

Women and education: Normalization and professionalization

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Abstract

In this article, in a historical perspective, the authors discuss the symbolization of the female figure in the social imaginary in relation to a teaching career, based on the practices of teacher training, professionalization and co-education. Since colonial times, the education of females in Brazil has always been permeated with expectations about domestic duties being women's main role. The opening of the possibility of entering a paid profession that was in harmony with this role made the teaching profession the vocational path of women in education from the outset. The subordination of the female sex to the male sex is another mechanism of social control between the sexes, which also means a relation of power. Power aims, above all, to regulate habits and customs and to sanitize and moralize behaviours. As a consequence, it induces full compliance with the legal, social and religious precepts. This ideal retains the privileges of the minority group, whether in terms of social class or sex.

Keywords

Women, education, normalization, professionalization

Introduction

In Brazil, mainly in the most developed states, such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, the social and economic changes that happened at the end of the 19th century to do with urbanization and then the process of industrialization brought about social transformations due to the expansion of the labour market. With the arrival of the republic, the ideas represented by liberalism and positivism and the debate around them that had intensified in Europe and in the USA also resonated nationally. In 1945, after the end of the dictatorial government that came to power after the coup d'état of 1937,

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the recovery of democratic ideals occurred simultaneously with the end of the Second World War and contributed to changes in customs, resulting in repercussions in education and people's lives, especially for women. The 1950s preceded the sexual revolution of the middle of the 20th century and the end of the decade had already indicated the principles of feminist agitation that would assume even greater significance in the 1960s and 1970s. At the end of the millennium these strengthened an ideology based upon gender relations that no longer accepts sexual inequality based on biological differences among individuals.

Gender studies carried out by the feminist critique have recently been considered scientifically in an academic way, being explicitly associated with the concepts of race and social class and seen from a multicultural angle, mainly in the USA. The necessity of thinking about feminism from a theoretical perspective led to the introduction of the concept of gender as a scientific category that specifies the social relation between the sexes, leading to the elaboration of concepts about power relations. In academia, the concept of gender was introduced because the classic paradigm could not elaborate more flexible models of explanation to analyse the specific situation of women as a social and historical subject and, so, the concept has been adopted more frequently in studies in this field.

Although the concept of gender could refer, in a restrictive sense, to studies that have the woman as an object of analysis, in a wider sense, gender could be understood as a social, cultural and historical construction elaborated over a sexual difference that exists between men and women. From this perspective, it does not refer specifically to one or the other sex, but to the relations that are socially built between them. It is considered that the power configurations vary between the genders in the same way as meanings, normalizations, practices and symbols vary according to cultures, religions, the economy, social class, race, historical moments and so on. These networks of meanings edify and maintain relations with each other, acting in all areas of daily life. To sum up so far, the inequalities between the sexes, classes and races, and among those who assume conflicting or different sexual points of view from those said to be 'normal' patterns, result in a mechanism of production and reproduction of discrimination and become entrenched in all the demands of public and private life: in the professions, at work, in marriage, in a person's heritage, in a person's life pattern, in sexuality, in communication and even in the social sciences, including history, anthropology, sociology, politics and education.

Usage of the word 'gender' implies, then, a rejection of differences between the sexes based simply on biological aspects, according to the positivist and hygienist theorists at the beginning of the 20th century. In gender studies, the word 'maternity', which only refers to the biological dimension of pregnancy and delivery, is substituted by the term *maternage* which refers to the social processes of child education. In the analysis of relations of inequality between the sexes, the adoption of naturalist paradigms implies the acknowledgement of the implicit category of women's subordination to men, which is unacceptable from the feminist and democratic points of view and, nowadays, from the 'politically correct' point of view as well. According to women, the feminist perspective allows the appropriation of a political consciousness which could bring them to the perception that the inequalities will only be transcended if the social divisions based on sex could be suppressed, just the same as the social divisions of race and social class in a society based on equal rights. Such a premise, in a way, adopts a utopian socialist view if we consider the reality of relations between the sexes, classes and races, and the way they develop in daily life, in spite of the incontestable social gains obtained to this day as a result of the struggles, courage and effort of certain people.

The fact that gender has hardly been taken into account at all in research into education reveals a marked contradiction considering that this is a field in which women have always acted. Besides, in the social history of the last centuries, in various countries it was always the responsibility of females to educate children, especially the younger ones. When sexual neutrality, assumed in the output of research, denies gender as a determinant analysis category for the comprehension of the educational process, it reveals a kind of discomfort or constraint in giving gender the importance it warrants in this context. Only recently, and thanks to the pioneering work of intellectuals and militants, have projects using the gender category been putting themselves forward as an area of study in research centres and universities.

In order to evaluate the Brazilian output of research on women and education before the 1960s, we undertook a bibliographic review of the *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Pedagógicos*, a traditional periodical on education in the country which has been published since the 1940s. The articles analysed are from the period 1944–1955, using a total of 35 volumes belonging to the library of the Faculdade de Ciências e Letras at UNESP. Only two articles relating to female education were found in no. 44, vol. XVI, published between October–December 1951: ‘A educação da mulher na Argentina’ and ‘O problema da seleção de alunas para as escolas de enfermagem’ (RBEP, 1951). We have also searched in three volumes about the state of teacher training in Brazil during the period 1960–1980 published by INEP (National Institute of Educational Studies and Research) in 1987, containing 311 summaries of publications in Brazil on this topic in the last 20 years. Among these, 55 were written by men and 26 were publications by official organizations and universities; therefore, 230 articles were written by women, that is, more than two-thirds of the total. In spite of this there was only one article that talked about the ‘feminization of the teacher profession’, which appeared in issue 272, on p. 587. This was entitled ‘O papel do professor na sociedade moderna’ and was written by Maria Cristina S. S. Campos, published in *Revista Educação Brasileira* in 1983 (CAMPOS, 1983).

The scarce research output found in *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Pedagógicos* and in the analytic summaries from the INEP confirmed that in Brazil women used to be ignored as a historical subject in education, with the exception of when they were found to be important in maintaining the unity of the family, social and patriotic cohesion, and male hegemony (RBEP, 1951). In this perspective, we find authors from the first decades of the century such as Afrânio Peixoto (1936), Teixeira Mendes (1906), José Veríssimo (1906) and the Portuguese Emília De Souza Costa (1923), among others who, in their period, exerted considerable influence on the course of female education in the country.

In retrospect – briefly

In Brazil, the end of the 19th century witnessed the establishment of the republic. The end of monarchy also saw feminist agitations for the right to vote and, consequently, for access to full citizenship, as well as claims that more education and instruction for women were needed. It was a movement led by a female cultured elite with more economic power who, like their North American and European counterparts, did not want to be absent from the historical process, although in the Brazilian case the process developed in a mild way, without the radicalization experienced by English women, for example. Brazilian women also challenged the existing social structure. They were frequently supported by men of political and intellectual means and their cause who also served the oligarchies

that ordered and regulated the social rules of the period, because they were from the same powerful elite.

The implementation of the Estado Novo¹ in the 1930s and the arrival of women's suffrage silenced women's voices to a large extent and they kept quiet for almost 30 years until the feminist flag was raised again and American feminism was reignited in response to the publication of Betty Friedman's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, in the 1960s (Friedman, 1971). The denunciation of the manipulation of women by a strongly urbanized consumer society echoed loudly all over the world. In the Brazilian national scene, taking their cue from the pioneer women at the beginning of the century, women mobilized again and started to listen to an interior voice instead of 'the master's voice' and, by this time, they were in greater numbers and belonged to more heterogeneous groups: intellectuals, working women, housewives, businesswomen, teachers and lawyers, who intended to leave the fringes of the system which doomed them to darkness and guilt, in order to claim a part of the public space. They required and obtained, at least, the right to be heard. They also wanted to hear, and in this process, they definitively transposed the invisibility of a domestic world to public view.

Brazilian society, still conservative in the 1970s, witnessed truly feminine revolutions. The women in the second half of the century were different from the pioneers of its early years: they could vote and be voted on to and into things, and they decided if they would have children or not – getting married was not the only option and they chose careers and partners instead. Likewise, they built their lives according to what they thought would be best. Feminist organizations proliferated and they spread and denounced cases of violence and sexual oppression. Women, not only Brazilian, but from almost every corner of the world, were no longer willing to accept their role only as reproducers of the human race as proclaimed by the hygienists and positivists at the beginning of the century. Instead, they started to reclaim the right to pleasure, not only sexual, but also the pleasure of living their own life without the chains imposed by sex. Marriage was not the only option and it was beginning to look as if the everlasting slavery sacramented by the expression 'until death do us part' imposed by the Catholic Church could be dismantled with benefits.

In teacher training, definitely a feminine career choice, women had some rights that had been introduced gradually: compatible work hours, a smaller gender pay gap, retirement after 25 years of work, and sick and maternity leave, among other benefits. However, the profession is still badly paid, and this improvement process has shown signs of being reversed at some levels.

The feminist struggles for education and power

In Brazil, in the early years of the 20th century, the first step in gaining major rights for women came through the possibility of acquiring knowledge that had so far belonged to men. This advance happened when knowledge went beyond the limits of private institutions and became public. Thus, the feminists also struggled for power, which had always been denied to them. For women, power meant obtaining civil rights through political participation and getting paid jobs.

While men were competing for power in public institutions, women were kept in the shadow of housework, confined in the domestic space, having no freedom and no opportunities to expand their intelligence and talents. Far from public sight and covered

with demureness and ignorance, women were the invisible half of urban society – they were absent from politics, scientific fields and the labour market. They were wanted only to ensure the perpetuation of the species.

The demand for a female workforce to supply industry and market necessities made women leave their homes, especially because they lived in a developing country like Brazil, which was becoming industrialized very quickly. This situation caused a change in customs and duties and, finally, power was partially shared with women. Keeping women far from power in an attitude based on biological differences created an oppressive mood. Considering that knowledge can provide power, the patriarchal society reacted by adopting and emphasizing the myth of the saintly woman, the ingenuous young lady, as a paradigm. Saintly, pure and ignorant... that was the ideal woman at that time.

The responsibility for the religious doctrine that sanctioned women's submission lay with the Catholic Church. Once more, power relations appear because of the considerable influence of Christian values on women's lives, of which the clergy took advantage, preaching attitudes of renunciation, submission and selflessness. Once again, through the religious faith, the masculine domination game is played out, especially considering that religious leaders are always men. The Madonna was magnified and taken as an example for all women. The men could be sinners, but women and their noble souls had to follow the pattern of Our Lady and bear all the suffering in her name. Even though positivism and hygienism in the 19th century had an opposite position in relation to the Catholic Church, they had very similar views in relation to women and they were determining elements in feminine education. Through prejudice and guilt, hygienist education would form a restrained and ceremonious person, according to European patterns. As cultured people are superior to uncultured ones, men's function should be intellectual and women's should be housekeeping activities. So, a woman's existence should only be to love and be loved. Meanwhile, she should prepare herself for social life, necessary due to increasing urbanization. However, she could not compete professionally and intellectually with men, because women would become dangerous if they became economically free from their husbands and intellectually comparable with them; moreover, it would go beyond the limits of a particular notion of social safety. Thus, it would be necessary to reduce women's autonomy, which was a consequence of having a well-paid job. A woman should be cultured to regenerate society, but everything she did should benefit her home and her family and it should not hinder her main function: to produce men for the nation, which would increase its development until it reached the level of the greatest nations in the world.

In 1923, in Rio de Janeiro, Emília De Sousa Costa (1923: 13), a Portuguese writer and feminist, delivered a lecture where she declared: 'The nation's soul is the woman's soul, the mother's soul, who is the educator, the sculptor of the characters, the tradition transmitter, the loyal guardian of the love for the Nation in her children's hearts.' That was also the positivists' wish: women would be their ideology transmitters. A school education was important for women but, at the same time, if they were to be transmitters of imposed ideas, it was necessary to domesticate women in order to prevent them from overcoming the limits imposed by the social structures. Thus, they could and should be educated and cultured and having an occupation was important, especially one that involved teaching and cooperating in the education of future generations. However, men would keep on leading and directing schools, so it was still men's function to guide and organize the teaching and to select educational syllabuses.

The feminization of teacher training in Brazil

In the Brazilian history of education there is a very black hole concerning feminine themes – this subject barely rears its head, and women, far from being historic protagonists, are just ignored. Families, society and public authorities disregarded education for girls, which only started in private schools in the second half of the 19th century. In rich households, private tutors taught the girls elementary subjects, but the main focus was on learning housekeeping and good manners. Even these privileged young ladies had almost no contact with reading and they knew little or nothing about the history and geography of their own country or other nations. They had very weak notions about literature and mathematics; they usually learned a language, however, preferably French, but they lived inside the narrow limits of their home horizons. The republic came into being in Brazil at the end of the 19th century. At that time, almost two-thirds of women in the country were illiterate, although so were the rest of the population in general. At the same time, some discussions about co-education took place and, in 1880, when the third teacher training school was established in São Paulo, co-education started in schools. A number of movements with the aim of improving women's education got stronger and certain schools began to instil new ideas into some of the worthy minds in the country. In addition, liberalism and its postulates concerning individuality and equality among men had to include the feminine causes, at least theoretically, in order to follow its own principles.

In this context, the necessity of creating a teacher training school became a priority and its main function was to prepare teachers to work in elementary schools that were developing along with the population increase. The first school, which was established in 1835 in Niterói, Rio de Janeiro state, was a precarious institution. In São Paulo, another teacher training school was established in 1846 but, after having opened, these schools closed after a short while because not many people were interested in the courses and the number of graduating teachers in such schools was insignificant. A women's department at the Seminário da Glória, a teacher training school in São Paulo, was established in 1876. After closing and then reopening in 1880, it quickly became a very famous school for women teachers because it was known for giving them a professional training, increasing their knowledge and, at the same time, preparing them to be good mothers and housewives. In point of fact, the access to knowledge that this women's department at the Seminário da Glória provided, supplied the social needs that urbanization demanded: basic schooling for most of the people and, in a way, jobs for poor young women.

Was the gradual feminization of elementary teaching in Brazil at the beginning of the century a result of the feminist struggles or a consequence of them, taking into account the fact that men had left this field because of the low salaries, as has been said in some academic studies? We think this matter should be analysed. According to some historians, when the women's department at the Seminário da Glória was established, it was initially to be a department specially reserved for poor and orphaned young ladies who were fated not to have a good marriage, mainly because 'to get married' was directly related to people's economic means. Considering that it would be difficult to get married, those young ladies needed to find a decent way to survive. The ideal job would be one that suited the principles we inherited from the Portuguese people: to keep women at home and exalt them only as wives and mothers. Being a teacher was only an extension of household activities, like educating children at home, under the assertion that this mission and vocation was inherent in a woman's personality. Although teaching had a sort of negative connotation because it was paid work for women, this was not so important if we consider its nobility.

Moreover, the teacher could take care of her housework too because, according to the law, she could only work part-time. So, doing tasks at home and taking care of her husband and children as well would be easy.

This situation went on until the 1970s, when Law 5692/71 made some changes both to elementary teaching and to teaching as a whole. Now, teachers could work full-time and people who took courses at the teacher training school would be awarded a secondary school degree. There were some other changes too. At the time, some academic papers tried to indicate that the professionalization of teaching had classical paradigms. These analyses were based on the category of 'work'. The research tried to demonstrate that there were certain ideological mechanisms that lay under the discourse in which it was possible to notice an implicit connotation linking subordination features to mission, vocation and priesthood. The main contribution of those papers was to be a warning about elementary teaching professionals and, more widely, about education in Brazil.

The main problem is that, since the sense of mission, vocation and priesthood got left behind, nothing consistent enough replaced it, except for some teachers' questions about the reason they chose to teach. However, nobody realized that elementary teaching as a feminine profession had some particular facets that made it different from occupations where feminization did not occur.

There is no doubt that teaching was a poor profession to be in with regard to the salary, and in this case it was just like certain other jobs that targeted the poorer members of a population. Even though there is a belief that there was a time when being a teacher was synonymous with popularity and respect, for a long time this occupation has only attracted low salaries in Brazil. In the article 'Is there a Brazilian political thought?', Raimundo Faoro (1987: 34) mentions L. S. Vilhena when he declares that respect for teaching was very low and 'being a teacher and being nothing is just the same'. Even the priests and the first teachers who were responsible for education in Brazil when the Jesuits were expelled in 1789 were not well paid and had little knowledge, not enough to teach. Besides, they were in a country where the press was forbidden at the time.

In Brazil, in the first decades of the 20th century, most educators and intellectuals tried to raise the value of teaching, but their speeches, in fact, likened the profession to priesthood rather than a paid job. However, it is possible to find some writings whose authors are more realistic. In the *Teacher Training Yearbook* of 1918, Benedicto M. Tolosa wrote in his inspection report: 'Nowadays, the teacher earns only enough not to starve, living in bad conditions and dressing even worse; he cannot save even a coin to make a reserve to help him when necessary' (ANNUARIO, 1918). This miserable situation that teachers found themselves in motivated the Department of Education to create a kind of savings account called the Caixa Beneficiente for teachers who needed money for any reason. This was established through Law 1491 of December 21 1915. In July 1921, Professor João Toledo, who taught teaching methods and was the teacher training school principal in Campinas, made a speech about a library to primary school teachers: 'writing books for children is a profitable business, writing them for teachers is almost a sacrifice. Poor as teachers usually are, they spend all their time working to pay for their food' (ANNUARIO, 1920/21).

In Brazil, since 1889, a lot of women, many of them teachers, wrote to newspapers demanding more schools for women, their right to vote and to be voted on to and into things and the possibility of having a paid job. In the article 'A República Brasileira em jornais femininos da época (1889–1890)' [The Brazilian Republic in feminine newspapers of the time (1889–1890)], Maria Theresa C. C. Bernardes (1989) comments on the fact that the

texts that were published in that period appeared in two newspapers that had been founded and directed by women in Rio de Janeiro. These texts reveal women's interests in politics at the time of the proclamation of the republic. Nowadays, this fact is unknown and not revealed by historians. The author (Bernardes, 1989: 28) also transcribes a speech by Professor Augusta de Paula Petit Werthmeier, printed in the newspaper *Correio Paulistano* in São Paulo on 25 October 1946, in which the professor strongly appeals for more schools, appropriate buildings and equal rights and duties. She declared to state government members: 'it depends on your wisdom to find out how to get the Brazilian woman out of the narrow mold where her existence was poured'.

In São Paulo, in the republican period, the female majority in elementary teaching was a fact. According to the *Anuario*, 1889, the number of women enrolled at the teacher training school was larger than the number of men (51 men and 64 women). In 1912, at the Capital Teacher Training School, in São Paulo the number of enrolled students was 172 men and 768 women. That year, 24 men and 120 women graduated. It is possible to verify that the vast majority of students in teacher training schools at the end of the 19th century were women, and in the following years too. This was happening at the same time as feminist movements got worldwide attention and women's demands for education and knowledge increased.

Some feminine newspapers campaigned for certain women's rights, such as education and a paid occupation. Thus, considering the behaviour patterns of that time, a woman could only get into the job market by becoming a teacher. This occupation allowed a woman to have school education, either to teach or to improve her performance as a wife and mother. However, it was a difficult path due to the prejudice against paid work for women. Magaldi's study (1992) about the writings of Machado de Assis and Aluísio de Azevedo – widely read writers in Brazilian social and intellectual circles – shows the ideology regarding feminine roles that was emphasized in their novels and which reflected people's customs. Magaldi (1992: 68) remarks that becoming a professional was a pipe dream for girls that came from the middle to upper classes. Being a teacher was a solution just in case of extreme necessity and it was almost a shame for a woman and her family.

The prejudice against female teachers was based on the fact that they received payment rather than on the occupation itself. Some retrograde minds believed that this kind of work should be done by people from the lower classes. Considering that teaching could be compared to the priesthood, the nobility of this occupation should have been exalted and the shame of receiving money for the job would not have been so painful.

Through teaching, women entered the job market and, in the second quarter of the 20th century, started to struggle for women's liberation. The feminization of teaching can be seen as a result of many men leaving the profession, but its cause could be exactly the opposite: maybe men left teaching because the field became full of women. Thus, the idea that women are always victims is emphasized because they got a job that was not interesting to men anymore. This attitude reinforces the sexual prejudice that is always present in women's lives.

In Brazil, as in other countries, elementary teaching is now an occupation in which the great majority of practitioners are women. According to Brushini and Amado (1988: 4), in 1980

86.6% of teachers in Brazil are women. Almost all the pre-school teachers are women (99%) and most teachers in primary schools (1st to 4th grades) are women too (96.2%). This percentage only decreases gradually in the next grades of schooling.

Meanwhile, in the studies about this profession, this data is not taken into account, and it is almost as if the research is saying that gender does not influence the development and performance of such kind of work. The lack of a real preoccupation about gender is something quite remarkable in research projects that are to do with education. The studies are much more concerned with calling attention to stereotypes and sexual prejudice in education than in undertaking serious research about how women act as teachers and how they are responsible for concrete social and pedagogical attitudes.

Women in teaching: Possibilities and passion

Usually, when people discuss the feminine professional world, most of the questions are about choices. Standardized tests are applied and interviews are held, aiming to find out in teachers' terms the meaning of words such as 'mission' or 'vocation', and of terms such as 'I like children' and even 'teaching' itself. Inevitably, some people try to demonstrate that such kind of talk just hides an ideology and sex domination; the teachers' answers as a reflection of their feelings are ignored. It is important to consider the emotion, the will to teach, and the solidarity within the teaching profession as essential attributes for being a good teacher. All these mean that what teachers say is real and comes from deep within their hearts. Thus, denying or disqualifying the truth in teachers' discourse is trying to make them passive, vulnerable to external interests.

As women were always excluded from political matters, they became good at telling stories, real or fictitious. Living inside their homes, having little contact with the outside world, they were specialists in transferring knowledge about life. They know better than anybody else how to deal with resistance and subjectivity. Through work, however, a woman can deal with the other parts of existence. Is this the reason so many women decide to become a teacher? There are few studies about the work of teachers that call attention to gender. In research it is common to find the word 'teacher'² in the masculine form, even when it concerns primary teaching, where women are the protagonists. Rarely does the word 'teacher' in the feminine form appear as an explanatory category.

In analysing the everyday life of Brazilian teachers it can be seen that despite government neglect, low salaries, class struggle and oppression they have been doing their job: teaching children to read and teaching those of all social classes. Women have stayed in their jobs as teachers, even though the opportunities to change careers increased because of industrialization, progress and technology. In addition, paradoxically, a large number of teachers like what they do. That is the ambiguity of this profession: on the one hand it is not well paid and it is undervalued by the government, on the other hand it has prestige because teachers are the main transmitters of culture.

If the complex act of teaching and educating is reduced only to developing methods and techniques, school education will lack what the best things about it are: the full education of students, the development of their potential and the conscious exercise of citizenship. At least, this is the main role of a school. The absence of a focus on conscious citizenship takes away from teachers their sense of hope and belief and their potential for changing society through their work. However, it is important to bear in mind that teaching is a profession and it is not fair to give up the fight for better working conditions and salaries, instead thinking that being a teacher means sacrificing these things for the sake of the profession. This attitude would only legitimize social inequality.

Teaching is a profession and there is no better way to learn than from one human being to another and this is also an act of love. To like this job and to believe in education also means being passionate, passionate about what is possible to achieve, a feeling that comes from the being and its existence, a feeling that turns wishes into concrete possibilities of realizations. Perhaps this is the ambiguity between teaching and women's presence in it.

There are no liberal thoughts in this discourse – ideas that assign to the person alone the responsibility for his/her success or failure – but only the emotions, wishes and feelings that make life meaningful. This is a philosophical attitude and it comes from a belief in the human being and in his/her potential for doing things.

When educational technology is talked about, it is necessary to remember that although nowadays it is very accessible to a large part of the population, rarely will it reach the whole population simultaneously around the world; progress and high living standards still coexist with misery and the lack of basic living conditions. Some miserable places in Africa, Latin America and India are examples that the worldview will take a long time to change in relation to social inequalities. Thus, teachers will always be necessary, especially for the greater part of the population, which is very poor.

Conclusion

It could be partly true to affirm that schools have helped to entrench traditional feminine roles, but this does not cover the whole complexity of the theme. It is accepted that in this complexity there are contradictions and conflicts, from which the subordinations of class and gender arise but, at the same time, it is a place of resistance of and apprehension about formal knowledge, which otherwise could be absent from the daily life of large sections of society. Taking this perspective into account, couldn't we say that there are qualities in teaching, as in other professions, which are an inherent part of the *senses of passion*, that is, faith, desire, effort, will, hope? Is there a way to remove from memory scenes lived through by male and female teachers and their male and female students, the personal relations that fulfil each human being in his/her life and which articulate the other dimensions of his/her daily existence, without which we cease being whole people in order to be only professionals?

In previous research, when we worked with oral sources, during interviews with former teachers, we realized that there was a tender discourse in relation to the profession which they had once practised. Words such as love, affection, kindness, solidarity and maternal instinct appeared among the memories and were articulated with clear feelings of pride and pleasure about what these former teachers had done in the classroom. Their speech had a longing tone, filled with tenderness and affection for their teacher training and for the children they had helped to teach and educate. At the same time, they emphasized the value of their work and their dignity. This dignity led them to a better life in the sense of survival, fulfilment and affective rewards. *What would have happened to them without this profession? What would be left to them besides their marriage and the invisible domestic work – unknown and frustrating work because it is not recognized and has a lack of tangible results? How could they support themselves with dignity in the face of a lack of another kind of sustenance if it were not for their teacher training?* Here we have a hermeneutic speech that narrowly defines sense and the meaning of existence, while in contrast, these women, all good communicators, showed on their faces that sweetness which was from people who knew that they had taken part in the much, much wider entangled continuum of life.

Certain academic works were the first to describe the power relations inside teacher training and education and should have clarified the mechanisms of subordination and professional depreciation of teachers. However, when the texts put together these two aspects in relation to feminization, they stimulated a whole new concept by taking into account women's expectations in terms of the teaching profession. This happened because these academic studies did not point to guidelines and did not incorporate gender studies into education, which would have made it possible to overcome the current state of affairs and put a value on the professional consciousness of teachers. As a result, the legacy that these works left behind was the opportunity to reflect on an attitude which did not define the action of teaching as a whole, but just the technical competence obtained from professionalization, removing from teachers' performance the feelings which, perhaps, they needed to have in order to know what they were doing and which were derived from notions of humanity that permeate the relations among human beings.

It is true that, from the point of view of human existence, liking what we do is one of the main factors for an efficient performance.

It is true to say that since the beginning teaching has been badly paid and little valued (*Weren't the Greek pedagogists slaves?*). But it is also true that teaching had a kind of prestige which came from the fact that it was considered a worthy profession, a kind of priesthood. To sum up, a contradiction was agreed upon: *the profession was appreciated as a transmitter of moral values but not recognized in terms of the remuneration received by its agents*. All this goes to show the antagonism between educational policy and political power, just like the antagonism between the needs of the population of a determined country and those who govern it. Besides, the negativist vision, which considers the power of decision and the capacity to fight as exclusively male and banishes women to a secondary place, not only in history, but also in their own lives, adopts a narrow, male-centred perspective.

It could be that being a teacher, male or female, at some point in time, could have been a symbol of social status due to the respect that men of knowledge and 'letters' received from an ignorant and illiterate population. However, in terms of salaries and recognition from public powers, the teaching profession was always placed among the worst-paid professions. As a result, what we could question is that although it is a fact that the profession has always been badly paid, it certainly had a kind of prestige and we simply cannot ascribe the devaluation of the teaching profession solely to its feminization. There are other reasons for this, whose origins go beyond the simplified notion of women undertaking teacher training. These reasons must be looked for in the social organization and in the prevalence of inequality and oppression of class, sex and race, among others.

Nowadays, in Brazil, some studies have been trying to recover the history of female presence and have analysed the literature organized and written by women: biographies of women who became notable in defence of their rights; and the output of women of letters, teachers, feminist militants, doctors, lawyers, etc. This work has led us to rethink the actions and participation of the female sex in social development through history. Taking into account education and teacher training, women's attempts at breaking out of the mould have still been timid because of the presuppositions which have systematically been accepted without questioning their veracity. The difficulty in finding historical records and documentary sources for the rewriting of a history that takes women into consideration has raised obstacles with regard to the explanation of the deep contradictions within school education.

Although teachers have always led teaching and learning, they are largely absent from the decision-making processes in education and its history. The daily performances, the generations of literate children, the well-executed experiments inside the classroom, the stories of success – all of these have almost never been taken into consideration. What is taken into account is, unfortunately, only the information written by people who are absent from the classroom itself and which is transformed into laws and teaching guidelines. *Written things could not be sufficient to modify defined practice and interfere in the daily routine of classrooms.*

Throughout the decades, in Brazilian school education, elementary teachers have been those responsible for children's instruction and education since their first year in school. A number of generations have passed through their hands, not only in private schools, which are directed toward higher-income students, but also in public schools, which are attended by the majority of the population. These teachers have been doing their duties even under the most difficult of conditions, which range from the lack of interest from the government about the school system, the lack of funding, to the various accusations of inadequacy of teachers, as if it were *their fault and not the fault of that same government which does not invest adequately in training courses and does not give sufficient funds to education*. Furthermore, teachers have to face the incomprehension of some intellectual circles when they answer various surveys concerned with teaching to the effect that they like to teach, and also that they like children. *As if this incomprehension were a reason for shame and not a consequence of the reality which they carry inside themselves.*

The fact is that, like a legion of little anonymous birds, teachers work silently and perform a difficult, important and badly paid task. The training courses are still taking on students who want to be teachers and who see the possibility of having a profession considered worthy. Not all these students come from the lower classes and neither, we believe, is teaching their only option. The same happens with regard to university courses in education. Retired teachers talk about their profession with respect and belief, and it is the same with those who are still working as teachers under the most difficult circumstances. Focusing on this aspect, we must reflect on these women's assertions when talking about their work.

Women's space in school is definitely a conquered space. It remains to be seen how to delineate the limits of that space under a new perspective which could take into account aspects of the subjectivity of the human dimension. The act of educating another human being is difficult; it demands inner strength and willpower. Taking care of children who are not your own involves other components which are not simply to do with 'work'. This must be the reason why the analyses of teacher training, which have only recently adopted this category, have failed in their explanations. Considering women's teacher training, we think that it is clearer to use the expressions '*the passion for the possible*' or, maybe, '*to recreate the hope*': a hope and a faith that are systematically destroyed when a teacher leaves the teacher training course and looks for a job that pays reasonably well, and when a child cannot stay in school because of social inequalities.

We do not see any other way of explaining why those who remain in the teaching profession do so and also the dignity and effort shown by the teachers who work, despite everything, to keep school as one of the few alternatives for socializing knowledge, especially for a large majority who arrive there in an attempt to escape from their destiny.

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Notes

1. Estado Novo, or the Third Brazilian Republic, was the Brazilian political regime founded by Getúlio Vargas on November 10 1937, which lasted until October 29 1945. It was characterized by the centralization of power, nationalism, anti-communism and authoritarianism. It is part of the period in Brazilian history known as Era Vargas.
2. In Portuguese, 'teacher' is a word that has both masculine and feminine forms: *professor* and *professora*, like the words host and hostess in English.

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