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Chapter 14: 'Silence and Sexuality in School Settings: A Transnational Perspective', Helen Sauntson and Rodrigo Borba

Abstract

This chapter explores the silence dimension of aloneness in the early stages of the lifespan and in relation to the social dimension of sexuality – it specifically examines the silences experienced by young people in school in relation to sexuality. The discussion draws on our research experience at UK and Brazilian schools and thus provides a transnational perspective. Both in the UK and Brazil, frictions between acknowledging sexual diversity in schools and its silencing in policymaking and public discourses constitute a fertile ground for critical scrutiny. This chapter provides an overview of research from the disciplines of linguistics and discourse analysis which has explored silence in relation to sexuality identities and considers how these disciplinary insights have helped to develop a broader understanding of how silence functions in relation to identity. In particular, the chapter pays close attention to how silence around non-normative sexuality identities is enforced in school contexts.

Keywords: silence, schools, linguistics, discourse analysis, UK, Brazil

Introduction

As stated in the introductory chapter, this volume explores and brings together research relating to three specific forms of aloneness: solitude, silence and loneliness. And contributions in the volume are united in considering how these forms of aloneness develop over time across the lifespan. This chapter focuses on the silence dimension of aloneness in the early stages of the lifespan and in relation to the social dimension of sexuality – it specifically examines the silences experienced by young people in school in relation to sexuality. The discussion draws on our research experience at UK and Brazilian schools and, thus, provides a transnational perspective to the issue at hand. Moreover, the chapter explores silence from the disciplinary perspective of linguistics and discourse analysis.

As Stern notes in the introductory chapter to this volume, silence can refer to the omission of a particular topic and to ‘disengagement’, as well as to the literal absence of sound. It is the ‘unsayability’ of particular topics relating to sexual diversity and identity in schools which is the focus of the current chapter. In her work on schools, Lees (2012) distinguishes between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ silence with ‘weak’ silence involving denial, shame and fear. This kind of ‘weak silence’ is particularly relevant to the discourses of sexuality which frequently circulate in schools. In work on the role of silence in sexuality-based asylum hearings, Johnson (2011: 57) refers to the ‘ambiguous and textured quality of silence’ arguing that it can be either a productive site of resistance or can function to mute the voices of subjugated actors. These, as we will see, are key themes which emerge from linguistics-based literature on language and sexuality in relation to school settings. The silences around sexual diversity in schools are experienced by young people (and some teachers) as overwhelmingly negative, oppressive, imposed and difficult to challenge.

In previous literature on sexuality and schooling, Epstein *et al* (2003) observe that sexuality is both everywhere and nowhere in schools. They identify schools as sites where heterosexuality is constructed as normal and sexualities which transgress this norm are silenced, often tacitly rather than actively. A range of routine silencing and regulatory discourses in a range of schools in international contexts have also been explored by Francis and Msibi (2011), Moita Lopes (2006) and Sauntson (2013) amongst others. Moreover, Liddicoat (2009) observes how the language classrooms examined are dominated by a ‘heteronormative framing of identities’ and that heterosexuality is always potentially present in the classes. Eckert (1996) has commented that secondary schools are particularly marked sites for the production of heterosexual identities. According to Eckert, the transition into a heterosexual social order in secondary school brings boys and girls into an engagement in gender differentiation and encourages boys and girls to view themselves as ‘commodities’ on a heterosexual market. All of this work suggests that the unmarked and constant presence of heterosexuality contributes to the routine silencing of other forms of sexual identity in schools.

What we see in schools, then, is that on the one hand, sexuality in the form of heterosexuality is highly visible and permeates numerous aspects of the school environment. On the other hand, LGBT+ identities, and sexual diversity more broadly, are marginalized and often rendered invisible. Paradoxically, sexual diversity only becomes visible in schools when it takes the form of homophobic verbal abuse and other forms of sexuality-based bullying. Recent policy changes in UK and in Brazil - despite their differences in scope - may bring changes in this disparity of visibility across different sexuality identities in schools. In the UK, for example, the 2010 Equality Act made discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation illegal in schools and

other areas of public life, and the Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) guidance now includes a section on the positive teaching of LGBT+ identities and relationships.

The legislative scenario in Brazil is slightly more convoluted than this since gender equality and sexual diversity have only become of interest to policymakers, teachers and activists due to the re-democratization process initiated in 1985. With the end of a 21-year US-backed military dictatorship during which schools were used as battlegrounds to inculcate the conservative values espoused by the military junta in the citizenry, matters related to human rights, gender equity and sexual diversity timidly crawled their way into education laws. Sanctioned in 1996, the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação* (Education Guidelines Law), for instance, ranks respect for freedom and tolerance as principles to be followed in schools without ever mentioning gender and sexuality – erasure is a much-used silencing strategy. This situation was to be slightly redressed only in 2014 with the *Plano Nacional de Educação* (National Education Plan) which includes the necessity of eradicating all forms of discrimination, but again sexual diversity is not explicitly mentioned which is striking in an extremely LGBT+phobic country as Brazil (Borba and Milani, 2017). As a significant number of teachers were schooled and/or trained during military rule, recent research shows they are wary (or outright dismissive) of matters related to these issues (Castro and Ferrari, 2017; Mattos, 2019; for exceptions to this trend see, however, Fabricio and Moita-Lopes, 2019).

Both in the UK and Brazil (as elsewhere), frictions between acknowledging sexual diversity in schools and its silencing in policymaking and public discourses constitute a fertile ground for critical scrutiny. In this context, this chapter provides an overview of research from the disciplines of linguistics and discourse analysis which has explored silence in relation to sexuality identities and considers how these disciplinary insights have helped to develop a broader understanding of how silence functions in relation to identity. In particular, the chapter pays close attention to how silence around non-normative sexuality identities is experienced and enforced in school contexts and in early life. We start by outlining the UK and Brazilian contexts as they relate to issues around sexuality, particularly in schools. We then consider some key work on silence and sexuality within linguistics and discourse analysis. We then go on to provide illustrative examples of what linguistic analysis can reveal about sexuality and silence from our own work in schools in the UK and Brazil respectively. The UK case study focuses on a linguistic analysis of silence and sexuality in the 2020 Relationships and Sex Education guidance. The Brazilian case discusses how the *Escola sem Partido* (Non-Partisan School) movement has fueled the public sphere with vocabulary whose aim is to eradicate sexual diversity from schools through curtailing teachers' voices and autonomy. The linguistic analyses of these texts and the macropolitical contexts from which they emerge demonstrate how silence may be loudly imposed as a strategy to counter recent advancements in gender equity and sexual diversity in contemporary societies.

UK context

There have been many recent advances in terms of LGBT+ equality in the UK. Most notably, there have been legislative changes which enable same-sex couples to marry and have the same adoption rights as heterosexual couples. Also, more public figures are openly LGB than ever before. But recent research by the UK LGBT rights charity Stonewall still shows that homophobia and heterosexism are still prevalent and pervasive in many UK secondary schools (Bradlow *et al*, 2017). Beyond schools, homophobia is also still prevalent.

For example, widely-reported incidents of homophobic violence on a London bus¹ and in Liverpool² in 2019 have highlighted the precarity of a hard-won equality for LGBT+ people in the UK. This is highlighted further by high profile protests against the teaching of LGBT relationships outside Birmingham primary schools which took place in 2019. Those who participated were specifically protesting against the *No Outsiders* equality programme for schools which is designed to teach children about differences in religions, families and relationships in a positive and accepting way. Protesters primarily argued that the subject matter of the programme contradicted the Islamic faith (although there were also a small number of protesters from other faith groups) and also argued that primary school children were too young to be made aware of same-sex relationships. The programme was suspended following the protests. Although protests only took place in Birmingham, the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) reported that up to 70 schools in England had encountered varying degrees of resistance to the programme from parents. These events were (and continue to be) significant because the issue of parental control over what is and is not explicitly spoken about in schools has formed a key part of the protests. Essentially, the protests are based around the argument that sexual diversity (anything other than heterosexuality) should be silenced in primary schools and left within the remit of the family.³

The historical context is important for understanding these ongoing issues relating to silence and sexuality in UK schools. A significant piece of legislation relating to sexual diversity issues in schools in the UK was 1988 local government act. Section 28 of this act made it illegal for homosexuality to be 'promoted' in schools. Non-heterosexual relationships were described as 'pretended family relationships'. In many ways, this act set the ground for providing RSE which focused exclusively on heterosexual (family) relationships and for creating and maintaining a silence around any other forms of sexual identities, relationships and family structures. Section 28 was finally repealed by Britain's Labour government in 2003 but there still appears to be a 'legacy' from Section 28 which has resulted in a pervading silence and fear of openly discussing non-heterosexual identities and relationships in schools (Ellis and High, 2004; Malmedie, 2012). The persistence of this legacy has been one of the driving forces behind the inclusion of LGBT+ identities and relationships in the new RSE guidance which operates in schools in England from September 2020.

Arguably, the rhetoric of the recent school protests against LGBT+ inclusion in RSE sits alongside language reminiscent of the 1980s and Section 28, stoking fears of 'sexualization' and 'indoctrination'. Although Section 28 is 'silent' in that it is not explicitly invoked as part of the rhetoric of the protesting groups, it is 'spectral' in that it is implicit in the language used. This spectrality and the way it manifests in language will be explored in more detail in section 5.

Brazilian context

After twenty-one years of silencing by the dictatorial regime, human rights, gender, race and sexuality shyly made their way into public discourses especially with regards to education. Since the re-democratization of the country in 1985, however, there has been resistance to these small (but powerful) changes. How this kind of opposition

¹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-crime-lgbt/teenagers-admit-homophobic-london-bus-attack-on-two-women-idUSKBN1Y220H>

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-48736297>

³ For more information about the school protests, see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-49978551>.

moved from quiet corridor murmurs to strident public criticisms against ‘indoctrination’, ‘teacher’s freedom’, and ‘sexualization’ is telling of the silencing strategies used to curb democratic practices nowadays.

Between 1985 and 2016, the Brazilian citizenry witnessed the instantiation of timid but nonetheless relevant laws and policies for the enfranchisement of vulnerable populations who, under the military junta, had absolutely no voice. In 1996, *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação* (Education Guidelines Law), for instance, made the teaching of African-Brazilian history and religions mandatory. Although sexual diversity is not explicitly mentioned, respect for freedom and tolerance are listed as guiding principles of pedagogical practices. Such progressive discourses gained more prominence during the left-wing governments which ranged from 2003 to 2016. During this period, policies for the protection and empowerment of women and LGBT+ constituencies were implemented. These include the creation of the Ministry of Women, Racial Equality, and Human Rights⁴, the criminalization of domestic violence, the National Human Rights Plan, the legalization of same-sex marriages, and *Brasil sem Homofobia* – a nation-wide programme to fight discrimination against non-heterosexual identities. As part of this programme, in 2011 the Ministry of Education prepared a booklet with anti-homophobic content to be distributed to public schools as a way to overcome the silence regarding this matter in a country where, according to the NGO *Grupo Gay da Bahia*, there is a homophobic-driven murder every 23 hours. The production of the anti-homophobia booklet was followed by two important developments in 2013: the legalization of same-sex marriage by the Supreme Court and the debate about the new National Education Plan.

Not coincidentally, a week after same-sex marriages were legalized, a group of Neo Pentecostal and Catholic politicians made a stir about a supposed ‘gay kit’ which would allegedly teach elementary school children to change genders at their own volition, thwarting, thus, the content of the anti-homophobia material whose aim was to foster respect for LGBT+ individuals. Their coordinated action had an impact on public opinion which led the then-president Dilma Rousseff to veto the distribution of the booklet and later allowed the ‘gay kit’ specter to influence the election of a far-right outspoken homophobe as president in 2018⁵. The Anti-Homophobia booklet was never made public which allowed unscrupulous politicians and conservative social movements to keep manipulating its aims, scope and content so as to whirl a public commotion against progressive policies in education. As the moral panic about the ‘gay kit’ took hold of the public sphere, the National Education Plan had started to be discussed by government representatives and the civil society. Two points of controversy were at the centre of the debate: the character of religious education and sexual diversity. Conservative politicians strived to make religion (i.e. creationism as well as Catholic dogma) a mandatory school subject and took issue with terms such as gender and sexual diversity which they wanted to be dropped from the document.

According to Miskolci (2018), this produced a fertile niche for the *Escola Sem Partido* (Non-Partisan School) movement to thrive. Created in 2003 as a parent control association against what they identified as ‘Marxist indoctrination’ at Brazilian schools (a clear reaction to the election of a left-wing president), the ESP movement only

⁴ The far-right government of Jair Bolsonaro changed this to Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights, which is under the command of a pro-life, anti-feminism religious fundamentalist.

⁵ Bolsonaro made the ‘gay kit’ as a central piece of his electoral campaign. In his inaugural speech in 2019 he singled the fight against ‘gender ideology’ at schools as his main political platform as president.

gathered political and public momentum after it embarked on the conservative bandwagon against a supposed sexualization of children in schools which was strategically linked to the political left, fueling a general distrust towards progressive ideas. Undergirding these efforts was the offensive against what these groups identify as ‘gender ideology’⁶. Serving as a rhetorical device used against the political left and the institutionalization of gender equality and sexual diversity in curricula, the discourse of ‘gender ideology’:

aims, first, to refute claims concerning the hierarchical construction of the raced, gendered, and heterosexual order; second, to essentialize and delegitimize feminist and queer theories of gender; third, to frustrate global and local gender mainstreaming efforts; fourth, to thwart gender and LGBT+ equality policies; and finally to reaffirm heteropatriarchal conceptions of sex, gender, and sexuality. (Corredor, 2019: 616)

Corrêa and Kalil (2020) note that the phrase ‘gender ideology’ gained impetus and political weight during the discussion of the National Education Plan in 2013. Anti-feminism, anti-LGBT+, and anti-Left lawmakers and protesters came together in a raucous effort to silence gender equity and sexual diversity matters and erase them from the plan. Part of their strategy to silence progressive changes in education were obstreperous and violent street protests. For example, in 2017 a group of anti-gender ideology demonstrators burned an effigy of Judith Butler while the philosopher visited the country.⁷

Their strategy was successful. The words gender and sexuality were removed from the document. Consequently, the 2017 *Base Nacional Comum Curricular* (the national basic curriculum) has no mention to gender equity or sexual diversity. This scenario paved the way for the ESP to inspire a slew of law projects whose aim is to prohibit ‘ideological indoctrination’ which allegedly gets materialized in critical pedagogical practices especially with regards to gender and sexual identities. These law projects employ words of order, rhetoric and discursive strategies that purport to curb critical pedagogical enterprises by mongering fear and, thus, silencing teachers’ voices. A detailed analysis of this language and, more broadly, the ESP’s silencing strategies is provided in the Brazil case study, below.

Language and sexuality in schools

Work in the field of linguistics recognizes that homophobia is not always overt and is actually more often construed as an effect of silence and invisibility, especially in organizations such as schools and universities. There is now a growing body of international academic research which explores the routine silencing and regulatory discourses around sexual diversity in schools as well as overtly discriminatory language. It is now more recognized that homophobic language and behaviour in schools is often ‘covert’ and sometimes difficult for teachers to even notice.

⁶ Elsewhere named ‘genderism’ and ‘gender theory’. As a rhetorical device, ‘gender ideology’ is used in a number of anti-gender movements worldwide. For a discussion of the history of the term see Butler (2019) and Corredor (2019). For an analysis of its transnational contours see Corrêa (2018) and Moragas (2020).

⁷ See Butler’s comments on this attack here:

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/11/13/judith-butler-discusses-being-burned-effigy-and-protected-brazil>

In recent research on sexuality in schools (Mattos, 2019; Sauntson, 2013; 2018), young LGBT+ people have repeatedly reported in interviews that sexual diversity (and especially homosexuality) is 'not talked about' and 'ignored' and that this has a negative emotional effect on them which, in turn, decreases their motivation to attend school. Recent research in the UK and Brazil (Mattos, 2019; Sauntson, 2018) highlights how this raises two points of tension. One is that the routine silences around non-heterosexual sexualities in schools sits in tension with the fact that sexual diversity is actually very visible elsewhere (e.g. in the media). The other tension is that whilst positive and inclusive discussion about sexual diversity is often absent, homophobic language is present and pervasive in schools. In order for homophobic language to exist, there has to be an acknowledgement that homosexuality exists – otherwise, there is nothing to discriminate against. However, linguistic absence produces the effect of erasing sexual identities which are not normatively heterosexual. To use Butler's (1990) term, particular identities are rendered 'unintelligible' through their repeated silencing and absence.

Butler herself draws on linguistic theory to argue that linguistic acts bring identities (including gender and sexual identities) into being. The idea that silence itself can operate as a speech act has been further developed in queer theory by Sedgwick (1990). In sexuality-focused work in linguistics, scholars have argued that silence as a linguistic act can produce the effect of homophobia when that silence functions to exclude non-heterosexual identities when there is no logical reason for doing so. Morrish (2011: 328), for example, states that 'homophobia may still be the result even when overt homophobic messages are not part of the text's content'.

Sauntson (2013) has examined this phenomenon of homophobia being enacted through linguistic silencing in interviews with teachers and LGB students in UK secondary schools. Ferrari (2011) has done similar work in Brazil. In spite of the different sociopolitical contexts, both researchers identify instances where teachers and pupils would have expected LGB identities to be explicitly discussed or made visible but they are not. In the UK context, for instance, this occurs particularly in the delivery of the English and PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) curricula. In Brazil, Ferrari shows a similar silencing process in Brazilian schools in which LGBT+ topics were brought up in backstage interactions among students but ignored by teachers. Stonewall and other LGBT rights organizations and charities continue to do much valuable work in schools around how to tackle sexuality-based bullying. Whilst this work undoubtedly has a positive effect, scholarship in linguistics suggests that tackling explicitly homophobic language can only take us so far. We need to try to use language in a way which does not normalize heterosexuality or present it as dominant or 'better' in any way. And we need to consistently use language which includes rather than excludes LGBT+ identities (e.g. when the term 'marriage' is used, be mindful and explicit that this can apply to same-sex as well as opposite-sex couples). Arguably, in educational contexts, we need to create spaces for new language to emerge, rather than closing down possibilities for linguistic expression or subsuming such possibilities under normative heterosexual experience.

Some research in linguistics has examined the efforts made so far by some schools to put this into practice. Sunderland and McGlashan (2012), for example, examine the use of picture-books in early years education which contain representations of same-sex relationships and LGB identities. This research has shown how useful these sorts of picture-books can be; they normalize same-sex families and relationships through positive representations of LGBT+ people. This, in turn, helps to normalize LGBT+ identities in children's minds as they get older. The authors argue that this could,

ultimately, be significant in helping to challenge and reduce homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in schools.

The review of RSE provision takes these efforts even further by explicitly directing teachers to include LGBT+ identities and relationships in their teaching in a positive way, thus breaking the pervasive silences around sexual diversity. However, we argue that the way that LGBT+ inclusion is presented in the 2020 guidance continues to be problematic. The next section focuses on different dimensions of silence and sexuality in the 2020 RSE guidance for England, as a UK-based example of how language-focused empirical research furthers understanding of how silence and sexuality operates in the school environment and during the early part of the lifespan.

UK case study: Silence in the 2020 Relationships and Sex Education guidance documents for England

As stated previously, some groups in England have recently mobilized against the inclusion of positive teaching about LGBT+ identities and relationships in the new RSE guidance. The protests held by groups outside schools in Birmingham and elsewhere suggest that, although there is overwhelming support for the new guidance, including its section on LGBT+ identities, there are still groups in society who are opposed to teaching about this dimension of equality. And their voices are being heard in ways that could potentially 're-silence' the opening up of positive teaching about sexual diversity. Given these conflicting reactions to changes in RSE, it is particularly important that the language used in the guidance is as positive and inclusive as possible. The new guidance was published in 2019 after a two-year review period and will be implemented in schools from September 2020 (we refer to it in this chapter as the '2020 guidance' to reflect its implementation date in schools).

Scrutiny of the 2020 guidance reveals that, despite the inclusion of sex relationships and LGBT+ identities, this only occurs in a small section (two paragraphs) and the language used in these paragraphs is vague. Whilst the reforms are welcome and undoubtedly a positive step forwards, there is still work to be done in terms of making LGBT+ identities and relationships even more visible in the guidance, and finding a way of ensuring that this aspect of the guidance is consistently being delivered in a positive and inclusive way by teachers. Moreover, the vague language of the new RSE guidance means that the implementation of it by teachers is likely to be highly variable.

Sauntson (2018) has argued that linguistic presence in the form of inclusion in the curriculum legitimizes certain subject content and ideological positions, while linguistic absence may function to delegitimize certain positions. The concept of silence in relation to power relations and homosexuality has been well-documented (e.g. Sedgwick, 1990). Drawing on Austin's (1962) distinction between locutionary speech acts (what is said) and illocutionary acts (the action that is performed when something is said), Langton (1993) distinguishes between locutionary silence (what is not said) and illocutionary silencing (the action performed when something is not said). In previous work, Sauntson (2013) has argued that 'illocutionary silences' around sexual diversity routinely occur in various aspects of schooling, including in the curriculum and curriculum guidance documents for teachers.

Significantly, 'sexuality' as a topic is one which *is* clearly and explicitly addressed in the RSE curriculum as a central part of its remit. In an analysis of the preceding version of the RSE guidance (2014), Sauntson (2018) conducted a linguistic analysis and found that there was little which actively encourages teachers to incorporate positive teaching around 'sexual diversity'. The analysis revealed that the semantic profiles created

around concepts such as 'sexuality' and 'health' were fairly restricted. Moreover, the findings showed that a predominant discourse of 'risk' and 'disease' is created around sexuality and sexual behaviour. Furthermore, heterosexual marriage is highlighted as 'important' and ascribed positive value. This sits in tension with the fact that the 2014 guidance explicitly prohibits the 'promotion' of sexual orientation. Without specifying which sexual orientation should not be promoted, the association of marriage and sexual activity with reproduction, and the overwhelmingly positive values ascribed to these, strongly imply that it is homosexuality which should not be 'promoted'. The text therefore embodies heteronormative and even homophobic values.

In the revised 2020 guidance document, there have been some welcome changes which address some of the previous omissions. For example, the 2020 guidance now covers sexual harassment, sexual violence, consent and internet safety. And there is the inclusion of the two paragraphs on including positive teaching about LGBT+ identities and relationships. Paragraphs 36 and 37 of the guidance are as follows:

36. In teaching Relationships Education and RSE, schools should ensure that the needs of all pupils are appropriately met, and that all pupils understand the importance of equality and respect. Schools must ensure that they comply with the relevant provisions of the Equality Act 2010, (please see The Equality Act 2010 and schools: Departmental advice), under which sexual orientation and gender reassignment are amongst the protected characteristics.

37. Schools should ensure that all of their teaching is sensitive and age appropriate in approach and content. At the point at which schools consider it appropriate to teach their pupils about LGBT, they should ensure that this content is fully integrated into their programmes of study for this area of the curriculum rather than delivered as a standalone unit or lesson. Schools are free to determine how they do this, and we expect all pupils to have been taught LGBT content at a timely point as part of this area of the curriculum.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/805781/Relationships_Education_Relationships_and_Sex_Education_RSE_and_Health_Education.pdf

Whilst this is a positive move in terms of challenging previous silences around sexual diversity, what is worrying is that the revised guidance appears to have retained implicit references to the long-repealed Clause 28 legislation. In fact, a side-by-side comparison of the original Clause 28 text and the reformed RSE guidance currently in use shows how similar they are in how they deal with sexual orientation. In Figure 1, we have underlined the specific areas of similarity.

A local authority:

'shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality or promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship'. [Clause 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act]

Young people, whatever their developing sexuality, need to feel that sex and relationship education is relevant to them and sensitive to their needs. The Secretary of State for Education and Employment is clear that teachers should be able to deal honestly and sensitively with sexual orientation, answer appropriate questions and offer support. There should be no direct promotion of sexual

Figure 1: Comparison of Clause 28 and 2020 RSE documents

Sauntson (2020) has argued that this comparison reveals that the ‘spectre’ of section 28 is clearly evident in the language of the documents which are currently directly informing the teaching of RSE in schools. Closer examination reveals that it is specifically the use of the verb *promote* and its collocation with *sexual orientation* which creates the spectrality and its accompanying negative prosody around sexual diversity. In fact, when we look at a concordance⁸ of *promot**⁹ as it is used in the 2020 RSE guidance, we see that co-occurrences of *sexual** and *promot** always appear in negative constructions i.e. the texts advocate *not* promoting sexual orientation. In the concordances in Table 1, we can see that the verb *promote* mainly collocates negatively with sexual orientation and with same-sex marriage, and positively with equality and inclusion. In effect, this means that not only are schools expected to not promote sexual orientation, they are also expected to not promote same-sex marriage. This produces an ideologically contradictory position in which legal practices are silenced, and that silencing itself, is a homophobic and, therefore arguably, illegal practice under the 2010 Equality Act which governs schools.

Table 1: Sample concordance of *promot** as it is used in the 2020 RSE guidance

as with any professional, to will be	promote	sexual orientation. They
sexual health. It is not about the support. There should be no direct	promotion promotion	of sexual orientation of sexual orientation
would be required to actively that the proprietor must actively	promote promote	same-sex marriage. During the fundamental British
values and that schools must actively	promote	the specified principles
that schools are not required to teacher, is under a duty to support,	promote promote	same-sex marriage: Teaching or endorse marriage of
same-sex requirement for schools to actively	promote	principles which encourage
arising from the concept of active	promotion.	The inevitable result
requiring schools to ‘actively provoked	promote’	British values have
and sexual health. It doesn’t support. There should be no direct	promote promotion	early sexual activity of sexual orientation.
PSHE should be taught in a way that and sexual health. It does not	promotes promote	equality as defined early sexual activity or
any bullying which should support and	promote	the inclusive and tolerant
a wider preventative approach to	promoting	inclusive, tolerant school
ways to work with boys and girls to	promote	gender equality and both
and reflect the key principles in	promoting	tolerance and inclusion

If we look at the context of some of the *promot** concordances in Table 1, more of the ‘spectrality’ of section 28 is revealed, as shown in the examples below (from Sauntson,

⁸ In corpus-based linguistics, a ‘concordance’ refers to a specified number of words to the left and right of the search term. Examining a word’s concordances can help to build up a semantic profile of that word which can contribute to revealing any underlying discourses in the text/s under scrutiny.

⁹ Search terms (or ‘node words’) are lemmas i.e. the base forms of words which can vary in terms of word class, grammatical tense and so on. So *promot** includes *promote*, *promotes*, *promoting*, *promoted*, *promotion* etc. In corpus-based linguistics, lemmas are indicated through the use of an asterisk.

2020). These examples show how *promot** collocates negatively with *sexual orientation* and *same-sex marriage* in the document. We have underlined the specific parts of the text in which these wordings appear.

It is inappropriate for youth workers, as with any professional, to promote sexual orientation. They will be expected to respect this guidance when dealing with school age children.

It is about the understanding of the importance of marriage for family life, stable and loving relationships, respect, love and care. It is also about the teaching of sex, sexuality, and sexual health. It is not about the promotion of sexual orientation or sexual activity – this would be inappropriate teaching.

...teachers should be able to deal honestly and sensitively with sexual orientation, answer appropriate questions and offer support. There should be no direct promotion of sexual orientation.

Some campaign groups, including the Coalition for Marriage, interpreted the reforms as meaning that schools would be required to actively promote same-sex marriage.

No school, or individual teacher, is under a duty to support, promote or endorse marriage of same sex couples. Teaching should be based on facts and should enable pupils to develop an understanding of how the law applies to different relationships.

Sex and relationship education (SRE) is compulsory from age 11 onwards. It involves teaching children about reproduction, sexuality and sexual health. It doesn't promote early sexual activity or any particular sexual orientation.

This was updated in June 2014, and states that schools are not required to promote same-sex marriage: Teaching about marriage must be done in a sensitive, reasonable, respectful and balanced way.

No school, or individual teacher, is under a duty to support, promote or endorse marriage of same sex couples.

It is widely recognized that the underlying problem with using *promote* to refer to sexual orientation is that it implies that sexual orientation is a choice. And given the history of the Section 28 legislation, this phrase clearly means 'do not "promote" homosexuality' in the teaching of RSE. This conflicts with the fact that schools are now governed by the Equality Act which clearly prohibits discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. The phrase also sits in tension with the fact that (particular kinds of) heterosexuality appears to be 'promoted' all the way through the guidance because of the prevalence of positive reference to heterosexual reproduction. It is perhaps not surprising that teachers are confused and apprehensive about how to address issues of non-heterosexual identities and relationships in SRE, given the retention of this phrase. We can therefore deduce from this that when the document prohibits teachers from promoting sexual orientation, heterosexuality is, in fact, exempt from this. Thus, the semantic profile of *promot** functions to effect a discourse of heteronormativity which concurrently silences any other forms of sexuality. This silencing may, ironically, contribute to the perpetuation of sexuality-based bullying in schools through its prioritizing of heterosexuality and its retention of the section 28 directive not to 'promote' sexual orientation.

Brazil case study: *Escola sem Partido* and its silencing strategies

During the twenty-one-year US-backed military dictatorship in Brazil, LGBT+ individuals were ferociously chased, incarcerated, and tortured (Green, 1999). Homophobia is still rampant. However, the country never had any legislation prohibiting the ‘promotion’ of homosexuality and same-sex marriages at schools like the UK’s Section 28 or 2020 RSE guidance which, as shown above, despite bringing some advances still surreptitiously disguises its homophobia. Perhaps this kind of official policy in Brazil was not seen as necessary due to the extremely strong public character of heterosexuality as the only acceptable norm (Miskolci, 2012) which, in turn, silences other expressions of sexuality from being legitimately addressed in the public sphere.

In fact, research shows that schools are the prime loci for the naturalization of heterosexuality since it is ‘seen but unnoticed’ – it is everywhere and nowhere – acting thus as a tacit norm orienting teachers and students (Epstein *et al*, 2003; Ferrari, 2011; Liddicoat, 2009; Mattos, 2019; Moita Lopes, 2002). Following this trend, Ferrari (2011) and Mattos (2019) note that Brazilian teachers tend to be quite wary of gender equity and sexual diversity as these topics tend to be strategically ignored or explicitly dismissed despite their ubiquity in students’ off-class conversations. This locutionary silence (Langton, 1993) about gender equality and sexual diversity in schools has not stopped the ESP movement to thrive, though. ESP supporters and activists take advantage of the homophobic character of Brazilian society to stir moral panic about the ‘sexualization’ of children. This can be directly linked to the enfranchisement of LGBT and feminist movements during the Left-wing governments of Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff. Between 2003 and 2016, such movements had an important voice in setting public policies such as the *Brasil sem Homofobia* programme. This unprecedented phenomenon, in turn, was seen as challenging the public character of heterosexuality and provoked strong parliamentary and social reactions. In fact, the ESP movement, which was created in 2003, only gathered significant public notoriety during the debates about the new National Education Plan in 2013. Engaging with previous efforts to curb the silencing of non-heterosexual identities as materialized in the anti-homophobia kit the Ministry of Education had previously prepared (but never got to distribute), proposals to include gender equality and sexual diversity as part of the national basic curriculum (an attempt to curtail the silence surrounding these topics at Brazilian schools) were met with accusations of promoting ‘gender ideology’, a phrase which became a trademark of the ESP movement.

In order to understand the discursive and political impact of the ESP, it is important to scrutinise how its vocabulary has infiltrated the public domain. A quantitative analysis provided by *Google Trends*, which shows the frequency of online searches for given terms at specific time periods, is useful for this purpose since it measures the public interest in certain topics and gives evidence of the presence of such terms in people’s repertoire. The graphs below illustrate how the ESP and its anti-gender and anti-LGBT+ (i.e. ‘gender ideology’ and ‘ideological indoctrination’) agenda gained momentum in 2013 during the time the new national curriculum was being discussed with lawmakers and civil society.

Graphic 1: Google searches for ‘Escola sem Partido’



Graphic 2: Google searches for 'Ideologia de gênero'



Graphic 3: Google searches for 'doutrinação ideológica'



These graphics demonstrate how the phrases 'Escola sem Partido', 'ideologia de gênero' and 'doutrinação ideológica' moved from a relatively unknown status to become incorporated in the public discursive repertoire, a rising trend that has put these terms in people's understandings of teachers and their jobs. Taking advantage of this momentum, the ESP modernized its website (<https://www.programaescolasempartido.org/>) which showcases its eye-catching motto:

'We need a law against abuses of teaching freedom'. Following this opening, the website makes explicit the ESP strategies to silence teachers who may be seen as promoting 'ideological indoctrination'. In its website, the ESP advances at least three main illocutionary silencing (Langton, 1993) strategies parents and pupils may use: (1) a detailed explanation of its law project, (2) channels to report teachers and schools (a WhatsApp number and an online form), and (3) a model extrajudicial notice parents may download, fill in and present at schools. Miguel (2016) has analyzed the types of extrajudicial notices ESP supporters and parents have presented at schools. As Miguel (2016) notes, this type of document has no legal binding, but is commonly used to coerce individuals who may have broken the law. If a school is notified extrajudicially it only means the parent intends to take the case to further legal spheres and acts, thus, as a prime example of how the ESP works by stirring fear in teachers, which, in turn, may silence any potential attempt to bring sexual diversity (and critical pedagogical practices more broadly) into the classroom.

The ESP law project has served as a blueprint for more than 200 similar law projects that have been presented in the different levels of the federation (municipalities, states and the federal government) since 2014 and have fed the public discursive repertoire with phrases and words which aim to curb teachers' voices and critical teaching. At the time of writing, fifty-seven ESP-inspired laws against 'gender ideology' and 'ideological indoctrination' at schools have been sanctioned in several municipalities and 53 are waiting to be voted. The penalties vary greatly: teachers who are seen as promoting sexual diversity and 'ideological indoctrination' at schools may be fined, sacked or incarcerated. Several of these law projects have been vetoed or rejected at the municipal and/or state level.

At the federal government level, the ESP project was first presented in 2014. In its first incarnation, the law project explicitly prohibited 'gender ideology' from schools. It also provided students and parents with more control over pedagogical practices by allowing classes to be recorded without the consent of teachers. Due to its attacks on freedom of speech and the lack of clarity of what is meant by 'gender ideology', the project has been archived by the Supreme Court. However, a new version of the ESP project was presented to the Lower House in February 2019. The most recent instantiation of the law project does not include 'gender ideology' in its text. Given the intimate imbrication of 'Escola sem Partido' and 'ideologia de gênero', as illustrated by the graphs above, the omission of this phrase hardly makes any difference since, in the public discursive repertoire, ESP equals a fight against 'gender ideology' in schools. Despite this change, the ESP project makes it clear that teachers' voices and critical teaching may be surveilled in order to avoid 'gender dogmatism and proselytism'. This is justified by the fact that:

teachers and textbooks writers have been using their classes and their books in attempts to obtain students' participation in certain political and ideological waves as well as to make them adopt judgement patterns and moral conduct – especially sexual morals – incompatible with those their parents or caretakers teach.¹⁰

As mentioned above, research in Brazilian schools demonstrates teachers' unwillingness (or fear) to discuss gender equality and sexual diversity (Ferrari, 2011; Mattos, 2019). The law project is thus at odds with the reality of most schools in the

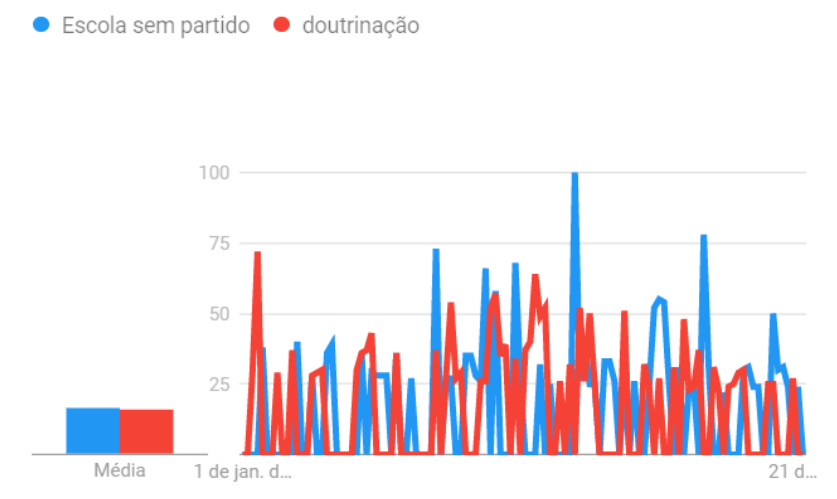
¹⁰ Available at

https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/prop_mostrarintegra?codteor=1707037andfilename=PL+246/2

country and, what is worse, puts teachers in a vulnerable position, which, in turn, may have consequences for their pedagogical practices and job satisfaction.

As an illocutionary speech act, fearmongering has a powerful silencing effect. The ESP project stokes fear and insecurity by attempting to establish an even more explicit panoptical surveillance at schools. In the law project, this is materialized in two ways: (1) the possibility of students to record classes without the teachers' consent and (2) the establishment of a federal hotline for reporting teachers. Importantly, urging the population to report teachers who are seen as promoting 'gender ideology' and 'ideological indoctrination' depends on feeding the population with discursive tools that may serve that purpose. Stretching the public discursive domain with vocabulary that curtails the possibility of discussing sexual diversity at schools is an important silencing device the ESP movement and its supporters have explored successfully. As can be seen in the graph below, ESP-related vocabulary (i.e. 'gender ideology' and 'ideological indoctrination') has, since 2013, entered the public discursive repertoire and may be activated by anyone who fears teachers may be indoctrinating their children.

Graphic 4: ESP-related vocabulary Jan/2020-Mar/2020



With their raucous street protests and frequent media attention, since 2013 the ESP movement has been successful in changing the discursive repertoire of the country with semantically slippery terms such as 'gender ideology' and 'ideological indoctrination' which may mean basically anything that is at odds with parents' beliefs. In fact, as Corrêa (2018) explains, these terms are 'empty signifiers' that may be filled with whatever parents and pupils feel disagrees with the moral and ideological systems they nurture at home. Because of the semantic elasticity of these terms, teachers see themselves in a double bind: if they do anything to produce a more LGBT+ friendly teaching environment and to curb homophobic bullying, they may be reported and lose their jobs; if they turn a blind eye to the rampant homophobia in Brazilian schools, LGBT+ students' school experiences may be traumatizing, to say the least. In fact, the counter-movement *Escola sem Mordaça* (*Schools Without Gags*, in English), which gathers teachers, parents and students against the ESP proposals, notes that since 2014 the number of teachers reported, sacked or physically assaulted for ideological reasons has risen exponentially.

On 24 April 2020, the Supreme Court of Justice found the ESP law project unconstitutional for it breaches teachers' freedom of speech. Minutes after the unconstitutionality of the project had been voted, the ESP posted the following message to its 114,000 Twitter followers (in translation):

Declaring the unconstitutionality of law projects against gender ideology at primary schools, the Supreme Court may end up forcing parents to take the law into their own hands in order to defend their kids' psychic and moral integrity and their sacred right of educating them. Teachers beware.

Despite the fact that ESP law projects have been judged unconstitutional, by feeding the public discursive repertoire with terms whose pragmatic force is to silence teachers and curb advances in gender equality and sexual diversity, it has opened avenues for teachers' voices to be curtailed and the pedagogical needs of LGBT+ students to be ignored. The Brazilian case study illustrates that attempts to silence progressive teaching practices with regards to sexual diversity may be quite noisy and violent.

Concluding remarks

School forms a major part of the early life experiences of most young people in the UK and Brazil (and elsewhere in the world). In the UK, schools have a legal duty to teach inclusive curricula and provide equality of opportunity to all. The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public bodies (including schools) to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimization and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, which has included 'sexual orientation' as a protected characteristic since 2006. Understanding, accepting, respecting and celebrating cultural diversity is integral to Ofsted's¹¹ school inspection criteria with regards to Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) development. In Brazil, the lack of legislation contemplating anti-discrimination on the grounds of sexual identity seems to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, including unspecific references to the promotion of tolerance and respect as pedagogical goals, the National Educational Plan opens avenues for teachers to bring gender equity and sexual diversity into the curricula. On the other, it allows leeway for unscrupulous social actors to devise strategies to silence critical pedagogical practices whose aim is to foster respect for sexually and gender non-conforming students. In other words, anti-discrimination legislation is a necessity in Brazil so as to prevent schools from becoming labs for bigotry.

We argue that in order to implement these legal duties in the respective countries, it is necessary to not only tackle overt forms of homophobia, but also to fill the silences around difference and diversity which currently pervade schools. The explicit and positive inclusion of sexual diversity, and the equally positive presentation of different sexual orientations and relationship types within these will better prepare students for engaging in their own sexual and romantic relationships as well as for understanding those of others which may be different from their own. In order to positively and effectively change what happens in schools, a contributing factor may be the insertion of a greater diversity of meanings into the 'exclusionary and silencing language' of school curricula.

¹¹ Ofsted stands for the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. It is a non-ministerial department which has responsibility for inspecting services which provide education and skills for learners of all ages, and for regulating services that care for children and young people in England.

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