

## TRANSGENDERISM AND SCHOOL INCLUSION: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES IN THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

### TRANSGENERIDADE E A INCLUSÃO ESCOLAR: DESAFIOS E POSSIBILIDADES NO AMBIENTE EDUCACIONAL

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**RESUMO:** Este artigo propõe uma reflexão sobre como a escola lida com a presença de estudantes trans e quais caminhos podem ser trilhados para garantir uma educação mais acolhedora e respeitosa. A partir de uma revisão teórica, abordamos os principais desafios enfrentados por esses jovens no cotidiano escolar — como o preconceito, a falta de preparo da equipe pedagógica e a ausência de políticas institucionais efetivas. Também destacamos as possibilidades de transformação por meio do afeto, do respeito e do reconhecimento da dignidade de cada pessoa. A escola precisa se tornar um espaço onde todos, todas e todes se sintam pertencentes e seguros para aprender e existir.

**Palavras-chave:** Transgeneridade. Inclusão Escolar. Diversidade. Respeito. Acolhimento.

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**ABSTRACT:** This article reflects on how schools address the presence of transgender students and examines strategies for fostering a more inclusive and respectful educational environment. Grounded in a theoretical review, it discusses the main challenges faced by these students in the school context, including prejudice, the lack of preparation among educators, and the absence of effective institutional policies. At the same time, it emphasizes the potential for transformation through affection, respect, and the recognition of human dignity. It argues that schools must be reconfigured as spaces of belonging, safety, and appreciation of diversity, ensuring that all students can fully learn and exist.

**Keywords:** Transgender. School Inclusion. Diversity. Respect. Welcoming.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The school is configured as a privileged environment for interpersonal relationships, where knowledge and values are built that shape the integral formation of the subjects. However, for many trans students, this space that should promote the reception and construction of citizenship becomes a hostile environment, where discriminatory acts, often subtle and sometimes explicit, reveal the presence of a symbolic violence that marginalizes these subjects in the school routine. The Brazilian educational scenario still shows serious limitations in dealing with the diversity of gender identities, especially when they challenge the normative standards traditionally imposed by society.

The presence of trans students in school spaces reveals the urgent need to rethink pedagogical practices, physical structures, and interpersonal relationships. It is an ethical call to listen, to recognize and value the existence of the other. As Louro (1997) points out, the school institution carries intentionalities that influence the production and reproduction of social norms, including those related to gender identities. Thus, the refusal of a trans student's identity is not only an administrative or pedagogical failure, but a form of institutional violence that compromises their dignity and their right to learn.

Judith Butler (2003) invites us to reflect on the fact that gender is performative — that is, it is constructed through social actions and interactions, and not determined by biological aspects. This understanding breaks with the binary rigidity of gender and proposes a more fluid approach, where each person should have the freedom to live their identity without coercion or punishment. The school, in this context, needs to break with its normative function to become a space of emancipation, where all identities are respected and legitimized.

Despite legal and social advances, such as the recognition of the social name in school records and the growing discussion about diversity in teacher training, the daily lives of trans students are still permeated by exclusions. As the ANTRA Dossier (2022) shows, the school environment continues to be one of the main places of violence for the trans population, which contributes significantly to school dropout and the denial of basic rights such as access to education.

The challenge of inclusion goes beyond the simple guarantee of school entry, also requiring concrete measures to ensure the feeling of belonging and the continuity of studies in a respectful environment. This implies structural and subjective changes: from the creation of inclusive institutional policies to the cultivation of a school culture based on empathy, dialogue,

and the appreciation of diversity. Inserting trans people in the educational space should not be interpreted as a gesture of institutional benevolence, but as an expression of commitment to equity and to the democratic principles of education.

In view of this, this article seeks to reflect on the challenges and possibilities of school inclusion of trans people in the Brazilian educational context. From a theoretical and critical approach, we will discuss how the school can — and should — become a safe, affective and fair environment for all forms of being and existing. After all, educating with ethical commitment is also guaranteeing the right of each subject to be respected in their identity and humanity.

## 2. Transgenderism: Understanding to Include

Transgenderism refers to the authentic experience of gender identity, that is, the inalienable right of each person to be recognized as perceived and expressed in the world, with respect, freedom and dignity. Trans individuals are those whose gender identity differs from that assigned at birth—a condition that, far from being a deviation, constitutes a legitimate part of human diversity. Understanding this reality is essential for building a more ethical, empathetic, and inclusive society.

From the earliest years of life, trans children and adolescents often perceive a disconnect between who they are internally and what society expects of them. This experience is usually accompanied by feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, and silence. As Berenice Bento (2006) discusses, the trajectory of trans people is marked by the constant struggle for recognition in contexts that often delegitimize their existence.

The school, as a space for social formation and human development, should be a safe place for all identities. However, reality points out that many trans students face discrimination, rejection, or invisibility in their school environments. Refusal to use the social name, disrespect for correct pronouns and mockery among peers are forms of violence that compromise not only the emotional health, but also the academic performance of these subjects. Research indicates that these experiences of exclusion are associated with school dropout and psychological distress, such as anxiety, depression, and self-injurious behaviors.

More than knowing the concepts related to transgenderism, it is essential to cultivate attitudes of empathy and collective responsibility. The commitment to inclusion begins with simple but meaningful practices: listening carefully, respecting each person's identity, combating transphobic manifestations, and fostering debates about diversity in an ethical,

critical, and reasoned way. These gestures, when incorporated into the school routine, have the power to transform lives.

The presence of the family in this process is equally decisive. Studies show that trans children and adolescents who receive family support develop greater self-esteem and security to face social challenges. However, many families still reproduce prejudices due to lack of information or fear. In this scenario, the school can act as a partner in promoting dialogue, offering guidance and building care and reception networks that involve all actors in the school community.

From a legal point of view, Brazil already recognizes the right to use the social name in public institutions, including schools. However, guaranteeing this right effectively depends on concrete actions: continuous training of education professionals, inclusive public policies, and the strengthening of a culture of respect for human rights.

Another central aspect for the advancement of inclusion is the incorporation of the theme of gender and diversity in school curricula. Discussing issues related to transgenderism in a sensitive way and with theoretical support contributes to overcoming stereotypes and developing a critical awareness in students. Silence on these issues, on the other hand, perpetuates prejudice and fuels marginalization.

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Training educators prepared to deal with the plurality of identities is a strategic and urgent step. Many teachers still feel insecure when addressing these issues, which reveals the need to invest in training that includes gender, sexuality, human rights and inclusive pedagogical practices. After all, teaching is also a political and affective act — it requires openness to learn from the other, review postures and build bridges where barriers once existed.

In essence, welcoming trans students is recognizing their dignity, their humanity, and their right to exist fully. In the school space, this translates into respectful pedagogical practices, active listening, building bonds and valuing the multiple ways of being. What is at stake is more than access to knowledge — it is the right of every person to flourish in freedom.

### **3. The challenges of being trans at school**

The school experience for transgender students often represents a territory marked by adversity and obstacles that go far beyond the academic challenges common to all students. In an environment that has historically been structured based on rigid binary gender norms, the trans experience is often made invisible or disrespected, which can have profound effects on

the construction of identity, emotional development, and school performance of these students (BENTO, 2006; LOURO, 1997). The denial of the use of the social name, explicit and veiled prejudice, bullying, and the lack of inclusive educational policies are realities that contribute to the marginalization and early withdrawal of trans young people from schools (ANTRA, 2022; JESUS, 2012).

In addition, the lack of adequate training for educators and staff on gender diversity and the absence of representation in the curriculum reinforce exclusionary structures, making it difficult to promote a safe and welcoming school environment (PEREIRA, 2011; SILVA; MISKOLCI, 2012). Studies indicate that the hostile school environment is directly related to increased dropout rates, mental health problems, such as anxiety and depression, and higher risks of social vulnerability for trans students (FACCHINI, 2009; JESUS, 2012). Therefore, facing these challenges requires a collective commitment to the transformation of pedagogical practices, the implementation of inclusive public policies, and the construction of a school culture based on respect for diversity, the appreciation of identities, and the guarantee of human rights (HOOKS, 2013; LOURO, 2008).

### 3.1. Prejudice that hurts

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For many trans people, the school experience is permeated by frequent episodes of discrimination and exclusion. Insults, offensive jokes, disrespectful nicknames and social isolation become realities that accompany young people who, in addition to the typical challenges of adolescence, have to deal with the denial of their identities. These situations not only cause deep emotional impacts, but also directly affect the academic path, reflecting in high dropout rates.

According to data from the National Association of Transvestites and Transsexuals (ANTRA, 2022), most trans people in Brazil interrupt their studies while still in adolescence, not for lack of interest, but due to the absence of a welcoming and safe school environment. According to Louro (2008, p.17), schools remain as spaces that normalize and control bodies, where differences are often made invisible or ridiculed.

Institutionalized transphobia in the school environment has serious impacts on the mental health of these students. Jesus (2012) highlights that the non-acceptance of gender identity can transform the school into an oppressive space, contributing to the construction of

a subjectivity marked by exclusion. In this sense, silence and invisibility end up intensifying the process of marginalization (Jesus, 2012, p. 89).

Violence against trans people is not restricted to physical or verbal aggression, but also takes symbolic and structural forms. Denying the use of the social name, not including references to trans identities in the curricula and the lack of preparation of the school staff are examples of silent violence that reinforces exclusion. Bento (2006, p. 134) warns that this exclusion reflects the cisnormativity that permeates educational institutions.

Ensuring a dignified education implies implementing inclusive public policies, continuously training teachers for gender and sexuality diversity, and building a school culture that respects human rights. It is urgent to transform schools into environments where all people can learn, teach and exist with freedom and respect.

Facchini (2009, p. 46) summarizes the need by stating that the school should be a space to welcome difference, and not to reproduce the social violence that affects trans people. This challenge is a priority for Brazilian education.

### 3.2. Unprepared teachers

Most education professionals in Brazil have not received adequate training to deal with the specificities of gender diversity and trans experiences. This does not mean disinterest, but it reveals important gaps in initial and continuing education, making it difficult to create truly inclusive school environments.

Pereira (2011) emphasizes that the educator's training must go beyond the mere transmission of content, involving the construction of an ethical posture capable of recognizing each student in his or her uniqueness. The lack of this preparation can lead to the unconscious reproduction of prejudices, weakening the bond between teachers and trans students.

According to Silva and Miskolci (2012, p. 35), the school still follows a binary logic of gender that does not recognize multiple existences, silencing identities that deviate from the norm. Therefore, even teachers with good intentions can end up reinforcing exclusions due to lack of knowledge or insecurity.

It is essential, therefore, that the school invests in continuing education that enables critical reflection on pedagogical practices, construction of new knowledge and the development of skills to work on topics such as gender identity, sexuality and human rights.

For Paraíso and Veiga-Neto (2005, p. 123), training teachers is, above all, training ethical subjects who know how to live with differences without exercising symbolic violence.

Thus, the role of the teacher goes beyond the teaching of contents: he is a trainer of subjectivities. Preparing these professionals to act with respect for diversity is essential for the school to promote a democratic and welcoming environment.

### 3.3. Structures that exclude

The school exclusion of trans students also occurs through institutional barriers that, by neglecting their specific needs, reinforce the sense of not belonging. Examples include the absence of adequate bathrooms, the insistence on the use of one's civil name on attendance lists, the invisibility of trans identities in curricula, and the scarcity of positive representations in teaching materials.

These situations, sometimes little discussed in the traditional pedagogical discourse, undermine the self-esteem of trans students, making the school a space marked by constant surveillance and fear. Miskolci (2012, p. 40) highlights that the gender norms present in the school function as control mechanisms that reinforce heteronormativity and punish those who challenge this norm.

When the school does not adapt its structures to accommodate these differences, it maintains an educational model that values conformity and marginalizes divergences. Goffman (1988) observes that institutions tend to stigmatize those who deviate from the norms, evidenced, for example, in the embarrassment generated by the obligation to use bathrooms that do not correspond to the identity of the trans student. The lack of reception policies aggravates these difficulties.

The school curriculum also plays a fundamental role in this process. The absence of content that addresses gender and diversity contributes to the silencing of these identities. Britzman (1996) states that the curriculum is a space of symbolic dispute, where what is taught or omitted reveals the values that the school transmits.

The so-called neutrality of the school, according to Louro (1997, p. 21), often masks the maintenance of exclusionary norms, since denying differences does not promote impartiality, but reinforces exclusions. Therefore, adapting schools to include trans students is an ethical and legal requirement.

Transforming these structures implies a review of physical conditions, pedagogical practices and institutional positions. Effective inclusion happens when the school recognizes and values diversity as an essential part of its identity.

#### **4. Possible paths to a more inclusive school**

The search for a truly inclusive school is a contemporary challenge that requires overcoming traditional practices and building educational environments that welcome diversity in its multiple dimensions. School inclusion transcends the simple physical insertion of students in the educational space; It presupposes the guarantee of conditions for everyone to have equitable access to the curriculum, the recognition of their identities and the full exercise of their rights. In this sense, it is essential to adopt effective public policies, the continuing education of education professionals and the critical review of pedagogical content and methods.

According to Louro (1997, p. 20), "schools are spaces for the production and reproduction of norms that discipline and regulate the subjects", which highlights the urgent need to transform school cultures so that they can welcome diversity and promote equity. In addition, Facchini (2009) highlights that inclusion demands "not only the elimination of physical barriers, but the overcoming of prejudices and the construction of an environment of respect and appreciation of differences" (p. 45). For Silva and Miskolci (2012), continuous teacher training is essential to "enable educators to deal with the multiple identities present in the school, combating stigmas and promoting inclusive pedagogical practices" (p. 37).

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Thus, the school can become a space of belonging and appreciation, capable of contributing to the formation of critical, empathetic and socially responsible subjects. As Freire (1996) emphasizes, "educating is an act of love, and this love is manifested in the ability to respect and value difference" (p. 43). Therefore, the paths to inclusion pass through the collective commitment to transformation, active listening, and the recognition that a truly democratic education must be accessible and welcoming for all.

##### **4.1. Respecting the social name is recognizing the identity**

Using a person's chosen name goes beyond a simple matter of etiquette or protocol — it is a fundamental gesture of acknowledging their existence. For trans students, having their social name respected in calls, records, and in everyday school life means much more than

formal inclusion: it represents the affirmation of their identity and humanity. It's like saying, in a simple but respectful way, "I see you and accept you as you are."

The right to use one's social name in educational institutions is not reduced to an administrative formality. It is supported by public policies and legal provisions that seek to combat transphobia and ensure dignity in the school environment. As established by Resolution No. 12 of the National Council to Combat Discrimination (BRASIL, 2015), the social name must be respected in all public bodies, including schools.

To deny this right is to contribute to the perpetuation of invisibility and symbolic violence. Bento (2006) points out that the name is a central component of a person's identity, and its denial is equivalent to refusing the right of each person to be who they are. Insisting on the use of one's birth name, especially in public contexts, can cause embarrassment, psychological distress, and a sense of exclusion.

In addition, valuing the social name is a pedagogical practice that strengthens the relationship between teachers and students. The educator who welcomes the student's identity opens space for dialogue, for the feeling of belonging and for the appreciation of diversity. Silva (2020, p. 77) points out that "recognizing the social name is recognizing the person in its entirety, valuing the autonomy and dignity that sustain the educational process".

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This simple gesture can make the difference between staying and dropping out of school. Respecting one's social name is, therefore, respecting life — a life that, for a long time, was marked by exclusion, erasure, and violence.

#### **4.2. Learning to teach sensitively**

Educating for diversity implies, first of all, assuming the commitment to attentive listening, empathy and social transformation. It means recognizing that the classroom is composed of unique individuals, whose identities cross multiple dimensions, such as gender, race, sexuality and social class. In this context, teaching goes beyond the transmission of content; It is a political, ethical and affective act.

Many teachers arrive in the classroom without adequate preparation to deal with gender diversity, due to initial and continuing training that neglects these topics. Therefore, it is essential to offer permanent training spaces, in which educators can reflect on their practices, exchange experiences, question beliefs and develop new pedagogical approaches.

Freire (1996, p. 43) emphasizes that "no one educates alone; everyone educates each other, in interaction with the world". It is in this process of dialogue and mutual recognition that a truly transformative pedagogy is born. Teaching with sensitivity requires intellectual humility and a willingness to review positions hitherto considered definitive.

Each attitude of the teacher communicates values: a look, a word, a posture can welcome or reject, liberate or hurt. When the educator is willing to listen attentively, question without prejudice and deepen his studies, he contributes to the construction of an inclusive school environment, in which everyone is fully respected.

Sensitivity, far from being fragility, is a powerful pedagogical tool that creates affective bonds, deconstructs prejudices and reinforces the feeling of belonging. Bell Hooks (2013) emphasizes that education as a practice of freedom must be based on affection and connection, because it is through these relationships that space is opened for transformation.

Educating for gender diversity is, therefore, an invitation for teachers to become not only transmitters of knowledge, but also cultivators of respect, empathy and justice. When the teacher learns from his students and values their experiences, the school becomes a space of resistance, care and renewal. To teach sensitively is to teach with an open heart—a fundamental learning.

#### **4.3. Curriculum that represents everyone**

The school cannot continue to be a place where only some identities and stories find representation. The curriculum, which is the central axis of educational practice, must reflect the multiplicity of voices and trajectories that make up society. This implies breaking with traditions that privileged certain knowledges and bodies, while silencing those of trans, black, indigenous, disabled, peripheral people, and other historically marginalized identities.

An inclusive curriculum is not limited to mentioning diversity on specific dates or specific projects; it must integrate this plurality in a transversal, critical and permanent way. Silva (2000, p. 77) defines the curriculum as a social construction permeated by disputes, where the selection of what is taught and what is omitted carries a deep political meaning.

The absence of representation has serious consequences on the subjectivity of students. When a trans, black or indigenous child or young person does not recognize themselves in the teaching materials, images or content presented, they receive an implicit message that their history and identity are not valued. This generates pain, demotivation and exclusion.

On the other hand, a curriculum that embraces diversity broadens horizons and promotes social justice. Including positive representations of trans people, for example, helps combat structural transphobia and offers models that strengthen students' self-esteem and dignity. Gomes (2017) highlights that "representativeness matters because it allows us to imagine possible futures where difference is a power, not an obstacle".

Therefore, it is essential to rethink the curriculum as a living instrument, which dialogues with current demands and welcomes subjects in their complexity. This includes the choice of plural teaching materials, the appreciation of ancestral and popular knowledge, the inclusion of diverse authors, and pedagogical practices based on respect and equity.

#### **4.4. Create spaces for listening and welcoming**

The school is, above all, a space for human coexistence. Therefore, it is essential to promote environments where students can express their experiences, be heard and welcomed, contributing to a more affective, democratic and inclusive school culture. Conversation circles, support groups, thematic workshops, interdisciplinary projects and moments of sharing are strategies that favor active listening and the development of empathy.

In the case of trans students, these spaces are even more necessary. They often face rejection, prejudice and isolation, both inside and outside of school. Ensuring that they can talk about their experiences in a safe and respectful environment is a concrete action to combat silencing and strengthen their self-esteem.

Freire (1996, p. 42) states that "there is no dialogue without a deep love for the world and for people". Dialogue, in this way, is more than a verbal exchange — it is a meeting of subjectivities. It is in this meeting that the relationship between educators and students is strengthened, enabling an education that recognizes and values differences.

Listening must be welcoming, that is, free of judgment and open to multiple human experiences. Listening is considering the other in its totality, with its pains and powers. To welcome is to communicate that no one is alone and that there is room to exist, feel and belong.

Arendt (2009) points out that political action is born from the relationship with the other, from the creation of spaces for visibility and sharing. The school, as a social institution, has an ethical commitment to promote this visibility, breaking with authoritarian and hierarchical structures that have historically silenced dissident voices.

Creating spaces for listening and welcoming is, therefore, a pedagogical and political practice, which affirms the value of each student. Building daily relationships that humanize, liberate, and transform is to ensure that no one feels invisible — after all, being seen, heard, and welcomed is a fundamental right of all people.

## 5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ensuring the inclusion of trans students goes beyond formal compliance with laws, resolutions, or institutional guidelines. It is a practice lived daily at school, expressed in the recognition of differences, in attitudes of respect, in words that affirm identities and in actions that promote humanity. To transform the school environment, it is not enough to establish norms; It is necessary to cultivate active listening, empathy and ethical commitment to the dignity of the other.

Breaking with exclusionary patterns requires deconstructing an education based on rigid normativity, which often silences and invisibilizes bodies that deviate from the dominant pattern. As Louro (1997, p. 20) points out, schools historically function as spaces that regulate and discipline subjects, reinforcing social norms. Thus, recognizing gender diversity as a richness to be celebrated, and not as a threat, represents an essential step towards dismantling structures that deny the right to full existence.

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When a school welcomes a trans student, it contributes not only to their permanence in the educational system, but also acts directly to promote their life and well-being. In a Brazilian context in which the trans population faces high rates of violence and vulnerability, the school can represent the first environment where these students are seen as subjects worthy of respect, learning and belonging.

As Hooks (2013) emphasizes, liberating education is an act that involves love and hope. Respecting the name, identity and trajectory of each student means more than teaching content; it is to transmit values that form conscious, critical citizens committed to social justice.

To educate with sensitivity is to recognize that no one learns if they do not feel safe, and that no one develops fully if they are not seen in their entirety. The school's fundamental role is to ensure that everyone — students, teachers, and the community — can exist, learn, and dream in a welcoming space. Each time a trans student finds acceptance and recognition, the entire educational community advances in its understanding of what it means to educate with humanity.

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