

**SEXUALITY SILENCED IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND THE
CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE SERIES SEX EDUCATION**

***A SEXUALIDADE SILENCIADA NO AMBIENTE ESCOLAR E AS CONTRIBUIÇÕES
DA SÉRIE SEX EDUCATION***

***SEXUALIDAD SILENCIADA EN EL ENTORNO ESCOLAR Y LAS
CONTRIBUCIONES DE LA SERIE SEX EDUCATION***

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ABSTRACT: Sex education is considered a taboo in society. The dialogues that should, in short, support coherent information and debates about sexuality are transformed into a set of disagreements based on misinformation, revealing an informal sexual education that has been passed down through generations and supported by moral and religious dogmas. The research aims to analyze Netflix's Sex Education series and its relevance to the Sex Education debate. It is an exploratory study that allows us to reflect on the school as an organ inherent to society, which is reflected in a paradigm marked by the reinforcement of common sense linked to the themes of sexuality. Thus, it is noted that the school should be responsible for disseminating a formal sexual education, based on scientific studies about sexuality, but it tumbles on moral and misrepresented concepts of professionals, preventing, consequently, that there is a free discussion of dogmas and prejudices that, effectively, will solve the questions of the students of the current generation.

KEYWORDS: Education. Sexuality. Society. Dialogue.

RESUMO: *A Educação Sexual é considerada um tabu na sociedade. Os diálogos que deveriam, em suma, alicerçar informações e debates coerentes sobre sexualidade são transformados em um conjunto de achismos baseados em desinformações, revelando uma Educação Sexual informal perpassada por gerações e apoiada em dogmas morais e religiosos. A pesquisa tem como objetivo analisar a série Sex Education da Netflix e sua relevância para o debate da Educação Sexual. Trata-se de um estudo exploratório que nos permite refletir a escola como*

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órgão inerente à sociedade, que se vê refletida em um paradigma marcado pelo reforço do senso comum atrelado às temáticas da sexualidade. Assim, denota-se que a escola deve ser responsável por disseminar uma Educação Sexual formal, baseada em estudos científicos acerca da sexualidade, mas esbarra em conceitos morais e deturpados de profissionais, impedindo, conseqüentemente, que haja uma discussão livre de dogmas e preconceitos e que, efetivamente, venha a sanar os questionamentos dos alunos da atual geração.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação. Sexualidade. Sociedade. Diálogo.

RESUMEN: *La educación sexual se considera un tabú en la sociedad. Los diálogos que deberían, en definitiva, sustentar información coherente y debates sobre la sexualidad se transforman en un conjunto de desacuerdos basados en la desinformación, revelando una educación sexual informal que ha sido transmitida de generación en generación y sustentada en dogmas morales y religiosos. La investigación tiene como objetivo analizar la serie Sex Education de Netflix y su relevancia para el debate sobre educación sexual. Se trata de un estudio exploratorio que nos permite reflexionar sobre la escuela como órgano inherente a la sociedad, lo que se refleja en un paradigma marcado por el refuerzo del sentido común ligado a los temas de la sexualidad. Así, se advierte que la escuela debe ser la encargada de difundir una educación sexual formal, basada en estudios científicos sobre la sexualidad, pero cae sobre conceptos morales y tergiversados de los profesionales, impidiendo, en consecuencia, que exista una libre discusión de dogmas y prejuicios que, efectivamente, resolverá las interrogantes de los estudiantes de la generación actual.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación. Sexualidad. Sociedad. Diálogo.

Introduction

This article aims to highlight the relevance of inserting Sex Education in the school curriculum through an emancipatory approach, in order to cause reflection on some important points that permeate this practice through an analysis of the series Sex Education, available on Netflix, and to show the relevance of the series in this period in which we face several setbacks regarding sexuality within the school, in the family and in society.

The baseline studies were done through articles in the *Revista Ibero-Americana de Estudos em Educação* (Ibero-American Journal of Education Studies), made available by the organizers of this dossier, in addition to other authors. However, we pay attention to a part referring to the Methodology to clarify which path we take to reach the result of this work.

We chose to study the series because we understand that it has a very current focus on the theme of sexuality: as it is seen by teachers and principal, the unpreparedness that both face, the excess of curiosity of students and the indispensability of a capacitated professional for deal with the topic with ownership and understanding. These points present questions and reflections throughout this article.

We want to propose a reflection on the taboos that Sex Education faces, as well as the setbacks and, consequently, the importance of breaking this promiscuous and erroneous look at the theme, and that, in this way, teachers assume a liberating practice and social transformation when dealing with sexuality within schools.

We also wish to think, study, and inform about the importance and necessity of this discipline for the global education of students, thus also reducing some problems that we face in society today, such as sexual violence, early pregnancy, sexism, racism, among others that were and will be cited throughout this work. It is evident the urgency of such a subject to be increasingly taken beyond the physical spaces of the school in a systematic way.

Thus, we consider that the series Sex Education demonstrates in a clear and questioning way important points to be discussed within the school and by society.

This article is the result of an exploratory research, considering that the objective of this method is to provide necessary information to expand knowledge, this is due to the malleable character provided by the best development of the method. The exploratory method allows the researcher to have a broad notion of new themes to be investigated, in addition to demonstrating the relevance of the theme and its contribution to the academy and its relevance in the context of human experiences.

They generally provide greater familiarity with the problem, that is, they aim to make it more explicit. Its main objective is the improvement of ideas or the discovery of intuitions. Although the planning of exploratory research is quite flexible, in most cases it can take the form of bibliographic research or case study (HANDEM; MATIOLI; PEREIRA; NASCIMENTO, 2007, p. 91, our translation).

Therefore, for the elaboration of this writing, we started from a detailed and attentive planning in the selection of the materials to be read and interpreted, most of the selected articles are articles available in the Revista Ibero Americana, in addition to bibliographies of authors who discuss the need for if serious scientific knowledge is disseminated on the topic of Sex Education, allied to the analysis of the series Sex Education. We take into account the contribution that sounds, images and movements contribute to the understanding of different themes, facilitating understanding (DESIDÉRIO, 2015), especially when dealing with subjects interpreted in such a distorted way in our society, such as Sex Education within the school context.

Development

Sexuality is one of the most controversial topics today, considering that it goes beyond the barriers of sex understood as solely for reproduction purposes, encompassing in its subjective construction process the biological, psychological and sociocultural development, in addition to being a territory of the discovery of pleasure. Sexuality is an inherent trait of the human being, present since birth, going through all other phases of life and, therefore, a strategy of knowledge and power is designed.

[...] It is the name that can be given to a historical construct: there is not a stealthy reality that is difficult to grasp, but an enormous network-shaped surface on which the stimulations of bodies, the intensification of pleasures, the incitement to discourse, the formation of specialized knowledge, the strengthening of controls and resistance are linked to each other, according to a few important strategies of knowledge and power (BRITZMAN, 2003, p. 100-101, our translation).

In view of the above, an epistemic look at the theme is urgent. The view of the body in force today is conditioned by capitalist, mercantile and media society, leading to the limited and reductionist dimensions of the body, dehumanizing social and affective-sexual relations (BONFIM, 2012, p. 61).

Therefore, it is essential to investigate the possibilities of deconstruction and reconstruction of new ways of thinking about human experience. Much is speculated about what should be the appropriate environment to work on this topic with the coherent and necessary information to meet the expectations of new generations. In early 2019, the well-known Netflix streaming platform, which currently has more than 160,000 subscribers, launched the first season of the series entitled Sex Education dedicated to young audiences. With a focus on sexuality, the series achieved unexpected results, audience success and popularity among the series available on the digital platform.

Created by screenwriter Laurie Nunn, Sex Education was inspired by films by John Hughes, a famous American director who left in his legacy a diverse range of films of the most diverse themes, however, most of his films were dedicated to teen themes with sexual overtones very close to the experience and desires typical of this very peculiar phase of human development.

The first season of the British series, original from Netflix, presents a touch of acid humor and very realistic scenes of themes considered taboo such as sex, masturbation, nudism, homosexual relationships, self-esteem, fantasies, personality discovery, abortion, family relationships, health and woman's pleasure. Although the characters are clichés of the typical

format of films for teenagers in high school, the development of the characters is sculpted differently, starting with being played by a little-known young cast.

The storyline takes place at Moordale High School, where the virgin Otis (Asa Butterfield) and his partner, the typical troubled teenager Maeve Wiley (Emma Mackey), create a clinic to give sexual and affective advice to school members, starting from colleagues' own questions about the way they experience their own sexuality.

The ease of the character Otis in dealing with issues related to sexuality is due to his family background, since his mother Jean, lived by Gillian Anderson, has as a formation and profession the role of sex therapist and writer of books on the same theme, as well as his father Remy (James Purefoy), although absent, is also a writer on the theme of sexuality, although he is dedicated to the theme of masculinity in typically heteronormative patterns. The course of the first season unfolds in a seam that culminates in a sexual web of several complex characters and their unfolding. It is worth mentioning, for example, the character Eric (Ncuti Gatwa), gay best friend of the main character Otis, who stood out for the construction of the character during the plot, giving visibility to racial issues, homophobia internalized in the school environment, maturity and acceptance of homosexuality in the family context. The character Eric is essential to compose the series, based on the character and its development, problematizations are proposed that, generally, are not found in the contexts of other series dedicated to the adolescent and young audience. The first season chose to work on issues such as teenage abortion, masculinities and toxic behaviors, masturbation and female pleasure.

In the beginning of 2020, the second season of the series was launched that lived up to the success of the first season, reaching the top of the most commented subjects of Twitter in Brazil due to its importance in the context of human and sexual formation of users of the Netflix online platform.

The 2nd season of Sex Education brought to the screen of smartphones and computers complex questions related to information and misinformation about sexuality, who should have the domain to deal with the speculations and desires of teenagers who cry out for answers to their sexual and emotional dilemmas.

The history of Otis and Maeve's adolescent counseling clinic is just a scenario for deeper issues developed in the plot, such as the period of adolescence and the way in which maturity develops.

The Moordale school in the plot was not prepared to deal with the doubts and needs of its students regarding sexuality, so, at this point in the plot, the criticism of school teaching systems and their purely biologicist views of sex education is made explicit. The series, at this

point, ends up fixing as a central point of the season the absence of dialogue between teenagers and school and the reflection of this in the human formation of the students.

There are many conflicts between the family and educational institutions about who should be responsible for informing students, because “[...] it involves prejudices rooted in a patriarchal sexual morality [...]” (BONFIM, 2012, p. 65, our translation). We note that teachers argue that they do not feel prepared to discuss the topic, this is due to inexperience and the lack of scientific knowledge about human sexuality, in view of the absence of formation courses, in addition to the fact that they have ingrained values and taboos from their construction process as a subject in today's society. In this perspective, the prevailing view is “[...] that each family received from their ancestors and passed on to their children, almost always repressive, dogmatic, sinful, and shameful” (BONFIM, 2012, p. 65, our translation).

In view of the above, the principle is assumed that allowing the school to discuss sexuality in its multidimensional character, also implies that the teacher formation contemplates this aspect. This is because this discussion depends, among other factors, on teachers who feel capable of addressing and problematizing not only aspects associated with the biological body, namely: STDs, anatomy and physiology of the male and female reproductive system, but, above all, social, cultural aspects, ethical, philosophical, among others, as these are the aspects that, together with biology, will give meaning to sexuality and help teachers to develop this theme in the classroom with students, in the search to enable these social actors to responsible experience of their sexuality. Therefore, it is understood that the teacher is the social actor/author who has the role of, at school, helping the student to subjectify (ZOCCA; MUZZETI; NOGUEIRA; RIBEIRO, 2015, p. 1449, our translation).

When observing the advance of anti-sec education strategies in the political sphere, with popular support from families that organize themselves in civil society based on conservatism and puritanism, it is assumed that the best way to work on sexuality seen by society is to silence all and any form of intervention regarding information related to the topic.

Parents and educators must understand that hiding the subject also means taking a stand on it. Neutrality can be worse than an opposite position: the culture of silence that still prevails at school and in the family forgets that we do not necessarily need to use dialogue to express our positions. Omission, gestures, prohibitions laden with moralistic and sociocultural values are a way of contributing to prejudice and sexual taboos being perpetuated (BONFIM, 2012, p. 64, our translation).

This type of view builds an image that Sexual Education in schools is an immoral and promiscuous practice and that this would be responsible for inducing children to have sexual intercourse early. Interpretations like this still recommend abstinence as a prevention of pregnancy and sexual diseases. In mid-2004, a political movement in Brazil called *Escola Sem*

Partido (School Without Party) emerged, created by lawyer Miguel Nagib who, at the time, served as a prosecutor for the State of São Paulo. The movement came after alleged allegations of political party indoctrination in schools for ideological purposes, the argument used was that teachers worked with a concept that was called Gender Ideology. To understand the scenario of this statement, it is first necessary to appropriate the concept of gender.

Gender is a theoretical category created in the second half of the 20th century to designate the social constructions on the feminine and the masculine [...] It is not something that is born with the person, it is not something determined by biology [...] it cannot be said that women are all the same or that men are all the same, as we are faced with a huge diversity of meanings, ways of being and existing in the world and in society, and even different ways of dealing with and feeling sexuality [...] the meanings of gender present in our society are guided by power relations [...]. This idea is based, generally, on biological determinism, and on the construction of differences in a hierarchical way and generates inequalities and oppression. And it is at this point that conservative groups support each other to criticize the construction of gender equality, because to bring up the discussion of gender means to show that there are significant differences among women, among men, that there are different masculinities and femininities, different forms to express affection, sexuality, gender characteristics, denounce disrespect for diversity and preach equality and respect for human dignity and differences. So, you cannot talk about gender ideology because gender is not an ideology. Quite the contrary, bringing the gender discussion is a way of deconstructing an ideology based on nature and biology, deconstructing inequality between men and women in our society, and even deconstructing inequalities between groups of women among themselves and between groups of men (TALLES, 2016, p. 2, our translation).

That said, we understand that there was a misrepresentation in the understanding of the concept of Gender, which increased the fear of teachers in schools to address the issue of sexuality.

A fallacy dubbed gender ideology was created, which would induce the destruction of the traditional family, the legalization of pedophilia, the end of the natural order and relations between genders and which denies the existing discrimination and violence against women and LGBT people proven with official data and scientific studies. Intellectual dishonesty was used, formulating arguments without scientific foundations, and replicating them on social media to be swallowed and regurgitated by the uncritical faithful who accept them as unquestionable truths. It was also used as a kind of moral terrorism, assigning demon status to people favorable to respect for gender equality and sexual diversity in education, in addition to intimidating education professionals with extrajudicial notices, with the threat of prosecution against anyone who dared to approach these subjects in the classroom. A movement was created to erase the gender issue from the school curriculum (REIS; EGGERT, 2017, p. 20, our translation).

Within this point of view, one of the main human characteristics, sexuality, is abdicated, so fundamental for a good human development. This circumstance gives rise to fear on the part of the teacher to approach the subject and suffer retaliation. Therefore, we can say that we receive more sex education in an informal than formal way (systematized in the school environment) during our life.

[...] to improve this situation, first, a sex re-education of all of us is necessary. Sex education is not done in a dogmatic or doctrinal way. A sex education project about spontaneistic volunteering, even one full of good intentions and altruism, should not be sustained. The will must be the engine of transformative practices, but these are only completed with critical awareness that must be systematically pursued by science and by the intellectual work of research and deepening [...] (BONFIM, 2012, p. 65, our translation).

Talking about Sex Education at school is still a complex subject, especially when this subject permeates the school space attended by a wide diversity of adolescents. However, we must emphasize that, throughout our formation, we learn about Sex Education in a timely manner, with a friend when a question arises, with our parents' reactions when we want to know about something related, and also within the school, in the way the teacher addresses the topic in the school context, the school is positioned to educate its students on sexuality.

[...] the sexual issue cannot be disconnected from social transformation, which needs to be perceived as a process, in a dialectical perspective, that is, in a context in which truths, ideas, worldviews, experiences and livings are not absolute. Thus, the proposal of Sex Education is any action that involves learning about human sexuality, which is inserted in a historical-cultural context and that allows the search for feelings, values, emotions and attitudes towards sexual life (DESIDÉRIO, 2014, p. 88, our translation).

We find in the educational documents and laws the necessary bases to support the Sex Education approach at school. The National Education Guidelines and Bases Law No. 9,934, of 20 December 1996 (LDBEN 9394\96) stands out, with emphasis on Art. 2 which stresses that “Education, duty of the family and the State, inspired in the principles of freedom and ideals of human solidarity, it aims at the full development of the student [...]” (our translation), still complements Art. 3, when paragraph 1 legally guarantees “[...] equal conditions for the access and stay at school [...]”. Following the same path, we can cite the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil of 1988 (CF 88), which in Art. 205 corroborates by saying that “Education, the right of all [...] aiming at the full development of the person, their preparation for the exercise of citizenship [...]” (BRASIL, 1996, Art. 205. Our translation).

According to legal documents, we must promote education for sexuality together with teachers and students. It is important to note that the PCN (National Curriculum Parameters) since 1996 bring the discussion of Sexual Orientation into the school space through transversal themes. Despite the problems indicated by several researchers, such as the treatment of sexuality from a biological perspective and the superficial approach to gender issues, the official document corresponds to the legitimation of the approach to sexual and gender diversity at school (SILVA; BRANCALEONI; OLIVEIRA, 2019).

In the Transversal Themes demonstrated in the PCN we find the necessary foundations to base the teaching of Sex Education in schools. There are six competencies for student education, according to the section on Transversal Themes, they are: ethics; sexual orientation; environment; health; cultural plurality and work and consumption. That is, sexual orientation is relevant to human compression.

The approach of the body as a matrix of sexuality aims to provide students with knowledge and respect for their own bodies and notions about the care they need from health services. The discussion on gender promotes the questioning of rigidly established roles for men and women in society, the valorization of each one and the flexibility of these roles. The work to prevent sexually transmitted diseases/AIDS makes it possible to offer scientific and updated information on ways to prevent diseases. It must also combat discrimination against HIV-positive people and AIDS patients to contribute to the adoption of preventive behavior by young people (BRASIL, 1997, p. 34, our translation).

By apprehending the importance of sexuality for human formation, we defend that Sex Education should be worked on from early childhood education. Here we will pay attention to its relevance during the adolescence period, since it is in this context full of changes for the teenager that many concerns arise, among them, unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, the proper use of condoms, knowledge about the body, the initiation of sexual relations immaturely, masturbation, the use of contraceptives, etc.

That is why Sex Education is indispensable, especially at this moment in life when transformations and news are experienced alongside doubts and uncertainties (ZOCCA; MUZZETI; NOGUEIRA; RIBEIRO, 2016). Conceptualizing the approach to which we advocate that, according to Figueiró (1996), it refers to a political approach because it is aimed at the emancipation of the individual, developing criticality in the social, political and cultural notes about his sexuality in the broadest way (gender, identity, orientation, desire, pleasure, values) not only of oneself, but also of all the environment in which one finds oneself, we have to:

Sexual Orientation at school should be understood as a process of pedagogical intervention that aims to transmit information and problematize issues related to sexuality, including postures, beliefs, taboos and values associated with it. Such intervention occurs at a collective level, differentiating itself from an individual work, of a psychotherapeutic nature and focusing on the sociological, psychological and physiological dimensions of sexuality. It is also different from the education carried out by the family, as it makes it possible to discuss different points of view associated with sexuality, without imposing certain values on others. The Sexual Orientation work aims to provide young people with the possibility of exercising their sexuality in a responsible and pleasant way. Its development should offer criteria for the discernment of sexuality-related behaviors that demand privacy and intimacy, as well as recognition of the manifestations of sexuality that can be expressed at school (FIGUEIRO, 1996, p. 34, our translation).

The consequence of this positioning of the school and teachers in relation to this theme makes students look for information in countless communication sources, and this acquired information arrives distorted, they are inconsistent, they educate instead of educating. We live in a moment in which it is already visible that changes in this direction are necessary, since for some time Sex Education, unfortunately, has remained only in legal documents and has been barred at the school gates, causing ostensible consequences in our society.

The Sex Education series is all set to provide interventions that make it possible for the viewer to deconstruct preconceived knowledge, and still, it gives a rich return on scientific knowledge. The series is formatted to think and evaluate the complexity of human relationships and affective diversity in contemporary times.

[...] the school is one of the educational institutions whose role is the socialization of systematized knowledge. The school needs to be seen outside from itself, to meet the needs of the whole society, enabling existing conflicts, meeting the interests of a class society. (BIANCON, 2016, p. 25, our translation).

Therefore, we note that the theme is mandatory and ensured by important official documents to compose the educational curriculum, in addition to the curriculum, students have needs, typical curiosities arising from this maturation phase and feel willing to discuss the matter within the school, as well family atmosphere.

Final considerations

Despite the criticisms and obstacles mentioned above, the school is considered the conducive environment for working on the theme of sexuality due to the approach and access to school-age students, as discussed along the article, the curiosity of adolescents in talking

about the subject and also the weakness of the school in working on this issue, reflecting a society that opted for a sex education based on moral and religious concepts that culminated in decades of delay and misinformation, which ends up generating several conditions of violence such as machismo, misogyny, homophobia, domestic violence, gender violence, child sexual abuse, among other forms of violence that reflect the lack of human formation in the field of sexuality.

Therefore, there is an urgent need for the school to take charge of producing this dialogue in order to meet the expectations of the students of that generation, and of future ones who will enter the school environment. It is significant to reinforce the NCPs that already offer a legal basis for this debate to take place.

Finally, we must conclude the importance of the Sex Education series in the current historical context marked by so many setbacks. This is accessible content that discusses taboo-free sexuality and, for that reason, is beneficial to society in general, since from the content covered in the series plot, many teenagers and even adults reported having reflected on content they had never before been presented or questioned to them, details so simple and stigmatized at the same time.

In the same perspective, the series demonstrates the seriousness and dimension of the formation necessary for the professional to be capacitated to deal with the dissemination of content related to sexuality so that it is based in a scientific, didactic, and natural way, so as not to produce untruths and inconsistencies based on shallow and distorted knowledge. In addition, there is a concern that the topic will be worked with spontaneity and that its scope will be understandable to students of today and future generations, emphasizing that sexually educating adolescents and young people is advantageous and beneficial for the whole of society.

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