

THE NEED FOR MALE TEACHERS

SOME THOUGHTS FROM BRAZIL

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I - INTRODUCTION

There has long been a concern for the diminished school performance of males, compared to that of females - a fact that has increased throughout the world, and that can be seen in many OECD countries, where the high school graduation rate is much higher among females (87%) than among males (78%) of the same age group.¹ In Spain, this rate is even higher, with that of females being 15% higher than that of males.

Brazil is heading in the same direction. The publication *Anuário Brasileiro de Educação Básica de 2012*² contains a decade-long study tracing the academic paths of students, carried out by the *Instituto de Pesquisas Econômicas Aplicadas* (Ipea), for 1998 to 2007. Among other facts, this same difference between males and females is highlighted. It is clear that these inequalities accumulate during the years of schooling. The percentage of the generation born in 1987-1988 that concluded the 4^a grade of primary schooling in 1998 was 30.2% for the

¹ Cf. Aceprensa, 112/07

² Cf. *Anuário Brasileiro de Educação Básica de 2012*

males and 35.4% for the females. For this same group, in 2005, 22.6% of the males entered secondary school, and 26.7% of the females. In 2007, now looking at higher education, the percentages were 18.4% of the males and 26.3% of the females.

Since the 1990s, various studies have sought to diagnose the possible causes of this comparatively lower performance by males. Sommers, a well-known specialist on the American feminist movement, highlighted this difference in the book *The War Against Boys*. The researcher wrote that in many U.S. schools, some masculine traits, such as energy and competitiveness, were seen as undesirable, and called attention to the possible relation of the absence of these factors with the lower academic performance and sense of discouragement of males.

In 2007, the well-known French magazine *Famille Chrétienne*³ published a report on school learning difficulties of boys. According to this report, the first problem in many cases is the lack of a male reference model. If within the family it's the mother who mainly assumes the first challenges in education the children, the overwhelming presence of female teachers in primary schools is also marked. Today in France, as in the vast majority of developed or developing countries, the rate of female school teachers is around 80%. Considering that biologically, females mature at a faster rate than males, the report conjectures that the absence of male teachers may be contributing even more to the learning process for boys, provoking future learning inequalities.

Aware of this educational inequality between boys and girls throughout the world, Diefenbach & Klein⁴ argue that the reduction in the numbers of teachers beginning in the 1960s, principally in the first years of primary schooling, possibly influenced the learning of boys. They hypothesize that the low

³ Cf. *Famille Chrétienne*, 21-09-2007

⁴ DIEFENBACH, H./ KLEIN, 2002, M. "Bringing Black", soziale Ungleichheit zwischen den Geschlechtern im Bildungssystem zuungunsten von Jungen am Beispiel der Sekundarabschlüsse, In: *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, (Alemanha), p. 938-958.

rates of school performance presented during the past decade, and the reduction of the number of boys who conclude secondary schooling may be related to the low numbers of male teachers.

The present article asks the question: is the male image important in educating children? Is there a relationship, as Diefenbach & Klein assert, between the decrease in the numbers of male teachers over the last decades, and the learning of boys?

II. THE MALE PRESENCE IN TEACHING

Indeed, the decrease of male teachers is a global reality. Numerous studies have analyzed the phenomenon. In a recent thesis, Pincinato⁵ carried out a historical analysis, concentrating on the period between 1950 and 1989, and concluded that some legal factors imposed during this period on the Brazilian education system caused great changes in schools, and with this differentiated school culture was created in which time, space, and even the very subjects of education - students, teachers and administrative personnel - changed. A series of occurrences changed the way males worked within the teaching profession, and the way they thought - and still think - about their professional identities.

According to the Brazilian School Census of 2011⁶, there were 380,314 male teachers in primary and secondary education, which corresponds to 19.32% within a universe of more than 2,045,000 individuals, while women teachers comprised the overwhelming majority of more than 1,650,000. The greatest disparity in male teachers is in preschool education. Only 2.9% of teachers in this area of education are males. That is,

⁵ PINCINATO, D. A. V. 2007, "Homens e Masculinidades na cultura do Magistério: uma escolha pelo possível, um lugar para brilhar (São Paulo, 1950-1989)". Tese de doutorado, Universidade de São Paulo/USP. 2007

⁶ <http://www.moderna.com.br/lumis/portal/file/fileDownload.jsp?fileId=8A8A8A83376FC2C9013776334AAE47F0>

they total 11,897 among a total of 408,739 teachers. In the first phase of primary education (students from 6 to 10 years of age) they total 69,606, which represents 9.6% of the total of 724,451 teachers. In the final years of primary education (students from 11 to 14 years of age) male teachers total 222,421, or 28% of a total of 793,889. In secondary education, there are 183,973 male teachers, of a total of 488,527.

Kleff ⁷, a German researcher, presents two arguments that emphasize the importance of a masculine presence in education. First, he argues that schools need male teachers due to the fact that many children, during an important phase of development (5 years of age until puberty), practically do not possess examples and don't live with adult males at home, since 80% of children with parents who are separated live with the mother. The second relevant aspect is that the teaching profession is made up of approximately 70% women, and in the first years of primary schooling this proportion is even larger. Therefore, boys have few chances to relate to an adult male either at home or in school.

With these numbers in view, which show the dominance of female teachers, and considering the importance of the example of the male presence as a source of reference for boys, as Kleff points out, it seems reasonable to ponder solutions that can decrease in part this education deficit.

III. COMMUNICATION & LEARNING

In regard to the second issue that is the object of this study - whether there is some relation between the issue of gender and the learning of boys - we intend to reflect upon a possible link between communication and learning, and if this com-

⁷ Sanem Kleff von der Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft: Quotenmänner für die Erziehung. In: http://gruene-berlin.de/positionen/stach_arg/135/135-gespraech.htm, 19.05.08.

munication between male teachers and boys can have positive effects on the learning of the latter.

Burgraff¹ mentions some modern theories of communication that affirm that a person transmits more through who he or she is than through what he or she says. Following this philosophy, some specialists assert that 80% - 90% of our communication occurs in unconventional ways. Only a part of the information is transmitted and assimilated in a conscious manner, while all of the rest is unconscious.

Thus, it seems that these facets of communication can indeed provoke advantages or disadvantages when boys are or are not taught by male teachers. Some *gender ideologies* argue that neither natural men or natural women exist, and that human beings are born sexually neutral. It is society that constructs masculine or feminine roles, with genders being socially constructed, and for this reason there need not be a great concern to define the gender of teachers because the differences are diminished as teachers construct their own identities within the school environment. These new theories, besides giving short shrift to recent advances in neuroscience and its discoveries linked to the clear differentiations of both sexes², are far from the reality of those who are closely linked to teacher training. Teaching and learning between men and women are clearly different, and temperamental, psychological, hormonal, and spiritual factors define differentiated pedagogical paths.

In a recently published book,³ Sax, a renowned family physician with broad clinical experience and research in the area of infant/juvenile psychology in the United States, states, for example, that what is normal for a three year-old boy – the movement and tone of voice of the teacher – can result in something

¹ BURGRAFF, J., “, 2009, “La transmisión de la fe en el postmodernismo: en y desde la familia”, [<http://mujeresdelopusdei.com/documentos/la-transmision-de-la-fe-en-el-postmodernismo-en-y-desde-la-familia/>].

² <http://mginsight.blogspot.com.br/2011/04/neurociencia-e-as-diferencas-entre-os.html>

³ SAX, L. 2007, “Boys Adrift” (Meninos à Deriva). Basic Books.(New York) .

without substance for a girl of the same age (girls are more attentive to colors than to movement), or it may appear to girls that the teacher is shouting in the classroom. With this in mind, and given the evident feminization of the teaching profession, these two differences that the American researcher emphasizes – movement vs. color, and the tone of voice of the teacher – can help to show how the absence of male teachers can influence the learning of boys. If a female teacher tends to value color more than movement, it is quite possible that in a school assessment of the arts, for example, girls will have an advantage over boys, who instead of colored landscapes may possibly draw automobiles or super-heroes flying in black and white. In regard to tone of voice, in another book,⁴ Sax describes an experience that in part elucidates the question. He gives the example of some boys diagnosed as having an attention deficit and hyperactivity syndrome (TDAH) who, when moved to a classroom with a male teacher who speaks more loudly - nearly 8dB higher - no longer exhibited these symptoms.

Sax concludes that girls are born with more acute hearing than boys, and these differences increase as children grow. Thus, when a male adult speaks to a girl in a tone of voice that he considers to be normal, to her it may seem that he is shouting. On the other hand, boys may appear to be inattentive in the classroom simply because they are sitting too far from the teacher, especially if the teacher is a woman.

IV. THE PRINCIPLE OF HOMOGENEITY AND MASCULINITY EDUCATION

There are two *pedagogical reasons* for boys to receive schooling more from male teachers than from female teachers: the Principle of Homogeneity and Masculinity Education.

⁴ SAX, L. 2005, “Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know about the Emerging Science of Sex Differences”. Doubleday. (New York).

The Principle of Homogeneity is based on the premise that men and women are essentially different. Although women and men are essentially equal as persons, they are different principally due to their bodily substrate, and, from this, in their way of operating (this is the very reason for their complementarity). This means that men and women are not only different in regard to their bodies, but also in terms of affectivity, and from this, in their rationality. Thus, in order to work within a homogeneous group, it is necessary that men and women be separated into different groups.

Gillian⁵ points toward some differences; for example, in human relationships. She states that women tend more to seek that which is confidential and are more attentive to the *we*, while men tend to seek more personal goals and submit human relations to other objectives: challenges, disputes, and differentiation.

According to Gillian, boys are more impulsive, less organized, experience more difficulties in concentrating and in expressing their feelings. In terms of affectivity, they tend to be harder, insensitive, and to undervalue affection. With the passage of time, they become more affectionate. In terms of study, they tend to have better spatial perception, abstract reasoning, and long-term goals, and more easily divide into groups, while needing more breaks during the school day. They prefer analytic explanations.

The characteristics of girls are quite different: they are more organized, more punctual and constant, and express their feelings better. In terms of affectivity, they are more polite, give more attention to detail, emphasize emotive factors, and in the long term, traits of cruelty may appear. Studies show that they have more language facility, possess more artistic sensibility, knowledge of people and of history, dislike competitiveness, exhibit more solidarity, and require less time between classes. They prefer synthetic explanations.

⁵ GILLIAN, Carol. 1982, "In a Different Voice Psychological Theory and Women's Development". Harvard University, (Cambridge).

Accepting these differences, and following the principle of homogeneity, very much used in the training of children and adolescents – in spite of recent modern tendencies to question this principle, such as the Escola da Ponte ⁶ – it is better that groups of students be differentiated – one group for the males and another for the females, with the separation of their teachers as well. It appears to be easier, for both students and teachers, for them to be of the same sex, providing a more personalized education; for (with rare exceptions) men tend to get along better with boys, and women tend to get along better with girls.

Masculinity Education is another important motive for the presence of male teachers. It is known that examples are essential for education. As we have stated, an educator teaches not only through what he or she says and does, but also through what he or she is. From this perspective, is not only cognitive and intellectual processes that are taught differently within school; but also masculinity, as an important character trait. Masculinity, besides being a natural substrate that is innate, has socially-learned components. These components are developed principally within the nuclear family and secondarily within the school. Who the teacher is, and what he or she does do not go unperceived by the student. To the contrary; they exercise great influence, given that the student is in critical phases of personality formation. For this reason, as a reflection of themselves, it is natural that boys prefer male, rather than female models. But we better understand the relation of character formation and learning.

According to Aristotle⁷, there are two types of virtue: intellectual, or of learning, and moral, or of character. These may be divided into *two groups*. The first includes the more speculative virtues (theoretical or abstract reasoning), including *Sophia*

⁶ www.escoladaponte.com.pt

⁷ ARISTÓTELES. 2001, “*Ética a Nicômaco*”. Trad. Mário da Gama Kury. 4 ed.. Editora da UNB. (Brasília).

(wisdom) and Science. These virtues are also known as intellectual skills, including relevant scientific knowledge. The other rational group includes the more practical virtues (practical reason), including prudence, the principal function of which is the capacity for discernment and common sense, the fruit of experience. Within the second kind of virtues, Aristotle states that the virtues of character or morals are prudence, justice, strength, and temperance, which develop through habit, education, and practice.

In his thesis, Malheiro⁸ demonstrates the very strong relationship between theoretical and practical reason, and how the latter is developed through the learning of moral virtues. This learning, when it is exercised beginning with early childhood education, provides significant benefits not only through the thorough training of practical reason – a greater capacity for learning – but also through motivating the child to overcome natural resistance to the school environment, such as laziness, lack of interest, lack of perspective, lack of support of the school from the family, among others.

Given the principles of Homogeneity and of Masculinity Education, it appears better that male teachers be responsible for this training in virtues, for the education of children in their early years depends more on mimicry and only later on rationality, later arriving at the concept of virtue itself. Those who have had experience observing the behavior of young boys know that certain themes of infancy – sexuality, identity, adolescent rebelliousness, among others – are better resolved when persons of the same sex exchange their own experiences within a climate of confidence.

We conclude, therefore, that it may be better for a boy to be educated by a male teacher than by a female, if we take into consideration not only didactic and assessment aspects,

⁸ MALHEIRO, J., 2008, “A Motivação Ética no Processo de Ensino/Aprendizagem na Formação de Professores do Ensino Fundamental”. Doctoral thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, (Rio de Janeiro), p. 147-152

but also character training – a potent influence on student intellectual capacity.

IV. RECONQUEST OF THE MASCULINE *HABITUS*

It is necessary to attract male teachers to primary education. It is imperative, therefore, to recognize the value of this professional, as well as to change his *habitus*.

The analyses of the question of *habitus*⁹ carried out by Bourdieu are important in explaining the processes that bring an individual into a profession. For this French philosopher, personal choices are the result of mediation between the individual and society; in other words, of the way in which the objective conditions of life are internalized.

In thinking about the choice of a profession, most people suffer from *internal pressures*, fed by the anguish of uncertainties, doubts, the lack of talent, and indecision. They also face external pressures, whether on the micro level (family, friends), or on the macro level (employment, sustainability, status, success, yearning for power). We defend the hypothesis that, in the case of the choice of being a male teacher, these pressures are even greater.

The greatest internal pressures of these teachers come from the perception of social prejudice; principally when they teach in the early years of schooling. Sexual doubts on the part of people inside and outside the school community, together with doubts on the part of the individuals themselves regarding their ability to teach tend to generate as well feelings of inferiority and sadness.

External pressures normally come from the lack of social recognition of the profession, from salaries that are not aligned

⁹ BONNEWITZ, Patrice. 2003, “Primeiras lições sobre a sociologia de P. Bourdieu”. Translation by Lucy Magalhães. Editora: Vozes, (Petrópolis)..

with the effort demanded in order to educate a child, few prospects in the career itself, and the necessary confrontation with natural female corporativism of feminist movements, and currently present within the teaching profession.

Another pressure, perhaps little recognized in discussions about professional *habitus*, but currently of great importance, is ideological pressure. Besides gender ideologies, there also exist those that are materialist, relativist, and existential, in which concepts such as freedom, values, virtues, the overall meaning of life, and other metaphysical concepts are given little consideration.

The influence of these ideologies, in our view, has significantly distorted the identity of all teachers, and especially that of male teachers. Within a libertine context, their more masculine characteristics, such as rigor, control, and strong exercise of authority, have become weakened and undervalued. If we conceive the identity of the true teacher as one with a mission not only to educate children in the appropriate context, but also through it to develop a complete human being, in all psychological, moral, and spiritual dimensions, we may conclude that this identity has been diminished, and with the passage of time undone, thus creating identity problems for male teachers during the years of university training, as well as problems with their social role within their own families.

For these reasons, we assert that in order that there may be greater equity in teaching/learning, within which girls and boys can achieve the same academic outcomes and the same full and integral training, it is necessary to create favorable conditions within teacher training courses.

We do not agree with the alternatives offered by some educators for the “masculinization” of the teaching profession, such as public policies that require quotas for male teachers, that call for so-called “affirmative action”, or separate course entry exams for men and for women. Rather, it is necessary to re-examine or redeem the true objectives of education so

that teacher training institutions may adopt themselves better to these ends, and consequently, that their teachers may be newly prepared according to the demands of these objectives. It is necessary to leave aside the dominant ideologies and to give priority to the interests and the needs of students, within the context of their peculiarities and singularities. Thus, educators themselves (teachers and parents), as well as students will discover by themselves the wisdom of fostering a body of teachers according to the particular needs of each sex, and once again male teachers will be highly valued within the labor market.

VI. CONCLUSION

This article seeks to alert the academic community to the existence of the sad fact of an increasing “educational injustice”: boys are becoming more disadvantaged in their learning, and possibly in their character training, compared to girls. The principal cause of this disparity, according to some authors, was the reduction in the number of male teachers in the classroom and the resulting hegemony of women in the teaching profession. The absence of male teachers, according to the principle of Homogeneity, may lead to various learning difficulties related to attention, assessment, the relation between what is taught and what is learned, as well as weakening the training of practical reasoning, which is what empowers young people to overcome life’s difficulties, to make the right choices, and to have greater existential and educational motivation. The presence of male teachers will also have a salutatory effect on the education of masculinity that complements, in another field, the character training of boys and which can be decisive in reaching other educational goals, such as physical and psychological vigor, courage, autonomy, and the correct use of authority.

In light of the discovery of this phenomenon, the present article suggests changes in teacher training courses. The authors argue that the *habitus* of currently active male teachers were largely constructed as a result of ideological influences that are far from the true ends of education, such as the conquest of true freedom and the self-realization of human beings in all areas. These teleological detours have produced a male teacher who is both misshapen and who experiences difficulty in encountering his true identity. Such a person, in the face of the natural internal and external pressures of any profession, tends to be a worker who is little recognized socially, unmotivated, and with an inferiority complex.

On the other hand, if teacher training courses can be transformed, adjusting themselves toward the true ends of education, the masculinization of these university-level courses will be a logical outcome and will be mirrored later in all other levels of teaching - from primary to secondary. The pride in being a true teacher will be recovered, as has occurred in all countries that occupy the tops of international rankings of school performance, and parents, the principal protagonists of education, will once again recognize the importance of male teachers in the education of their male children.

