes (2012), Walsh (2009) and Hall (2003) provide the theoretical perspective of the analyses. The results show that despite advances in legislation it is necessary to re-signify the marks left by coloniality and to deconstruct monocultural curriculums, so that the initial and continued training of teachers complies with the premise that ensures respect and care for the ethnic, religious, economic and cultural diversities and that guided the drafting of the National Plan of Education (2011-2020), which should be one of the strategies that will enable a critical and emancipatory pedagogy.

KEYWORDS
Gender; ethnic-racial relations; public policies.

Gender and ethnic-racial relations: initial considerations

Educational public policies for diversity have advanced significantly in Brazil as a result of the pressures and demands of social movements that, for over a decade, have denounced the imposition of a model of education centered on the Eurocentric and hegemonic logic that renders the other differences inferior and subaltern in order to maintain the coloniality of knowledge and power. In this sense, we learn from Cultural Studies that it is necessary to understand that “truths” can be sought in different ways and places, considering that truth is constructed in the field of correlations of force and power.

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Thus, the homogeneous notions of collective identities, of race, class, culture and gender, are placed under suspicion based on another epistemology that identifies cultural differences and enables

... thinking how specific practices (articulated around contradictions that do not arise in the same way, at the same moment and at the same point) can nevertheless be thought of jointly. ... making cultural studies place on their agenda the critical issues of race, racial policy, resistance to racism, critical issues of cultural policy, consisted in a fierce theoretical struggle. (Hall, 2003, p. 152).

Discussions on ethnic-racial relations and on gender equity take priority in the National Plan of Education (Plano Nacional de Educação) (Brasil, 2011), in the National Plan of Policies for Women (Plano Nacional de Políticas para Mulheres) (Brasil, 2004b), in the National Curricular Guidelines for Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations and for the Teaching of African-Brazilian and African History and Culture (Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação das Relações Étnico-Raciais e para o Ensino de História e Cultura Afro-Brasileira e Africana) (2004a), and in Law no. 11,645/2008. These public policies propose a discussion regarding gender issues and ethnic-racial issues, with a view to combating discriminations, prejudices and invisibility, since we consider it a form of resistance.

According to Miranda and Schimanski (2014, p. 68), “the interest in gender, class and race, as a category for analysis, shows the commitment of researchers to the inclusion of the voice of the excluded subjects ...”

The purpose of the present article is to analyze the characterizations of female teachers from three public schools in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul/MS, Brazil, about gender and ethnic-racial relations. Analyzing the teachers’ characterizations regarding these topics is relevant because it enables us to understand the practices developed by them in the school context.

We chose to perform a qualitative survey because we believe that it gives us the necessary support to fulfill our objective in this article. Bogdan and Biklen (1994, p. 47-50) emphasize the following characteristics of qualitative investigation:

1. In qualitative investigation the direct source of data is the natural environment and the investigator is the main instrument. 2. Qualitative investigation is descriptive. 3. Qualitative investigators are more interested in the process than simply in the results or products. 4. Qualitative investigators tend to analyze their data inductively. 5. Meaning is essential in the qualitative approach.

The qualitative approach to research allows us use the questionnaire as data production instrument. Thus, a questionnaire was applied by the researchers to three teachers who volunteered for this and received fictitious names to keep up the anonymity ensured by the Letter of Free and Informed Consent. The questionnaires were applied in November 2015 at three public schools in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul (MS), Brazil. Our concern was not about the number of participants, rather it was about the characterizations/meanings that they assign to issues of gender and ethnic-racial relations.

We agree with Chizzotti (2009, p. 55) that “the questionnaire consists of a set of pre-elaborated questions, systematically and sequentially arranged in items that constitute the topic of research ...”. The questions in the form were elaborated based on the theoreticians
who research and study these topics and based on the already existing public policies and laws. In this sense, it was applied personally by the researchers to explain doubts when necessary. An appointment was made in advance with the three teachers who participated in the research, in order not to interfere in their work at school.

According to Miranda and Schimanski (2014, p. 71) “gender, as a historical and socio-cultural category, emerges precisely as a concept of analysis to question these spaces that define the behaviors of men and women based on sex.”

At different places, such as schools, churches, clubs, in the family, at shopping malls, at the workplace, in the media, in other words, in all spaces we find the marks of feminine and masculine; thus, the differences are constructed, because, when they are compared, they are always placed in relation to each other.

As to the ethnic-racial issues, the objective of the National Curricular Guidelines for Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations and for the Teaching of African-Brazilian and African History and Culture (Brasil, 2004a) is to disseminate and produce knowledge, as well as attitudes, positions and values to educate citizens regarding ethnic-racial plurality, enabling them to interact and negotiate common objectives that will ensure respect for legal rights and a valuing of identity for everyone, in the search for the consolidation of Brazilian democracy.

In this sense we attempted to find out what are the characterizations of the three schoolteachers from the three schools regarding ethnic-racial relations. Law no. 10,639 of January 9, 2003, the National Curricular Guidelines for Education of the Ethnic-Racial Relations and for the Teaching of African-Brazilian and African History and Culture (2004a), and Law no. 11,645 of March 10, 2008 are affirmative action policies, that is, policies designed to indemnify and recognize and enhance the value of the history, culture and identities of black people, and in the case of Law no. 11,645/2008 they also include the history, culture and identities of the indigenous peoples.

**Gender: A few possible notes**

We agree with Miranda and Schimanski (2014, p. 83) that “... gender is a process constructed socially to represent the masculine and feminine, according to the values that society wishes to maintain.”

The anatomical difference between male and female and the difference between the sex organs are seen as a natural justification for the socially constructed difference as inequality among genders, especially in the social division of labor (Miranda and Schimanski, 2014, p. 72). And this biologistic view is naturalized and reproduced in schools, as for instance in the separation between boys and girls in the queue, separate bathrooms for boys and girls, boys’ play and girls’ play, among others. Thus distinctions between the sexes and the place each should occupy in society haven been established.

Carvalho (2009, p. 15) characterizes gender as “[...] an ensemble of characteristics and behaviors attributed to women or men and thus to material and symbolic practices, to objects, places, activities and social representations.”

As we realize that cultures and societies are dynamic, they evolve, that standards and values change, we can perceive that throughout history there have been different forms of masculinity and femininity.

According to Carvalho (2009, p. 16),
Although genders take a plurality of forms in different societies, historical periods, social classes/groups, ethnic and religious groups, generations and even in the course of individual lives, all known societies have a system of sex/gender manifested in culture, ideology, science, violence, sexuality, reproduction, labor division, organization of the State and the family, in discursive and everyday practices.

Therefore, we can understand that gender issues are power relations, in which the male principle is taken as a universal parameter. In this sense the concept of gender represents the theoretical and political attempt to denaturalize sex inequalities, as pointed out by Carvalho (2009).

There are several lines in the theorization on gender, which range from essentialist to structuralist and poststructuralist currents.

The poststructuralist theoreticians conceive of gender as fluid, discursive and disembodied, seeing genders as plural and mutant. Thus, as Carvalho (2009, p. 22) emphasizes, “... femininity and masculinity do not have a fixed or stable meaning, since they are continually reconstructed and resignified representations; it is also true that gender relations of domination persist despite the achievements of the feminist movement throughout the 20th century.”

Meyer (2012, p. 16-19), in a feminist poststructuralist approach, on theorizing gender, points out the following implications:

Gender points to the notion that over the course of life, through many different institutions and social practices, we constitute ourselves as men and women, in a process that is not linear, progressive or harmonious, and that also will never be ended or complete; 2) The concept also underscores that, since we are born and live in specific times, places and circumstances, there are many and conflicting manners of defining and experiencing femininity and masculinity; 3) Implicit in gender is the idea that the analyses and interventions undertaken must consider or take as reference the power relations between men and women and the many social and cultural forms that constitute them as subjects of gender; 4) The concept of gender proposes to consider that the social institutions, the symbols, norms, knowledges, laws, doctrines and policies of a society are constituted and permeated by representations and assumptions of feminine and masculine at the same time as they are centrally involved in their production, maintenance and resignification.

In Brazil, the National Plan of Education of 2001 determines that, in the objectives and goals of basic education, texts that imply discrimination regarding gender and ethnicity be eliminated from the school books and that, in the objectives and goals of higher education and teacher training, an approach to gender be included. And the National Plan of Education of 2011-2020 reiterates as a premise “... respect and attention to ethnic, religious, economic and cultural diversities ... and demands “... excellence in the training and enhancement of the value of professionals of education” (Brasil, 2011, p. 1).

Characterizations of teachers: a few thoughts

Schoolteacher Suellen, when asked whether she had read, researched or studied something about gender issues, answered that unfortunately she had never had any contact with
the topic. This teacher conceptualizes/characterizes the gender issues in a biologistic view when she answers: “... biologically, the behaviors and cycles that occur both in girls and in boys refer to decisions and actions that are appropriate to each case, to each particularity.”

On the other hand, schoolteacher Poliana, when asked whether she had read, researched or studied something about gender issues, answered that she always tries to read something, although she has never specifically looked at or researched these issues. She conceptualizes/characterizes the gender issues by saying that “... gender cannot be characterized only as male and female”. Although she does not go further into the answer, she advances beyond the biologistic/essentialist view as she believes that these issues are not restricted to male and female, but she also does not explain that they are linked to historical, social, cultural, political and economic issues, among others.

When schoolteacher Stella was asked whether she had read, researched or studied something about gender issues, she did not answer, but characterized gender as

... connected to the way in which values, desires and behaviors related to sexuality are organized in society. According to the feminist movement, it is important to develop a policy that seeks to promote equal rights among men and women in civil society.

In other words, schoolteacher Stella is close to the characterization of gender of the poststructuralist theoreticians because she considers it important to try to promote at school equal rights between men and women and because she thinks that these issues are connected to the way in which society is organized.

The National Plan of Policies for Women establishes as a goal “... to ensure the inclusion of issues of gender, race and ethnicity in the curriculums, to recognize and seek ways to alter the educational practices, production of knowledge, formal education, discriminatory culture and communication” (Brasil, 2004b, p. 33).

Although the inclusion and discussion of gender issues in the curriculums are ensured by public policies, laws, guidelines and decrees, when we asked the teachers about what they consider relevant in the process of education, the answers were evasive and gender issues were not mentioned or rendered invisible.

I consider it important to acquire knowledge as a result of the mediation of educators with their students, and of the students with the school community. It is necessary to respect the process of acquiring this knowledge, which also occurs via teaching methods. (Suellen, Nov. 24, 2015).
Besides the process of learning related contents, it is relevant to cover current issues (Poliana, Nov. 25, 2015).
The curriculum, planning, favorable environment, autonomy and interaction between teachers and the technical staff. (Stella, Nov. 29, 2015).

The answers of the teachers cited above express a monocultural, Eurocentric, white, heterosexual, technicist curriculum view which emphasizes the acquisition of knowledge, contents, teaching methods, planning, curriculum. The teachers did not mention any concern about issues regarding race/ethnicity and gender. As said previously, they do not research, study or have had any (initial and continued) training on the issue of gender.
Ethnic-racial relations: a few possible thoughts

We perceive that in schools, as in other places in Brazilian society, there are situations of ethnic-racial discrimination and prejudice. In Brazil the indemnification policies aimed at the education of black people should offer these population groups guarantees that they will enter, stay and achieve success in school education and enhance the African-Brazilian historical and cultural heritage. The African-Brazilian community’s demand to be recognized, valued and have their rights affirmed, as regards to education, began to be supported when Law no. 10,639/2003 was enacted, which altered Law no. 9,394/1996, establishing the mandatory teaching of African-Brazilian and African history and culture. Law no. 10,639/2003 is the result of pressures by the Brazilian Black Movement on the school and the State. “The Black Movement and other participants of the anti-racist struggle began to intervene in the State and in laws on education, incorporating the pedagogical treatment of the racial issue as a student’s right and a school's duty” (Gomes, Oliveira and Souza, 2010, p. 70).

The goal of the National Curricular Guidelines for Education of Ethnic-Racial Relations and for the Teaching of African Brazilian and African History and Culture (Brasil, 2004a) is “… to promote the education of active and conscious citizens within the multicultural and pluriethnic society in Brazil, seeking positive ethnic-social relations toward the construction of a democratic nation”, and the objective of Law no. 11,645/2008 is to make the topic of “African-Brazilian and Indigenous History and Culture” mandatory in the official curriculum of the school system.

We can see that the public policies demanded by social movements have been enacted, but what concerns us is how they are being implemented/implanted and understood by the teachers who work in the schools.

When schoolteacher Suellen was asked whether she had read, researched or studied something about the ethnic-racial issues, she answered: “… I heard about some documents in 2006, but did not go into them; even so, I did participate in occasional projects at the school”. And she added a caveat: “I did not go further into the studies, I know that there is a law about African descendants and others, but I am not able to discuss about them.”

From what schoolteacher Suellen said we can infer that ethnic-racial issues are still rendered invisible/silenced in her practice. She reports: “I have never seen situations of racial discrimination, but I have heard of utterances by teachers who offended students of African descent, and these students complained and registered this with the principal of the school where I taught.” I asked her to tell of some work she had done on this issue in the classroom and she said: “I did not do any work. What I see in school are activities, teachers’ utterances in class, specific projects and exhibitions on the topic/subject, and these are developed by teachers of various fields in all classes.”

On the other hand, when schoolteacher Poliana was asked whether she had read, researched, or studied something about ethnic-racial issues, she answered: “… Yes, I took a course at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul on the topic, I always read and work on it in the classroom.” However, when asked whether she knew what Law no. 11,645/2008 says, her answer was that she did not. When asked whether she had already witnessed situations of racial discrimination, her answer was also that she had not. I asked her to tell of any work she had done in the classroom on this issue and she said: “Yes, a general and also regional study about ethnic-racial issues is done in groups or individually using the book “Culturas Afro-brasileiras e Indígenas”, written by Maria Celma Borges et al. (2012). Although
schoolteacher Poliana does not know the content of Law no. 11,645/2008 and cannot yet identify situations of racial discrimination, she works with students of the 6th grade of Basic Education using the material that she received from the Municipal Department of Education of Campo Grande/MS (SEMED).

When schoolteacher Stella was asked whether she had read, researched or studied something about ethnic-racial issues, she answered: “Yes, I have already read Ana Maria Machado, Alaide Lisboa de Oliveira, Eugênia Portela de Siqueira Marques, Florestan Fernandes and Oracy Nogueira.” And when asked whether she knew the content of Law no. 11,645/2008, she answered that this law “… alters Law no. 9,394, which establishes the basic guidelines of national education, to include mandatory teaching on the topic of African-Brazilian and Indigenous History and Culture in the school system curriculum.” We also asked whether she had already witnessed situations of racial discrimination and she said: “Yes. One student called another one a greasy nigger. When the student who had been offended complained to the teacher, the latter said: ‘No harm, no foul’ and dismissed the matter as unimportant. The child’s mother felt offended and asked to change him to another class.” We asked whether the school develops some project/activity that will foster reflection on gender and ethnic-racial issues, she answered: “Yes. On November 20, the Day of Black Awareness, we show films, lectures, murals and an exhibition of black dolls.”

We thus note that schoolteacher Stella reads about racial issues and the school proposes a reflection on them, but there is still a lack of reading on the topic among the other teachers, because another teacher told us that, when faced with a situation of discrimination, she made it invisible/silenced it up, instead of questioning the discriminatory attitude of the student or even proposing a discussion regarding racial issues in that class.

**A few possible considerations**

The study enabled us to identify the fact that the implementation of education for ethnic-racial relations is still a challenge, and discussing gender issues is likewise a major challenge. Analyzing the questionnaires answered by the three schoolteachers we perceive that training or lack of it interferes in pedagogical practices, from the perspective of dialogue between knowledges, and it is therefore impossible to construct an intercultural, decolonized and antiracist pedagogy. We therefore ask: Does the State have any control on compliance with the laws in force? Is there a concern about training teachers in regards to ethnic-racial and gender diversity? Does the school watch out for situations of prejudice and discrimination?

An analysis of the teachers’ answers allows us to state that there is some knowledge (although superficial) about what is contained in the laws, but that it is also very difficult to deal with them in their pedagogical practices, since the teachers who participated in the study recognized that they know little about the culture and history of the African peoples and about gender issues. In other words, in the schools investigated there are still homogenizing and ethnocentric pedagogical practices which, silently, impose the colonizing culture, the ethnocentric values and ideologies. Therefore, a question must be raised and answered: How can a black child construct or strengthen their identity considering that their physical characteristics are considered inferior in society, at school and in the curriculum? How can one become a man or woman in a male chauvinist society that does not discuss gender issues?
References


