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Male Teachers in Elementary Education in the Public Schools of Rio de Janeiro-Brazil and Aveiro-Portugal

El profesor de sexo masculino de educación primaria de las escuelas públicas de Río de Janeiro-Brasil y Aveiro-Portugal

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Abstract

This paper presents a comparative study of male teachers who work in public, elementary-level education in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and in Aveiro, Portugal. We intended, fundamentally, to research the reasons and consequences of the professional choice of teachers who are engaged in an area typically associated with women – an association so strong that these teachers seem like a “foreign body” in the daily lives of public elementary schools. We show that the presence of male teachers in elementary education is a way of bringing gender issues to the forefront of education, and that there are other issues and other voices that echo in schools, namely, individuals who are capable of exercising this profession regardless of gender.

Keywords: Gender, Professional choice, Teacher training.

Resumen

En este artículo se presenta un estudio comparativo sobre el profesor de sexo masculino que trabaja en las escuelas públicas “primarias” en Río de Janeiro (Brasil) y Aveiro (Portugal). Se intenta averiguar, fundamentalmente, las razones y consecuencias de la elección de carrera de los profesores que están adoptando un área típicamente asociada con el sexo femenino, una asociación tan fuerte que estos profesores parecen un “cuerpo extraño” en la vida cotidiana de las escuelas públicas de nivel primario. Señalamos que la presencia de los profesores de sexo masculino en la enseñanza de la educación “primaria” es una forma de insertar los temas de género en la educación, lo que demuestra que hay otras cuestiones y otras voces que hacen eco en las escuelas, es decir, personas capaces de ejercer dicha profesión independientemente de su sexo.

Palabras clave: Género, Elección de carrera, Formación del profesorado.

I. Introduction

We know that, historically, some professions have become women-oriented. Obviously, that has not happened easily (without opposition), but it has given rise to consequences. The elementary school teacher is one of the examples of feminized professions (Almeida, 1998), this represented both a perspective of "freedom" and a work opportunity for many women, as well as a devaluation of status and salary.

As some studies point out (Bertelli, 2006; Pincinato, 2004; Williams, 1995), in order for us to understand the disadvantages (and if there are any, the advantages) of women in the labour market, it is essential to examine the advantages and disadvantages for men. Our study has centered on understanding the motivations of men who choose the elementary school teaching profession,¹ as well as the consequences of that choice, such as what they found easy and difficult, and the prejudice that they face due to the fact that they are the minority in this sector.

Therefore, our main goal was to understand why men choose this profession. Is this choice well seen by people or is it diminished? Are these men satisfied by their profession or is it a way to set them off towards other professions? Does the ability to teach depend on sex? Are they welcomed to the profession or do they suffer discrimination? Will we gain something from the existence or integration of men in elementary school teaching?

Researching men's decision to enter public elementary teaching is important because schools are a place of educational experience and familiarity where most of the population is socialized.² In this manner, this research shows its relevance by promoting discussions centered on the representations of gender set around the professional teaching field, questioning the normalization of teaching as a profession linked to certain attributes considered to be feminine, and seeking to demystify the gender prejudice that surrounds teachers in this sector.

The problem of the separation between raising and educating is greatly discussed in the field of child education, whereas in elementary school this discussion is not as broad. Azevedo (2005) considers that the separation between raising and educating comes from the social representation of the teaching profession and what it means to be a "teacher", regardless of the range of their activities, and therefore, overcoming it means investing in teachers' social recognition.

This search for social recognition creates other divisions. Schindhelm (2008) points out that there exists a hierarchical distinction between the different professionals within child education (teachers and assistants) based on the division between care and teaching (which is also mentioned in the document Brazil, 1994), therefore, the teachers of this sector would be responsible for education and the assistants for caring, as if it were possible to separate caring from teaching. We have seen that this division also exists within all levels of education as a whole.

Sayão (2005) regards the separation between care and education as being involved with gender/sexuality issues, including the feminization of teaching. However, we question, along with Kramer (2003), whether

¹ In this article we shall use the term "elementary school" according to the International Standard Classification by UNESCO (CITE 1, 1997, in Eurydice, 2001) in order to make it understandable for both Brazil and Portugal (for it has been used in both countries) to refer to the "First Cycle of Basic Teaching (FCBT)" (which is the name given to the first four years of elementary school, which the child begins at the age of six) and the "First Stage of Fundamental Teaching" (used in Brazil for the first five years of elementary school, which the child also begins at the age of six).

² In both countries this teaching stage is mandatory, free and offered by the public administration. According to the Bases Law of the Portuguese Teaching System, the teaching of the FCBT is globalizing, and is the responsibility of only one teacher (mono-teaching), who may be helped by other professionals in specialized areas. In Brazil these first four years have been, and continue to be, taught by only one teacher, both in public and private schools (with some exceptions, as in some schools, some subjects are taught by different teachers during the last years, namely third and fourth grades).

"caring is specific to child education or 'there's always care' not only in child education but also in university?". Faced with this challenge, we argue that at all levels of education, including elementary school, there also exists integration between caring and educating.

Besides that, various authors (Altmann, 2003; Azevedo, 2005; Cafardo, 2006; Marques and Knijnik, 2006) mention that the initial and continuous training of teachers has not taken care of gender and sexuality issues (which is confirmed by the census performed by the Brazilian School Board, where only 0.25% of all continuous training was sexuality and gender oriented; Brasil, 2006, p. 292), 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 (Reis, 2002; Schindhelm, 2008) 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; Sarmento, 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. 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.

We argue that in order to understand teaching as a profession we first need to understand that "childcare" is not inherent to the female gender, and it is not the only important aspect of the profession, for a lot of dedication, commitment, professionalism and knowledge is also required. Because schools and teachers represent some of the first social interactions in an individual's life, a review of the stereotypes and gender representations of teachers is needed so they are not transmitted and absorbed by students.

The thesis that gave rise to this article was guided by a narrative research approach, centered on a quantitative method, with the goal of obtaining even more general data on this topic. The information was collected through questionnaires and interviews with male elementary school teachers.

Therefore, the methodology that we adopted to fulfill our goals was developed from a set of processes. Thus, we do not separate the quantitative and qualitative research approaches; on the contrary, according to the proposal of Sampieri et al. (2006), we preferred a multimodal and mixed model of research that converges such approaches leveraging their advantages.

We chose to focus on a qualitative method to obtain a greater depth in data, because we considered that there is a dynamic relationship between the individual and his surroundings, and an inseparable link between the subjective and objective which cannot be translated only by numbers. However, we also used quantitative research (with data obtained in the official agencies of both Brazil and Portugal, with the applicable questionnaires) in order to obtain more general data on the subject.

We now take the time to explain that this spatial area was taken and chosen from central discussions and comparisons, with the aim of finding the differences and similarities between these two places, thus never forgetting the influence of the Portuguese colonization on Brazilian culture and schools, but also pointing out local characteristics in order to understand what different paths may be set out and if they depend on the variables to which they are subject.

We have conducted narrative and semi-structured interviews, with six randomly chosen teachers³ from a range of 209 public education teachers who had answered a previous survey (objective and subjective)⁴, 60 from the Aveiro district (Portugal) and 149 from the state of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil).⁵ This enabled analysis of the collected data and gave us a wider range of data (categorization, assessment and quantification of statistics and written speech from the questionnaires), and made it possible to assess the information according to life experiences (from the narrative of the interviewees),⁶ analyze their meaning and their relation to society, its institutions and values. The combination of these data and speech collecting processes enabled us to make a comparison between what is general and local.

The interviews and questionnaires distributed to these male teachers in elementary public education in Brazil and Portugal offer us evidence that gender discrimination can be overcome, so that both women and men may be free from discrimination in teaching and perhaps in the labor market as a whole. Therefore, we will expose some of the conclusions of our work, which were made possible with the analysis of our data.

II. Motivations and consequences for men who have chosen the profession of elementary school teacher

2.1 The choice of the profession

While analyzing the reason for men's professional decision to becoming an elementary school teacher we found some interesting data in this study, for instead of being influenced by factors "extrinsic" to the profession (lack of options, employability, best accessible offer, easy access to the labour market, among others), most of the teachers questioned (both in AV-PT and RJ-BR) were mostly motivated by "intrinsic" factors (such as liking the profession, teaching itself, wanting to change the world, liking children, among others)⁷, which conflicts with some academic references on the matter, as well as representations that go around in society that men do not like children or do not have the skills to deal with them.

The narratives of the interviewed men, as well as the open questions answered by the interviewees, showed that men like to deal with kids and that most of them chose this career because they liked it and not because it was the best option possible. Even so, they take into account the viability of the profession, which shows that teachers are not exempt from the vicissitudes of life and the motivations that are interconnected; it is therefore not possible to separate them.

However, some teachers chose the teaching career due to extrinsic factors, and then begun liking the profession, which may indicate that the teachers went beyond their own representations of the fact that men are not able to teach children, due to the fact that they do not have a "natural maternal gift".

The bigger problem is with teachers that do not like the career at all, because, as Freire (1997) states, to be a teacher you need to like what you do, because the teacher's discomfort can lead to the loss of quality in education (Esteve, 1992). So it is important that teachers choose this career for intrinsic reasons, which is made easier by disclosure and accurate information to students about the profession and also by upgrading it (as indicated by the references on teacher malaise).

Even though we found a great deal of teachers who point out that people close to them are satisfied in relation to their profession (an average of above 60% satisfaction, which we did not expect), the existence of people close to them who are dissatisfied with their career choice has strong effects upon teachers, who believe (and are sorry) that the devaluation of teaching in society and the discrimination

³ Only an age range was selected for each country.

⁴ This was handed out to all male teachers of public schools, from whom we collected data, with authorization from city halls and the Aveiro District School Board (Portugal) and from the state of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil).

⁵ There were 113 surveys distributed in AV-PT and 328 in RJ-BR, with a return rate, respectively, of 53% and 45%.

⁶ The information also allowed us to analyze the different experiences in singular and common terms.

⁷ We use the expression "extrinsic and intrinsic factors" for career choice according to Jesus (2002).

suffered are some of the reasons for their teacher malaise.

2.2 Financial and social status of the profession

While analyzing the satisfaction and dissatisfaction of those close to teachers, the existence of conflicting opinions showed a smoldering issue: is the social and financial status of the profession good or bad?

Both in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (RJ-BR) and Aveiro-Portugal (AV-PT), some teachers pointed out that people regarded the teaching profession with prestige and other teachers did not, some thought the profession was financially productive and others not so much. It surprised us that there was a very low number of teachers in AV-PT who considered the profession financially un worthwhile, which is explained, according to the interviewees, by the financial appreciation that the profession has had in Portugal in recent decades. Such contradictions pointed to the need for further analysis on these aspects in academic literature and official data from both countries.

When performing this analysis, we observed that the teaching profession in Portugal had a very large financial valorization (mainly in elementary teaching), the profession is now almost equated with others needing equivalent academic qualifications, and only requires improvement in the early stages of the career. When compared with Brazil, the discrepancy is shown even more clearly. In Brazil we realized that the teaching profession has always been badly paid and only showed some improvement between the 1940s and 1960s, which is only an improvement if we appreciate its representation as a feminine profession, that is to say that teachers did not "need" to support the family with their earnings.⁸

Regarding the social devaluation in Portugal, teachers who participated in this study and the bibliographies consulted consider that this has increased in recent decades, because during the Estado Novo there was the strategy of exalting the social status of teachers as if "to compensate" the financial one; after April 25, 1974, there was an appreciation of the teacher's role, but such appreciation decreased along with the social role of schools and teachers (which were no longer the only representatives of the academic culture).

The fact that teachers are one of the most numerous professional groups in contemporary societies makes it even more difficult to improve their socioeconomic status. But in spite of the opinion that the status of teachers is in total disrepair, and they are losing the prestige that they felt they had, in a more detailed analysis we cannot make that conclusion, because the profession still has its attractions. This shows that social status is not entirely associated with the financial one⁹, for there may be a financial valorization that is dissociated from the social one and vice versa. But that does not mean that the financial aspect should be forgotten, because the high level of malaise in the profession shows that several improvements are needed, including salary improvement which nowadays is more visible and valued.

It should be noted that in both countries the financial and social devaluation of the profession was not related to the entry of women into teaching, because before they entered such impairment already existed, even with a social and financial appreciation in Portugal and Brazil after their entry. Therefore, we can say that the feminization of elementary teaching has not contributed to the social and/or financial devaluation of the profession, so we consider that such impairment would not decrease with the addition of more men into elementary teaching, as indicated in Williams (1995).

⁸ For more information regarding that analysis, see Rabelo (2008); for the Brazilian situation, see Campos (2002), Almeida (1998), Martins (1996), Gouveia (1957), Louro (1989), Tanuri (2000), among others; for the Portuguese situation, see Nôvoa (1987), Mónica (1978), Araújo (2000), Teodoro (1973), Benavente (1990), Federação Nacional dos Professores [FENPROF] (1990), Pardal and Martins (2006), among others.

⁹ Just as we considered in the past, because in Brazil the devaluation of the financial status also meant social devaluation.

2.3 Teacher malaise

There is great dissatisfaction and malaise among the teachers we interviewed, with symptoms mainly triggered by social depreciation (both in RJ-BR and AV-PT) and financial devaluation (more in RJ-BR), and present in poor working conditions and in the absence of investment, and value shifts, among others.

We can state that despite the majority of them liking their profession, most of the teachers from RJ-BR find themselves, in some manner, dissatisfied with their profession (the interviewees and 67% of those questioned) along with more of a third of the teachers from AV-PT (the interviewees and 37% of those questioned).

We must point out that a great deal of teachers wish to leave teaching (although not the majority of them); however the majority of teachers that do not want to continue in elementary teaching want to continue working in education, but wish for other careers.

In RJ-BR those teachers feel motivated to leave teaching due to salary differences and working hours making it impossible for them to progress financially whether in elementary teaching or other teaching levels, or other activities within education which allow a higher accumulation of functions and higher wages (such as in administrative functions within the education area and teaching in other sectors), other teachers (both in RJ-BR and AV-PT) wish to abandon it for because they feel greater affinity towards students from other age groups or a preference for another subject.

Thus, we find that most teachers who want to leave elementary teaching like the profession (for many teachers it was not initially perceived as a springboard for other activities), but want to "progress in their career" both due to financial matters (which includes the workload) and social ones (men are considered incapable of dealing with elementary school children, so teaching "older students" is seen socially as a promotion, as well as taking up office/administrative functions).

For this reason it is necessary to demystify gender-biased representations, but it is also crucial that the teaching profession offers opportunities for advancement, salary and professional enhancement, without forcing them to decline teaching activities.

In the meantime, another analysis can be made following this wish to "progress in one's career", as various authors point out: men have privileges in the most prestigious functions in education. That can be explained by the ideas that go around in society that men have no skills to take care of kids and should be more disciplinarian and authoritarian, which are important aspects in taking up leadership positions as well as in teaching young people and older children.

Such representations exert pressure upon teachers to leave elementary teaching (we perceived the existence of such pressure in some of the teachers interviewed and surveyed). Therefore, we understand that the need to assert masculinity in a feminized occupation, without prestige and with a low salary, can become strategies of affirmation, for example, in the search for more highly-paid and prestigious positions in the education field, which predominate in the mindset of society as being more suited to male professionals, and would give them greater respect, authority and power. In this way, gender stereotypes can create pressure and determine a quest for high office.

The advantage for men in teaching, which is present in an easier access to higher office, can be perceived in the bigger proportional teaching concentration of male teachers that reach the board roles in education, when compared to women, although this process is being reversed both in AV-PT and RJ-BR (although proportionally Brazil still lags behind in this approach, since these are mostly in executive positions in elementary schools).

Even considering teacher dissatisfaction, most of the Brazilian and Portuguese teachers included in this study wish to continue being elementary school teachers (51% from RJ-BR and 74% from AV-PT) and some learned to like the job (even the ones who became teachers "by chance").

Not all teachers are affected in the same way by their malaise and there are happy teachers who have achieved self-realization through their work. The shifts in thinking in teachers that "learned to like the job" point out the valorization of the positive aspects of the profession, but without forgetting the negative aspects, so we do not understand this change to be a simple conformism, for the desire to fight for improvement still exists (a higher conformism in the profession would be continuing it, but wanting to leave).

2.4 The interference of gender prejudice in representations and teaching practice

As we delve deeper into these gender issues, we understand that gender roles are built, so we can be sure that there is no specific skill for teaching in the feminine sex, nor that men that are elementary school teachers would be "out of place". However, gender perceptions in teachers that break boundaries and work in professions considered to be feminine do not always agree with these considerations.

We were surprised by the answers from the teachers interviewed and surveyed to the question "Who has better skills for elementary school teaching?".

There was a great quantity of teachers (especially in BR-RJ) that considered that women had better skills for elementary teaching, some said that men did, and the majority said that it was the same.

However, several of those that pointed out that it was indifferent continued to outline gender roles in their answers (for example, a woman would be more maternal, caring and patient and a man paternal, controlling and professional), which confirms the fact that men who work in traditionally female occupations are not always free from prejudice (even the ones that overcome difficulties and discrimination) and sometimes support the hegemonic masculinity to affirm their masculinity and competence.

Even though we found many prejudicial gender representations in teachers' answers to this question, the majority of the elementary school male teachers did not point out prejudice and showed that they are introducing contradictions and new meanings to gender relations.

They are men who are rethinking the male and female roles in careers in schools, and by introducing changes in the roles of each gender they end up being of the victims of many kinds of discrimination which were mentioned and described by the teachers interviewed and surveyed (more in RJ-BR, where 43.5% of teachers had already seen or suffered some sort of discrimination, compared to 15.25% in AV-PT).

One of these discriminations is homophobia against teachers, which is based on the prejudicial idea that all elementary school male teachers are homosexual. We must underline the fact that homophobia is not only applicable to gays, but to anyone who holds or seems to have a quality which is normally attributed to the other sex, this type of discrimination surfaces in tiny details, such as corporal manners, voices, attitudes/choices (Welzer-Lang, 2001). Therefore the simple fact that you are in a profession that is socially considered to be feminine is targeted by homophobia and, many times, this has repercussions in the difficulty in getting a job, in the need for a teacher to reaffirm his manhood or think of abandoning that career. Is it really necessary for a man to reaffirm himself in teaching in elementary school? Is there a problem with a homosexual becoming a teacher?

We understand that homosexuality itself is not a problem, neither for history nor society, but it has repercussions, and therefore while homosexuality continues to be considered abnormal and there is homophobia, the need for a man to reaffirm himself as a "male" will continue to be present for many men in our society. It is necessary to intensify and deepen the discussions concerning alternative sexualities, enhancing the possibility of change as far as assimilation and acceptance of the other is concerned, which will have repercussions in the production of subjectivities.

We already knew that that type of prejudice existed in RJ-BR (we confirmed it in other academic literature that exists in other places in Brazil), so we thought that we would also find it in Portugal; however, to our amazement, it did not show up, we questioned that fact in interviews and teachers confirmed its non-existence.

Is it possible that gender borders are less rigid in Portugal than in Brazil? We believe that it is not so. We think that the need to associate the need for "feminine attributes" for this profession is not as strong as in Brazil, which demonstrates the non-existence of such prejudice and less discrimination demarcated by Portuguese teachers when compared to the Brazilians.

Despite the amount of discrimination upon the male teacher being lower in AV-PT, we can still find it. The discrimination that we find most in AV-PT was that "men have no gift for dealing with children", this was the second largest in RJ-BR. This discrimination may not be as "strong" as the consideration that all male teachers are homosexuals, but it is founded on the same gender criteria that lead someone to believe that a man is gay, such as the qualities and roles of each gender. But the trend is reversed: he is a man, and therefore does not have female characteristics that are essential to being a good elementary schoolteacher.

The male teacher is discriminated against for being "different" from the majority, considering that by this fact he does not have the qualities to be an elementary schoolteacher. This type of discrimination was sometimes associated with homophobia, either because he has female characteristics and is considered homosexual or because he has male features and does not have these female characteristics and, therefore, has no aptitude for teaching. Such discrimination also generates negative effects in male teachers, especially in hiring, but our respondents showed no such difficulty in getting employment.

Another type of discrimination happens because most elementary schoolteachers are women, so it is believed that the profession is female-oriented (which appeared both in RJ-BR and AV-PT). Due to this belief, it is not expected to see a man being an elementary schoolteacher (or studying to be one), so the term "professora" (which is the female form for teacher in the Portuguese language) is said and written in the papers rather than a form that includes men and women. Although it seems milder, such a generalization is often associated with other biased representations, so we believe that this gender discrimination may be less stated than others, but that cannot hide other prejudices that were left unsaid.

The suspicion or concern that male elementary schoolteachers could be pedophiles or harass students is yet another biased representation that affects teachers, and it follows the same "logic" of the gender-based prejudice mentioned above¹⁰ and it even goes further, because this representation contains a fear of "male sexuality", and contributes to the idea that women lack sexuality. Such an idea, besides causing the effects described above on the other kind of discrimination, still raises concerns that teachers may start being wary of their affections, with the fear of being negatively perceived, which may paradoxically serve to confirm the prejudice that women are more affective and that men have no affection. However, this concern is not always shared by our respondents, who state their affection, but sometimes to confirm their competencies firsthand.

The biased gender representation that teaching, due to the fact that it is underpaid, is not suitable for the family man also affects or has affected some of the interviewees, but we reiterate that that representation is currently unjustifiable in both Brazil and Portugal (when compared to other male-oriented professions, teaching is not that underpaid in either country) and it correlates gender bias, because nowadays the man is not the only breadwinner in the family. Therefore, this idea discriminates and can be a factor deterring men from entering the teaching profession or a cause for them leaving it. However, this factor alone may not have such intense effects, for it is not only the salary that pushes them away from this profession, which is proven in the case of Portugal, where the pay was greatly

¹⁰ Namely, that the work of an elementary school teacher needs feminine characteristics, but if a man has them, which is not considered to be "normal", he is not fit for elementary school teaching, and if the man has male characteristics he is not fit because he lacks the necessary feminine characteristics and has others that are an obstacle to the profession.

improved, but the proportion of men remains very low.

Despite all of these gender biased representations, some of the teachers interviewed and surveyed (AV-PT and RJ-BR) claim that they feel welcome in the profession, having even experienced positive discrimination for being a male teacher, for example, there may be a preference for them because a man would be more disciplinary, more competent and more professional when compared to a woman. This preference may seem paradoxical, but it is not, it also relates to ideas of gender prejudice and reinforces the fact that men find opportunities, including career boosts, which demonstrates that the integration of men in women's work does not always change hierarchies based on gender, because many men tend to focus on more prestigious and better paid specialties.

In the surveys and interviews, some teachers (mainly in AV-PT) have reported that they have never experienced nor witnessed any form of discrimination for being a male elementary schoolteacher. Is that discrimination overcome, especially in Portugal?

We have seen that such discrimination in AV-PT is transferred to another level (such as early childhood educators), which shows that masculine and feminine tasks are socially constructed and depend heavily on the context. In addition, the existence of RJ-BR teachers who have stated that they have never experienced or witnessed that type of situation or discrimination against male elementary schoolteachers may be explained by male strategies to assert and demarcate their masculinity, thus not allowing any prejudice to occur.

However, a large number of teachers from RJ-BR who experienced or witnessed discrimination shows that gender-biased representations regarding these teachers are still very strong in this field and often it is necessary for them to reaffirm their professional place (their masculinity and competence) due to that type of discrimination.

In any case, usually when the teacher can break the barrier of prejudice against them (which often means that a big fight was needed to assert their position, against the obstacles placed, poor reception and lack of consideration) and show his competence and professionalism, he benefits from the career advantages and is preferred to female schoolteachers.

III. Conclusion: "A foreign body in the teaching career"

The fact that we realize that teachers are also biased and often do not change the hierarchies based on gender, reinforcing hegemonic masculinity, even as a way to escape discrimination, and benefit from the advantages of being a part of the male or dominant sex, makes us question: will we gain something from the existence or entrance of men in elementary teaching?

We believe that discrimination against this kind of teacher is a reflection of society's concern with regard to what is different and the possibility of changes to the existing order, which could become greater, so the mere sight of a male teacher (a minority) in this society triggers biased representations and prejudice, among other things. However, teachers have the job of disclosing social representations, so it is possible to resist such notions.

We know it is not easy to resist, so we chose the following phrase from Nôvoa (1987) as a kind of motto: "Remember always that living with hope does not authorize anyone to cultivate illusions; but remember also that denouncing illusions is not, cannot be, a renunciation of hope" (p. 16). Thus we denounce some illusions, but this does not mean that we should renounce hope. Teachers have access to the successive daily routine and difficulties in the classroom, where they can try to improve educational practices and school reality, as well as enable effective educational changes by inciting the questioning of existing representations.

In this sense, we argue that the entry of men in elementary teaching can show everyone¹¹ that men can succeed in exercising this profession, so this is not only a female profession. This is because, despite the discrimination, we note that these teachers are, for the most part, welcome and considered skilled in their professional practice, which contradicts the stereotypes and ultimately reveals that in society, neither teaching nor "traditionally feminine" qualities are specific to women.

We emphasize that the mere entry of men in teaching can help change the definition of masculinity and include so-called "feminine" qualities in this profession, because the children these elementary schoolteachers deal with could identify themselves with these new male models who carry out these activities. They would start having other male role models who do not regard child handling as a task only to be carried out by women and that can include aspects considered "feminine" in their masculinity, thus, their presence in these occupations can change the distinctions between man and woman, even if only in a subtle way, which is an important step towards the realization of gender equality.

Finally, we demonstrate that some men are still in elementary teaching, even suffering from discrimination, and that the voice of this portion of teachers, which is an absolute in elementary school teaching, shows that there may be resistance to these determinations, namely that suitability for teaching does not depend on sex. Such resistance shows up in the struggle of many of these men to continue teaching, which is also marked by their professional success and recognition by children and their caregivers.

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¹¹ Children and their fathers, mothers and other professionals and people that see him in this profession.

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