

IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY: IS EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION A MAN'S PLACE?

EM BUSCA DE IDENTIDADE: EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL É LUGAR DE HOMEM?

EN BÚSQUEDA DE IDENTIDAD: ¿ES LA EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL LUGAR DEL HOMBRE?

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ABSTRACT: This article, which aims to discuss the male presence in the teaching profession, specifically in the space of Early Childhood Education, was organized with data obtained in a qualitative research, which investigated how different school actors understand the social role of daycare centers and professionals that act on it. In this way, information obtained with a student in the Pedagogy course is brought up for discussion, using reports of the practice. The data, treated in the perspective of the analysis of the Bakhtinian discourse, lead us to the statement that “male harshness” is an element of culture and not of human nature - of the male gender. Thus, it is possible, reasonable, and acceptable to men to identify with the teaching work at the daycare center; as well as that they can build the necessary skills/knowledge (patience, calm, social tact, sensitivity, etc.) for the proper professional performance with the children of this level of education

KEYWORDS: Masculinities and teaching. Professional identity. Teaching in the daycare center

RESUMO: *Esse artigo, que tem como objetivo discutir a presença masculina no ofício docente, especificamente no espaço da Educação Infantil, foi organizado com dados obtidos em uma pesquisa, de natureza qualitativa, que investigou como diferentes atores escolares compreendem o papel social da creche e dos profissionais que nela atuam. Desta forma, são trazidas para discussão as informações obtidas junto a um estudante do curso de Pedagogia, com o uso de relatos da prática. Os dados, tratados na perspectiva da análise do discurso bakhtiniana, nos levam a afirmativa de que a “aspereza masculina” é elemento da cultura e não da natureza humana – do gênero masculino. Sendo assim, é possível, razoável e aceitável a identificação dos homens com o trabalho docente na creche; bem como eles são capazes de construir as habilidades/saberes necessários (paciência, calma, tato social, sensibilidade, etc.) para a atuação profissional adequada junto às crianças deste nível de ensino.*

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Masculinidade e docência. Identidade profissional. Docência na creche.*

RESUMEN: *Este artículo, que tiene como objetivo discutir la presencia masculina en la profesión docente, específicamente en el espacio de Educación Infantil, fue organizado con datos obtenidos en una investigación cualitativa, que indagó cómo diferentes actores escolares entienden el rol social de la guardería y sus profesionales. De esta forma, son discutidas la información obtenida de un estudiante en el curso de Pedagogía, utilizando narrativas de la práctica. Los datos, tratados en la perspectiva del análisis del discurso bahktiniano, nos llevan a afirmar que la “dureza masculina” es un elemento de la cultura y no de la naturaleza humana - del género masculino. Así, es posible, razonable y aceptable que los hombres identificar-se con lo labor docente en la guardería; así como que sean capaces de construir las habilidades / conocimientos necesarios (paciencia, calma, tacto social, sensibilidad, etc.) para el adecuado desempeño profesional con los niños de este nivel educativo.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Masculinidad y docencia. Identidad profesional. Docencia en la guardería.*

Introducing the question

Maternal love has for so long been conceived in terms of instinct that we easily believe that such behavior is part of a woman's nature, whatever the time or the environment that surrounds her (BADINTER, 1985, p. 20, our translation).

We start from the current premise that the - and indeed mistaken - assumption (strongly ingrained) that women (almost exclusively) should assume basic responsibility for the education and care of very young children, as we are talking about social functions and, form, historically and culturally assigned functions. As Louro (1997a, p. 21, our translation) points out, the reasons for our practices and beliefs of inequalities “[...] need to be sought not in biological differences (if even these can be understood outside their social constitution), but yes, in social arrangements, in history, in the conditions of access to society's resources, in the forms of representations”.

Thus, the resulting idea - also wrong - which is very present, both in formation and in practice, is that the professional of early childhood education⁴, especially in daycare, needs more “maternal feeling” (or vocation to deal with children) than professional formation, since the smaller the child, the simpler and more feminine the work to be performed is considered

⁴ It is worth mentioning that due to the existing terminology to designate professionals who work directly with young children in educational institutions, even as a way to categorize salaries and tasks, in this work the terms professional of early childhood education, educator and teacher are used as synonyms, without the intention of differentiating positions or functions, since it is understood that everyone must have a minimum specific formation to perform such activity.

(RODRIGUES, 2016).

Louro (1997b) points out that the teaching career was the gateway found by women to conquer the public space; the incursion into normal schools in the middle of the twentieth century is basically due to changes in the economic contours that occurred in the society of the time that made men - until then the only ones to occupy the functions responsible for formal education - lose interest in the teaching career and turn to professional activities that are more economically and socially profitable, thus triggering the process of feminization of teaching professional activity.

However, this is a movement that applies to what is now known as elementary education, because in the case of Early Childhood Education, most notably in daycare, professional performance is already born with the “female” brand, with absolute actuation by women, in view of its origins referring to nursing homes, orphanages, etc. This historical data makes us understand not only the absence of men in Early Childhood Education, but also their little representation on other levels; they are there, but they are of little significance, as pointed out by Gonçalves (2020).

Barbosa (2006, p. 83, our translation) points out that “[...] the first Brazilian daycare centers emerged as a necessary evil, seeking to mitigate infant mortality, publicize breastfeeding campaigns, assist single mothers and carry out moral education for families”. We reiterate that, for a long time, it has been tacit and serenely accepted - even understood as “normal” - that these tasks are considered to be “maternal”.

These and other justifications, more or less subjective, are responsible for the understanding, not only of common sense, but also that early childhood education is a professional space to be occupied only by women, since the functions socially attributed to the institution involve attention, patience, care, affection, sensitivity, etc., attributes of the “feminine essence”. Such an idea predominates in the social imaginary, reverberating in the rejection - veiled or explicit - of the male figure in this space; because, as Louro (1997a, p. 99, our translation) indicates, “teachers - like any other social group - were and are the target of representations”, which are cultural in nature, which on the one hand are not static on the other hand, they do not change simply and quickly.

It is in this described context that we bring, within the limits of this article, some reflections produced by the narrative of a student of the Pedagogy Course, at the time of data

collection, of the male gender - here named as Orpheus⁵ -, about his experiences during the realization of the Supervised internship carried out in a daycare center.

Methodological path

At the time of information collection, Orpheus was 39 years old and in a formation process for teaching activities; he was in the seventh semester of the Pedagogy course, at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul - Campus Pantanal, and had already done an internship in the nursery environment, being ready to start the same activity in preschool. Before entering the degree course in question, he had already completed a bachelor's degree in Psychology and when asked about the reasons for choosing a new course, his justifications denote mistaken ideas related to teaching being a gift and, still, somewhat idealistic expectations about the action of the profession.

Yeah... I thought the course thinking about being a teacher, but, I didn't have much idea of how, what it is like to be a teacher, I had practically no idea; had the experiences I had when I was a student, right? I was a student of another undergraduate and high school and elementary school, but I had no idea of what it was like to be a teacher in teaching practice, for me a teacher was a gift, it was having a gift...

Yeah... So, I thought I could get along well, like this, I thought I had something in me that I could, teach well...

And this is... It was very late. I think it was based on the relationships I had, yeah... With friends, with other people, in other social spaces, relationships and, and the need to want to change... To want to transform, to want to do something to change the context in which I was inserted, where I was living and the previous profession I had, in what I did before I did not see this as a possibility. I think that education, the area of education, was a space where I could be operating this way, working with the possibility of changing, transforming the reality I live in, the context I live in.

[...] I continue to believe this, but I start to realize that the thing is... it starts to look like this, more, it is, anguished with... The difficulties that appeared, became evident throughout my formation process (Excerpts from Orpheus' report, 2016).

Regarding the misunderstanding about the prerogatives for the exercise of the teaching profession perceived in the speech by Orpheus, Garcia (2010, p. 16) points out that the main reason for choosing teaching and staying in the profession “[...] is an intrinsic motivation, strongly linked to satisfaction for getting students to learn, develop skills, evolve and grow”. In the case of the academic, the ability to teach was erroneously understood as a given and not

⁵ Para to preserve confidentiality about the research participant's identity, a fictitious name was assigned. The name of a god from Greek mythology was chosen, which somehow refers to the subject's personal characteristics; in this case Orpheus is the god of music.

built skill, as if the subjects were already born "marked" to be teachers, which would exclude the need for specific learning to exercise teaching; perception that seems to have changed over the course.

The notes brought by the academic also corroborate Valle's proposition (2006, p. 179) about the choice of professional career that,

Contrary to what common sense reveals, a person's destiny is not only related to the characteristics of his personality - disposition, intelligence, character, vocation, aptitude, gifts and personal merits, which can be cultivated in different ways - but it depends mainly on the fact of being born at a certain historical moment and in a certain socio-cultural environment, defined by very precise structural elements: economic, political, educational. These elements weigh on each one's options and end up prescribing the future in the longest term, guiding personal choice and exerting a strong influence on the professional itinerary (our translation).

On the other hand, Orpheus' statements also indicate that when students enter the teacher formation course, they do not always have the clarity and maturity to understand the various dimensions that configure the teaching profession, especially in Early Childhood Education, which in the situation discussed, adds the male gender variable, which has no expressive presence in teaching in general, less frequently at the level mentioned and practically nonexistent in the daycare space (RODRIGUES, 2016).

I couldn't do it, I thought it, I thought it would be one, a very difficult situation, I would have a lot of difficulty to get in, to work... And because of that I couldn't even see myself as a professional in early childhood education, because like that, throughout my formation I always, I always listened, I obviously didn't have this in the disciplines, some discussions we had about it but... We realized that the area of education, especially in the initial grades, is also an area that has a lot of women, right? The Pedagogy course has a lot of women, but I think that in early childhood education this is much stronger. Much more striking, because it seems that early childhood education is, it's still linked, it's associated with the idea of maternal care, of the mother... So, although I always put myself against it inside the classroom, in some subjects I have, I play the role of taking care of children too, right? in some situations it is... Hypothetical, that we created in the classroom, there, I always... There was a situation that I remember, including that it was in the discipline of education and health, and that I presented a job, a presentation and, I had to take a baby on my lap and keep the baby on my lap, show how I hold the baby, how to change the baby's diaper and such... And I did it all in the classroom, I was almost a laughing matter for my friends, but they were surprised by my ability with the baby, who was a doll, not a real baby... I'm a father, so, I knew how to change diapers, I knew how to hold a baby in my arms, and the women, my classmates were surprised by this... So, my expectation is... So, I knew I had a condition, I knew how to deal with children, at least a little... I had already dealt with children because I was a father, but I, I did not see myself as a teacher of early childhood education, I could not build this image of myself as a teacher of child education, because there is a

lot of resistance in the environment, because there is practically no male professional in early childhood education (Excerpts from Orpheus' report, 2016, our translation).

The previous excerpt makes it clear that, even in the context of initial formation, there is a common sense idea of relating professional performance to young children as typical of female nature and personal experience (as mothers or fathers) as essential prerogatives to be a professional who will work in daycare centers (and preschools). We believe that the uncommon presence of men in the school education of young children indicates a form of resistance to gender relations, artificially imposed by past generations, at a certain historical moment, but which today has lost much of its meaning (RODRIGUES, 2016).

It is also evident that there was (and there are in similar situations) a questioning, not so veiled, about Orpheus's sexual identity when he performed female "so-called" tasks - an idea that seems to be shared, in a way, not only by the group but also for him, who quickly tries to justify his ability with babies by the fact that he has already exercised paternity (RODRIGUES, 2016); despite this, when asked about the presence of men in early childhood education, he categorically states that: "[...] *I do believe that it is a place for men and women*" (Excerpt from the report by Orpheus, 2016, our translation).

The fact of the massive presence of women as educators in daycare centers and preschools means that, many times, the professionals themselves consider that there is not a place for "males". Such questions lead us to return to the consideration that "masculinity" is a historical construction and, as such, it can be permanently reconstructed; Carvalho (1998, p. 6) already stated that,

[...] hegemonic masculinity would not be a fixed reference, but rather a permanently contestable and contested consensus, a historically mobile and provisional relationship. The hegemony of a certain configuration of masculinity means the maintenance of gender order and the consequent predominance of a certain configuration of femininity (our translation).

On the other hand, the statement by Campos *et al.* (1991, p. 55, our translation) that "[when] men dedicate themselves to educational work with young children, they become suspicious both about their male identity and about their morality". In a complementary way Cruz (1998, p. 245, author highlights) clarifies that in the learning environments of early childhood education:

[...] there are two masculines that threaten: the aggressor and the homosexual. The first, although unwanted, in a sense is legitimate [...] the man is not expected to commit sexual abuse, but it is desired that he be strong and

aggressive. The second, the homosexual, is denied, represents inadequacy, because he has behaviors or characteristics considered feminine, running away from what is considered “normal” masculine [...] if he is a man doing “womanly things” he can only be a man "Not much of a man" (our translation).

Thus, the male presence in the role of teacher in early childhood education appears as an element of strangeness and attention is increased; because, as reinforced in the report brought, the pre-concept of characteristics considered “natural” of the woman is amalgamated with the profession, focusing mainly on the attribution (or not) of some daily functions that are part of the prerogatives of the position of educator and that they do not depend (or should not depend) on the gender, such as, for example, the child's body care/hygiene (RODRIGUES, 2016). This situation was experienced by Orpheus as an apprentice, in fulfilling the activities of the mandatory internship held at the daycare center.

Look, my relationship with the children, I believe, for me, was very pleasant, the children were also... It was also a very affectionate relationship, the children show a lot of affection. Yeah... I tried to be sensitive to their needs, and I tried to do what they wanted to do, I always gave priority to their will. Although, as I was in the internship, and I was being supervised by the conducting teacher, then there were times when, I could not give vent to what I wanted to do with the children, due to the interference... Of the professionals who worked there, and... I also had some restrictions inside the nursery, right? One thing that I think is very important for me to say here, in this question, is that I could not bathe the children, because I am a man, right? And the justification they gave me was because there were some taboos from the community itself, that were there, that were not, that were not... So, to avoid having a problem with the children's parents, with the community, then I was prevented from giving baths to the children. I found this... Like, it is quite difficult to understand, but I ended up having to accept it and I ended up having to adapt myself to the situation to be able to do the internship.

[...] Look, I felt more specifically the situation of the bath, what I felt was like this... When, there were some moments when I took some children to comb their hair, and some professionals were amazed, right? they even took a picture of me combing the children's hair because they thought it was great, like, “ah! A man combing a child's hair and such, look how great” and they went there and took a picture.

[...] And look, the children did not feel that way... They were extremely receptive to my presence... They always treated me naturally, in the same way that they treated women... (Excerpts from Orpheus' report, 2016, our translation).

The intern's notes contradict the representations that men do not like and are not able to deal with children. In this way, as pointed out by Fonseca (2011), the entry of men in a field hegemonically dominated by women has a greater meaning than a search for professional fulfillment; when occupying a place "that does not belong to him", the male subject breaks with fixed patterns, with static identities, and builds new possibilities of identities for himself, for

the institution of early childhood education and the pedagogical work to be developed (RODRIGUES, 2016). When asked why he states that early childhood education is also a man's place, Orpheus resumes his experience in the internship as a reference.

Ah! Because maybe I am living proof of that... (laughs) I thought a lot and I think I did very well on the internship, I believe that... I don't know if it is a fact, but I believe that I did very well on the internship, that I managed to interact very well with the children, I left nothing to be desired in relation to other professionals, other female professionals, and so... I only regret that I was prevented from doing some things, because I am a man, and that the women do, I guarantee that I could have done it... Even better than people were doing there... But I was prevented from doing it, but I think, because of that, maybe I am even more motivated to raise this flag, right? And as I already said, becoming a male militant, and you're working in early childhood education, why not raise that flag? (Excerpts from Orpheus' report, 2016, our translation)

The arguments contained in the highlighted excerpt again show significant features that men can exercise maternal functions as well as women when circumstances require (and allow); It is important to point out that the paternal role is (or should be) as charged with sensitivity, affection and care-oriented as the maternal (RODRIGUES, 2016). On the other hand, “[...] men can be maternal as long as there is an interest in themselves and the goodwill of women who are close to mothering and care are socio-cultural elements that can be learned by both men and women” (SAYÃO, 2005, p. 165, our translation).

In this way, it is reaffirmed that defending the male presence inside the daycare centers is a way of seeking to overcome the practices and discourses that often interfere in a negative way in the quality of the educational action of the institutions, because as already pointed out by Cerisara (2002), the motherhood related directly to the affection and care considered as typically feminine heightens the domestic character of the daycare's actions to the detriment of professional competence. It is also a question of reversing a formative action that is

[...] loaded with very explicit prejudices from a machista, sexist and racist society, in which children, from a very young age, are formed (deformed?) by micropolitics that standardize a way of being a boy and being a girl in society. This also fosters an ideal of society based on heteronormativity, according to a hegemonic conception of a single type of masculinity and femininity [...] (SILVA, 2015, p. 22, our translation).

We believe that the “female primacy” in early childhood education is configured as a restriction of references in the constitutive process of children's subjectivities; the real world is diverse, composed of men and women, and it is necessary to learn to live with differences with freedom of choice of identification figures (male or female) in all spaces, without restrictions

(RODRIGUES, 2016).

Orpheus' statements show the dynamics of (de)formation of mentalities about female and male roles, because for children there is not a single problem to have a male educator-caregiver; something evidenced in this report. It is opportune, then, to highlight how significant the experience of the internship was for the academic to identify himself with the pedagogical work with the small children, as well as to realize the real dimension of the educational dynamics of the daycare center.

The internship experience managed to raise enough awareness for me to understand that early childhood education is one of the... I ended up considering one of the most important stages of education...

[...] So, before the internship I, I thought that early childhood education could be something interesting, although, I had some fears, because I am a man, because I realize that there was a lot... I don't know if it is a non-acceptance of the male figure, but the fact is that, this influenced a lot my expectation of early childhood education, because... I couldn't see myself as a professional in early childhood education...

[...] Look, the feeling of having done an internship is that you can have a perception of... of what you were studying theoretically, in a much clearer way, right? In a much more... Convincing way, let's say so, you are more convinced that, that it is real, that it really happens that way and... In addition, that you see possibilities, real possibilities, so it is... I think... After I left the internship in early childhood education, I left with a lot... A very good expectation, in the sense that, I think that early childhood education is a space... That it should, and it is not unfortunately, from what I saw there..., but, it should be much more valued, much more studied... that it is today, and unfortunately it is not, so I realized that child education, it is a complex, serious education, difficult to understand and which unfortunately is not valued by the society in which we live, right? For the people, for the governments that are there and that maybe, it is... The experience of being there is ... It made it possible, made me, maybe, become a militant in this area (laughs) (Excerpts from Orpheus' report, 2016, our translation).

The notes in Orpheus's report follow the recurrent discussion that the internship “[...] presents the praxiological exercise par excellence [...]” (AGOSTINHO, 2016, p. 52, our translation). The internship was in fact configured as a space-time approach to teaching practice with very young children, which allowed the exercise of observation, analysis and reflection on the daycare's learning environments, their unique characteristics and the unpredictability of the day-to-day, etc. (SOUZA; RODRIGUES; GOMES, 2014); it also represented the rich possibility of bringing students closer to the future field of work, immersing themselves in the educational daily life of the institution and identifying with teaching, specifically in daycare, in addition to the perception that this is an extremely complex activity, but not inadequate for men (RODRIGUES, 2016).

Obviously, the internship has no potential (or space) to allow contact with the integrality of the elements/situations that permeate the daily life of educational institutions; but without a doubt it constitutes a proficient moment of confrontation with many daily demands of teaching (RODRIGUES, 2016).

Especially when we arrive within the space of early childhood education, we realize that there are many things that already are, that are already within the curriculum guidelines for early childhood education, the parameters that are already defended by, by the legislation in our country, but that unfortunately this is not consolidated in reality, right?... From the physical structure of the daycare center to the qualification of the professionals to be working with the children, and one thing I felt a lot like that, not only at the daycare center, but that it covers the entire educational system is how much, how much that despite the professional being formed and qualified, supposedly qualified, how much the cultural values of this professional interfere in the educational process and how often it gets in the way... As much as the person has gone through a specific graduation etc., but what seems that at the time, what weighs more, are these cultural values formed outside the academy... (Excerpts from Orpheus' report, 2016).

This excerpt from Orpheus' report shows the perception that ingrained cultural values, sometimes much more than the academic learning of initial (or continuing) formation, determine the ways of conducting pedagogical work; as teachers carry in their personal life stories influences from many different cultural, moral experiences, etc., which amalgamate themselves to the knowledge of formation, thus building the knowledge to be used in daily professional practice (RODRIGUES, 2016).

According to Nóvoa (2002, p. 27, our translation), it is not easy to define professional knowledge, as this: “[...] it has a theoretical dimension, but it is not theoretical; it has a practical dimension, but it is not practical; it has an experiential dimension, but it is not just a product of experience”. This is an understanding that seems to be pointed out by Orpheus when talking about the knowledge considered necessary to work as a nursery school educator.

So, I think he needs to be aware, know how to differentiate the levels, the phases in which the child is, right, just so you know how you will be able to work, and adapt your work to the needs of each level of childhood of the child, right... So you have to be clear about that, right, at what level is the child's subject development, it is... From that, you have to know what materials, in what way you can, creating shapes and spaces for them to contemplate these, these needs of both the baby in its early childhood and the child already more developed, it is... So I think you have to know, know how the child develops, you know, how human development occurs, you have to know... In which society in which these human subjects are inserted, how is it organized, this society, how is this structure of society organized, I think we have to understand how society works too, so that we know that type of learning that we want these children to have. [...] I think that, in this first moment, we are

already able to create opportunities, create conditions for the child to develop in this sense... So I think it is knowing society, knowing the social structure, how society works and how that... The human subject develops, right, within this society... (Excerpts from Orpheus' report, 2016).

It is worth mentioning the emphasis given to knowledge about child development, which is explicitly the only one specifically related to pedagogical practices to be developed with young children, pointed out in the answer to the provocation launched. In other excerpts of the report, indirectly mentioned, other knowledge considered necessary, such as articulated practices of caring and educating, planning specific activities for young children, organization of times and spaces; none of them were marked as too complex or inadequate to be built by men (RODRIGUES, 2016).

Final considerations

Identity is not a given, it is not a product. Identity is a place of struggles and conflicts, it is a space for building ways of being and being in the profession (NOVOA, 1992, p. 16, our translation).

In general, it is possible to state that Orpheus' initial formation has drawn his attention to important issues of education for young children in a collective space; the fact that he has overcome his preconceptions about the male presence in early childhood education is already a major achievement. It is important to note that, in addition to the intrinsic challenges to teaching in early childhood education, Orpheus' report reveals that for male teachers the difficulties are accentuated due to notions of a certain masculinity, whose characteristics are considered incompatible with the pedagogical work of daycare centers and preschools.

Facing the questioning from the eyes of the other was the first major obstacle to be faced; a "problem" that the academic of the Pedagogy course in some way circumvented, in the institution and with himself, being the experience of the internship the context that allowed the rupture, even if in a restricted way, with the notion of masculinity assumed by a good portion society and by him in principle. His first foray into early childhood education gives significant evidence that this is a possible professional field for both women and men (RODRIGUES, 2016).

While different studies and official documents seek to affirm the professional character that teaching in early childhood education needs to assume, in practice, there is a tendency to bring the teacher closer to the figure of mother, aunt, and female roles in general; thus, affirming

the importance of the presence of men in teaching is not to mischaracterize the figure of the teacher of small children, but on the contrary, to enrich it.

Similarly, it is not about defending a place for men as opposed to women; the clear intention is to demystify the idea of marked places, professions and obligations previously demarcated, coined by a history organized from models/patterns of behavior that disregard the many possibilities of being/living “roles of man and woman”. Cerisara (1996, p. 166, our translation) already signaled that

The movement that seeks integration and complementarity between female and male supposes that space is opened so that men can deal with affection, feeling, motherhood, as well as for professional practices with masculine features within Early Childhood Education institutions, with a view to collaborating to end gender discrimination in occupations related to the care and education of children from 0 to 6 years old and to contribute to the socialization process of boys and girls.

In this sense, Oliveira (2007) argues that the maternal model of care and education of young children, underlying the pedagogical practices of daycare centers, reinforces the understanding of the non-requirement for professionalization in this space; because it is expected that “the teacher” has only a few skills, such as: patience, the ability to express affection, that like and understand the children - also understood as “their” natural characteristics. However, it is necessary to consider that:

[...] calm, patience and affection are extremely necessary attributes when working with young children; however, it cannot be believed that these are natural gifts or aptitudes of a person or exclusive to a gender, but rather as capacities developed by the professional during the exercise of their profession, which can be qualified as experiential learning. Equally relevant, it is necessary to clarify that affection, in the pedagogical space, is not a synonym restricted to docility or gentleness, but rather to a caring way of treating others, in this case children; affection means being ready to meet the needs of the little ones with caution, commitment, attention and respect, combined with generosity towards others (RODRIGUES, 2016, p. 201, our translation).

In the case of the so-called “liking children” prerogative, we believe that indicating that this is a specific feature of early childhood education denotes the understanding - which we consider correct - that work at this level of education has an affective dimension that is related to the needs of children that is true (RODRIGUES, 2016). However,

[...] considering as a condition that applies only at this level of education does it mean that at other levels it is not necessary to like apprentices (older children, teenagers, young people and adults)? It is important to distinguish between identifying with professional tasks and “liking” the public; the *sine*

qua non condition defended is to identify with the tasks that the profession prescribes, with the daily demands that the function demands and adapt personal knowledge and skills to them. The current view that to work with a small child, it is enough to like is no longer enough, nor adequate, it is necessary to have professionals adequately prepared (in terms and theories, practices, values, and beliefs) and who minimally identify with the pedagogical work that should be implemented in daycare centers (and preschools) (RODRIGUES, 2016, p. 201, our translation).

The information provided by the then intern Orpheus brings up a disturbing question that, would daycare work be valued differently if men were taking care of the care and attention of children? (RODRIGUES, 2016). Thinking about the sexist society in which we live, we tend to believe so. Tebet, Martins and Rittmeister (2013, p. 157), indicate that the promotion and consequent growth of the male presence in the space of early childhood education can boost the recognition of this as a respectable professional field, causing suppression of the mistaken impression that it is a locus where are used practices and knowledge, about the education of very young children, restricted to the female universe, passed down from generation to generation, to constitute itself as “[...] a profession that can be exercised by those who wish to do so, regardless of sex, color or social class” (our translation). On the other hand, it is uncomfortable to admit this possibility of recognition of the professional field regulated by (simply) acceptance of the male presence in its core... (RODRIGUES, 2016)

The account brought up leaves us with the impression that there are strong indications of a comprehensive understanding of what it is to exercise teaching with very young children, but there is also a lack of clarity about the minutiae that surround this breadth, such as the permanence of ideas that to work with this level of education it is necessary to have family experience with children or to like them, among others. It is frustrating to see the veracity – and that it is still current - of Kramer's (2003) statement that the area of early childhood education is a minefield of dichotomies...

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