



Thematic analysis of sexuality in the school context with teachers of basic education

Análise da temática sexualidade no contexto escolar com professores da educação básica

Análisis de la temática sexualidad en el contexto escolar con docentes de la educación básica

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Objective: to identify content related to the sexuality theme at schools from municipal and state networks; and to identify the difficulties and needs of teachers in the approach to this theme. **Methods:** cross-sectional study with 79 teachers of educational institutions using self-administered questionnaire. For analysis one used as an endpoint to belong to the municipal or state school networks. **Result:** most teachers work in the state school network. The theme sexuality is not dealt with as recommended by the National Curriculum Parameters. Teachers from the municipal network deal more with the pregnancy issue ($p=0.04$), and it was more mentioned by the state system teachers for training ($p=0.03$). Most do not have experience and training in the subject ($p=0.04$). **Conclusion:** partnerships with the health area are necessary for teachers' training. It is also important to recognize the work of nurses in the work of sex education as an essential component in the comprehensiveness of care in order to strengthen the area of school health.

Descriptors: Sexuality; School Health; Education, Continuing; Faculty.

Objetivo: identificar conteúdos referentes à temática sexualidade nas redes municipal e estadual de ensino; e identificar as dificuldades e necessidades dos professores na abordagem da temática. **Métodos:** estudo transversal com 79 professores das instituições de ensino utilizando questionário autoaplicável. Para análise utilizou-se como desfecho pertencer à rede municipal ou estadual de ensino. **Resultado:** a maioria dos professores trabalha na rede estadual de ensino. A temática sexualidade não é trabalhada conforme recomendação do Parâmetro Curricular Nacional. Os professores da rede municipal trabalham mais o tema gravidez ($p=0,04$), e mais citado por professores da rede estadual para capacitação ($p=0,03$). A maioria não tem experiência e capacitação na temática ($p=0,04$). **Conclusão:** são necessárias parcerias com a área da saúde para instrumentalização do professor. É importante também reconhecer a atuação do enfermeiro no trabalho da educação sexual como componente essencial na integralidade do cuidado para fortalecer a área da saúde do escolar.

Descritores: Sexualidade; Saúde Escolar; Educação Continuada; Docentes.

Objetivo: identificar contenidos relacionados con la temática sexualidad en las redes municipal y estatal de enseñanza; e identificar dificultades y necesidades de los docentes en el enfoque temático. **Métodos:** estudio transversal con 79 docentes de las instituciones educativas mediante cuestionario auto administrado. Para análisis, se utilizó como criterio pertenecer a la red municipal o estatal. **Resultado:** mayoría de los profesores trabaja en la red estatal de enseñanza. La temática sexualidad no es trabajada según el Parámetro Curricular Nacional. Profesores de la red municipal trabajan más el tema embarazo ($p=0,04$), y más citado por profesores del sistema estatal para formación ($p=0,03$). Mayoría sin experiencia y formación en la temática ($p=0,04$). **Conclusión:** son necesarias alianzas con el área de la salud para instrumentalización del profesor. Es importante reconocer la actuación del enfermero en el trabajo de la educación sexual como componente esencial en la atención integral para fortalecer el área de la salud escolar.

Descriptorios: Sexualidad; Salud Escolar; Educación Continua; Docentes.

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Introduction

Sexuality manifests itself in all stages of a person's life, being conditioned by biological, psychological and social factors, and it must be understood from a multidisciplinary approach. Schools have an strategic position to promote the integral education of children and adolescents and therefore it should also take on the sexuality discussion aiming to promote sex education⁽¹⁻²⁾.

Themes involving sexuality have been discussed in institutions from the basic school system (elementary and high school) since the 1920s, but its inclusion in the curricula was intensified after 1970 with the law that regulated the Guidelines and Bases of Brazilian Education, which led to the inclusion of health programs and content related to human sexuality in the school curriculum⁽³⁾. The approach in a multidisciplinary way, on its turn is recommended from the National Curriculum Parameters, with the proposal to include in the political and pedagogical projects of schools themes related to all the areas of knowledge⁽⁴⁾, including sexual orientation, now called sexual education.

Other projects for the inclusion of the sexuality theme in the school environment have been presented and are developed covering the areas of education and health, as the national project Health and Prevention at Schools⁽⁵⁾, which aims to minimize the vulnerabilities of adolescents and youngsters to sexually transmitted diseases. The School Health Program⁽⁶⁾, in turn, was created to integrate preventive and intervention actions/assistance in the education and health networks, in dialogue with the Family Health Strategy, acting in health promotion and disease prevention, and particularly in teacher training, highlighting especially the work of nurses on these disciplinary actions.

Literature shows that both educational institutions and health care networks have considered

the sexuality topic with a focus on assistance, guided by the traditional and biologist model, suppressing therefore, reflective and problem-solving approaches^(1,4,7), which are recommended when it comes to pedagogical work about this issue.

The transversality proposed from the National Curriculum Guidelines recommends teachers as the primary agents, having to teach beyond the syllabus they received in their training, transversal themes escaping from the specificity that they are used to^(1,4). In turn, for its actual execution one must think about their working conditions and the quality of their training, so that the knowledge, skills and attitudes demanded for this activity, are guaranteed. Thus, one asks: how is the work with the sexuality theme in the school context? Do teachers feel prepared, present difficulties to perform this activity?

The pedagogical intervention in sexuality should be directed to meet the needs of students, based on the questioning and general reflections that the subject requires, decoupling it from beliefs, taboos and personal values, associated with an ethical posture in its operations^(4,8). So, teachers should develop some skills that foster students' interaction and confidence. Above all, they should establish dialogue, and they should encourage problem-solving, in order to develop individuals with critical and reflective thinking to interpret the world, intervene in it, transform it, transform themselves and be subjects of their own actions, especially make these individuals exercise their citizenship fully and also make them be co-responsible for their sexual and reproductive health⁽⁹⁻¹⁰⁾.

To know the health of the school population, recently, the first National Survey of School Health was held⁽¹¹⁾ and as a clipping of this study there was an investigation about sexual health of adolescents that showed the maintenance of attention to the vulnerability of young people, especially sexually transmitted diseases. This study reaffirms the need

for approaches of issues involving human sexuality in the school context.

For decades recommendations have been made by educational policies, allowing more discussions about sex education in educational institutions. However, the big gap is to consider the difficulties of teachers in dealing with this issue in the classroom, highlighting the weaknesses in the teacher training process (guided by a hegemonic view of sexuality) and the need to develop an active listening, free from prejudice and able to encourage citizenship of young people, especially in sexual and reproductive rights.

Then, the objectives of this study were to identify the contents related to the sexuality theme inserted in municipal and state school networks; and to identify the difficulties and needs of teachers in the approach to this theme.

Method

This is a cross-sectional study of descriptive and exploratory nature with a quantitative approach carried out with teachers of six public elementary and high schools (two state and four municipal), located in the east of the city of Goiânia-GO, from April to June 2010. These institutions were selected for representing the largest educational institutions in the region and are located in areas with coverage of the Family Health Strategy, attached to the Basic Health Units and with the School Health Program in development.

The study subjects were all teachers who were in the teaching profession at the time of data collection and who developed activities exclusively for students aged 12-18 years old. Teachers with temporary contracts were excluded, a category also referred to as pro-labor.

After identifying the subjects from the institutions selected who met the inclusion criteria, meetings were held in the educational institutions

with the group of teachers in order to present the research proposal and the invitation to participate.

For data collection we used a self-report instrument with open and closed questions that addressed the socio-demographic characteristics (age, sex, marital status), professional features (workplace, training area, time of teaching, time of work in the institution), and pedagogical practices involving the theme sexuality (work done with students, worked themes, methodology, experience in the sexuality theme, difficulty in the theme approach and training needs). The instrument was previously evaluated through pilot test conducted with teachers from other institutions with similar characteristics, in order to verify the objectivity, clarity and relevance in relation to the proposed objectives.

The data were typed in the statistical program Epi Info version 6.04 for Windows, developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in the United States of America. A descriptive analysis was performed through the distribution of frequencies, calculation of means and medians. For the univariate analysis we used the outcome of belonging to municipal or state schools. To verify differences between the proportions we used the tests χ^2 and Fisher's exact test, when appropriate, accepting as significance level the value of $p < 0.05$.

The study was approved by the Human and Animal Medical Research Committee of the Clinics Hospital from the Federal University of Goiás.

Results

From 92 teachers who met the inclusion criteria, 79 (86.0%) agreed to participate in the study.

In Table 1, it is observed that more than half of the teachers were younger than 35 years of age (54.4%) were females (68.4%) and were married (48.3%).

Table 1 - Socio-demographic characteristics of teachers (N=79)

Variable	n (%)
Age (median: 33.5, ranging from 20-66 years)	
≤ 35	43 (54.4)
≥ 35	36 (45.6)
Gender	
Female	54 (68.4)
Male	25 (31.6)
Marital status (n=77)	
Single	27 (35.0)
Married / consensual union	37 (48.3)
Divorced	9 (11.4)
Widowed	4 (5.1)

Most of them worked in state schools (64.6%). The bachelor’s degree was present as professional training in both groups. Comparing the two educational systems, municipal and state, teachers from the municipal network have worked for over 10 years in teaching (57.1%), and teachers from the state network less than five years in the institution, showing statistical significance (p=0.02) (Table 2).

Table 2 - Teachers’ professional features

Features	Municipal n (%)	State n (%)	X ²	p
Qualification				
Bachelor’s degree	11 (39.3)	29 (56.9)		
Specialization	13 (46.4)	20 (39.2)	3.88	0.14
Masters	4 (14.3)	2 (3.9)		
Teaching time (years)				
< 5	5 (17.9)	7 (13.7)		
5 – 10	7 (25.0)	18 (35.3)	0.94	0.62
> 10	16 (57.1)	26 (51.0)		
Teaching time at the institution (years)				
< 5	13 (46.4)	26 (51.0)		
5 – 10	5 (17.9)	19 (37.2)	7.43	0.02
> 10	10 (35.7)	6 (11.8)		
Area of work				
Biological Sciences	11 (39.3)	10 (19.6)		
Exact Sciences	8 (28.6)	14 (27.4)	4.36	0.11
Human Sciences	9 (32.1)	27 (53.0)		
Weekly working hours in teaching (hours)				
Up to 20	2 (7.2)	6 (11.8)		
21 – 30	9 (32.1)	19 (37.2)	0.83	0.66
> 30	17 (60.7)	26 (51.0)		

Teachers from both groups said that they work with the sexuality theme in the classroom, showing no statistical difference. The pregnancy theme is worked out in bigger frequency among teachers of municipal schools (p=0.04), compared to the state system. Lectures and text readings were the methods most commonly used in both groups. Regarding training on the issue, most of the teachers from both the state and the municipal networks said that they had not received any, showing statistically significant difference (p=0.04) (Table 3).

Table 3 - Pedagogical practices of teachers and topics covered in the classroom

Features	Municipal	State	X ²	p
	n (%)	n (%)		
Work about sexuality	11* (42.3)	11*(22.9)	3.04	0.08
Themes discussed				
Prevention of STDs	13 (46.4)	20 (39.2)	0.39	0.53
Sexuality	12 (42.8)	14 (27.5)	1.94	0.16
Pregnancy	10 (35.7)	8 (15.7)	4.20	0.04
AIDS/Sexually Transmitted Infections	12 (42.8)	12 (23.5)	3.19	0.07
Methodologies used				
Expository class	10 (35.7)	18 (35.3)	0.0	0.97
Group work	1 (3.6)	12 (23.5)	3.89	0.05
Workshops	3 (10.7)	4 (7.8)	0.0	0.99
Text reading	15 (53.6)	17 (33.3)	3.07	0.08
Received training ^(a)				
Yes	4 (14.3)	5 (9.8)	0.81	0.34
No	21 (75.0)	44 (86.3)	0.90	0.04
Experience on the sexuality theme				
Yes	4 (14.3)	3 (5.9)	0.71 [±]	0.40
No	11 (39.3)	14 (27.4)	1.17	0.27

*Valid responses: ^(a)excluding the ones without information [±]Corrected Chi-square and Yates

From Table 4 it is observed that the difficulty referred by both groups did not reach statistical significance. Concerning issues where there is the need for training, pregnancy was the theme with bigger need for teachers of state schools (p=0.03).

Table 4 - Characterization of the difficulties and issues required in the approach of the sexuality theme by teachers

Features	Municipal	State	χ^2	<i>p</i>
	n (%)	n (%)		
Difficulty in the approach	5* (18.5)	15* (30.0)	1.20	0.27
Prevention of sexually transmitted infections	14 (50.0)	35 (68.6)	2.70	0.10
Content of Sexually Transmitted Infections	14 (50.0)	34 (66.7)	2.10	0.15
Pregnancy	10 (35.7)	31 (60.8)	4.50	0.03
Sexuality	15 (53.6)	30 (58.8)	0.30	0.65
Contraceptive methods	8 (28.6)	25 (49.0)	3.10	0.08
Sexual diversity	11 (39.3)	17 (33.3)	0.30	0.60

*Valid responses

Discussion

The sexuality theme has still not been incorporated into teacher's practice as a theme guided by the questioning and general reflections that the subject requires, as recommended by the National Curriculum Standards. This study enabled us to identify the real need of support for teachers to work with diverse contents in the area of sexuality in an assertive way, in order to meet the requirements of the established programs and in line with the recommendations of the scientific literature.

The recommendations of the curriculum parameters are that the Political Pedagogical Projects should contemplate in their curricula the sexuality theme and its relations in a transdisciplinary and transversal way⁽¹⁰⁾, but in reality the contents are still dealt in formal expository classes and especially in the disciplines of the biological are and religious education, not allowing, thus, moments of discussion in other areas of knowledge.

Most teachers of this study are from the area of human sciences. This may indicate about the difficulty in addressing these contents, which are traditionally

worked in the disciplines of biological sciences, and in turn, do not receive such training during graduation. One reinforces the need to break with the hegemonic discourses that only science and biology disciplines discuss sexuality with students, but the theme should be contemplated transversally in other areas such as human, social and exact sciences⁽¹²⁾.

Teachers from the state network had specialization courses (*latu sensu*) and bachelor's degree and some teachers from the municipal network have master's degree (*strictu sensu*), which shows a good level of professional qualification, although it has been observed that most teachers have no experience with the sexuality theme. This shows the importance of encouraging continuing education as a motivational tool for teachers, which contributes to the strengthening and efficiency of existing educational policies.

The school is considered as a favorable environment for social and group interaction, where bonds are created, socialization is promoted and everyone is encouraged to participate in subjects of all kinds, especially the behavioral ones, making it an important space to discuss health education, especially with adolescents^(1,9,13).

Although governments are trying to incorporate issues related to human sexuality in everyday school life, it turns out there is still a big gap between the ideal and the real thing. Some authors state that teachers have no experience in that subject, do not receive training and have difficulties with the subject and need to be trained, which in turn implies the failure to carry out activities related to human sexuality in the classroom⁽¹³⁾, findings corroborated in this investigation.

Although many teachers said that they discussed issues related to sexuality, the pregnancy theme was the least discussed with their students, and it was more discussed in the municipal network and there was statistically significant difference when

the two school systems were compared ($p=0.04$). Teachers from the state network reported needing more training courses and cited the pregnancy issue as a priority ($p=0.03$). These results were found in other studies with similar results regarding the need to train teachers to work with the pregnancy theme at school, since during adolescence individuals are more vulnerable to an unwanted pregnancy, given that the start of childbearing age coincides with the early onset of sexual activity, lack of knowledge and the non-use of contraceptive methods⁽¹⁴⁻¹⁵⁾.

When educational activities were carried out, the teaching methods most used by teachers in this study were readings of texts and expository classes, while the less mentioned were group work and workshops. This result probably reflects the few resources available at schools for use of other methodologies such as active/problem-solving and the use of specific teaching materials such as theme albums, display boards of contraceptive methods and male and female prostheses, and also the lack of preparation of these individuals to use active methods.

We emphasize the precariousness of the national educational system, where access to technological resources in teaching, such as the Internet, are constant⁽¹⁶⁾, although the use of teaching resources is essential and fundamental to use in the school environment. Still, the use of modern, participatory, dialogic and motivating methodologies in educational work with young people are important tools in the teaching and learning process, because while promoting reflections, they give opportunity for participation, there is the socialization of information and experiences, which can facilitate learning⁽¹⁷⁻¹⁸⁾.

On the important and necessary issues required for training, a fact that called attention was the little importance that teachers gave to the contraception theme. Contraceptive methods, especially the barrier ones, associated to information are essential to prevent undesirable situations such as diseases

transmitted through sex and pregnancy. The approach of this issue should be worked systematically and continuously with students, once the information passed on in a scarce way, may not bring about changes in attitudes⁽¹⁰⁾.

The behavioral diversity and the current data of the epidemic of human immunodeficiency virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome points to emerging needs of prevention strategies, considering the local realities of these groups⁽⁸⁾. In this context, the school is an environment favorable also for the work of socialization, health promotion and disease prevention such as sexually transmitted diseases among adolescents, because while it prepares students to be citizens, it is a target setting to promote discussions in preventive education.

However, there is still the need to expand health promotion activities for adolescent students to strengthen the health area at school. The school environment is a favorable place for the actions of health professionals, especially nurses from the Family Health Strategy, who have specific educator skills, inherent from their training, knowledge about human sexuality and comprehensive care as an essential component acquired during undergraduate studies and they may facilitate this practice in the school context. Thus, nurses become great allies of teachers, to educate students and empower them.

It is essential to consider that both school and health professionals can help adolescents experience their sexuality and their affective relations satisfactorily. It is necessary that teachers and nurses share knowledge and work together in order to guide young people to exercise their sexuality with responsibility, dignity and above all in a more pleasant way.

The construction of inter-institutional partnerships in the creation of an integrated health and education network has already been reported as important in order to reduce possible health

problems and collaborate in the formation of future healthy citizens⁽¹⁻²⁾. Thus, it is important to establish partnerships between school, family and health facilities aimed at strengthening the promotion of adolescents' health, in order to minimize the vulnerabilities they are exposed to, due to the epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases and teenage pregnancy, a reality still very present in Brazilian educational institutions.

Every professional brings his own conceptions, taboos and experiences in the area of sexuality, and this can interfere in the conduction of the work related to the theme. However demanding the approach of the topic among teachers in a transversal way using only common sense experiences would be ineffective and unproductive.

There are demands inherent to adolescence that can benefit from the promotion of sexual and reproductive health actions at school, but on the other hand, there is also the emerging need for teacher training to work with sex education in all areas of knowledge, since they spend most of their time with students, demanding knowledge and security to work with this theme.

If projects and programs directed to students' health, such as Health and Prevention at Schools and School Health Program want to solve the problem, it is not possible to develop them without exploitation and investments in technical and scientific training of teachers and coordination with the health system. There are immeasurable differences in the approach of this issue because we must consider both the experience and academic background and the personal availability of each professional. So it is necessary that the government recognizes the need to include sex education in the Political and Pedagogical projects of Brazilian institutions and provide continuing education for teachers^(7,11), as well as subsidize the strengthening of existing programs that articulate

school and the health sector.

It is worth highlighting that education and information do not imply rapid changes in attitudes to the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, however they are facilitators in behavioral processes, contributing to the adhesion of safer sexual practices among teenagers. Thus, the process of socialization in childhood and adolescence is paramount for the construction of identity, and the educational and health institutions, through their projects and the effective actions of their professionals, have great responsibility in the future formation of sociable, participatory and healthy citizens.

Conclusion

With the results of this study, we can conclude that the sexuality theme is not being worked in a transversal way in the municipal and state educational institutions as established by the National Curriculum Parameters, although the group of teachers from the municipal network discusses more one theme than another, compared to the state network.

Teachers from the municipal network work more often with the pregnancy topic and the teachers from the state network mentioned that this theme is the most necessary for training.

It is noteworthy that the biggest limitation of this study was the acceptance of other teachers to participate in the study, which may indirectly show the difficulty of these subjects in dealing with sensitive issues such as the sexuality theme in the school context.

Most teachers cited lack of experience and need for training in the human sexuality theme.

It is also important to recognize the work of nurses in sex education as an essential component in the comprehensive care to strengthen the area of school health.

Collaborations

Chaveiro LG and Pires LM contributed to the design, collection, analysis, data interpretation and writing of the article. Matos MA, Teles SA, Souza SMB and Souza MM contributed to the data interpretation, drafting and final version of the article to be published.

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