Empathic Activists in Education

Exploring Emotion and Affect in Non-Formal, Peer-led Sexuality Education in Portugal

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of the inclusion of emotion and affect in educational practices. It looks at the case study of the Portuguese NGO Rede Ex Aequo, and their educational initiative "Projecto Educação LGBTI." I engage with this case study in the context of the need for schools in Portugal to outsource sexuality education to external experts, in the country's current socio-political and educational landscape. The thesis focuses on Rede Ex Aequo's non-formal, peer-led approach to sexuality education, whose work with the topics of sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions emphasises the visibility of LGBTQ+ experiences. The thesis also emphasises the importance of incorporating attributes of non-formal educational practices within the traditionally strict formal education system, as a means of engaging teachers and students more personally, emotionally, and politically in education. Finally, in dialogue with the volunteer educators from Rede Ex Aequo, my project highlights the role of empathy to their pedagogical approach, emphasising its contribution to simultaneously improve the mental health and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth, as well as to help combat anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination in school spaces. By bringing to the forefront of the sexuality education debate the volunteer educators' varied forms of emotional and affective labour, my thesis advocates for an improvement in the social and financial recognition of the passion and endurance required by this type of unpaid, outsourced educational practices performed by LGBTQ+ activists.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Throughout the last few years, I have cherished the moments shared with people whenever I mention being interested in the subject of sexuality education. The majority of people with whom I talk about this topic becomes visibly excited to share their own experience, mainly related to their discontentment at the mediocre sexuality education they received during their upbringing. People's experiences are usually fairly similar: learning about the pill in Biology class; spending a few minutes putting condoms on bananas; a nurse coming to the school to talk about STIs for an hour, etc. My own experience is similarly bleak: in the 18 years I spent in schools in Portugal, all I vaguely remember on the subject of sexuality education is being shown an episode of a children's animated show on the reproductive system, and a (short) list of existent forms of contraception. It was only once I left high school that I understood how much it could have positively impacted me to have had better sexuality education growing up. This realisation, as well as the frustration that quickly bred from it, was the starting point of my academic interest in this topic. It is both the reason I would like to pursue a career in sexuality education in the future, as well as the very baseline upon which I write this thesis.

Across the time that I have talked to people from different countries on this topic, I found that it can be somewhat amusing, for a moment, to connect to others over our shared experience with inadequate sexuality education programmes. However, it is also a tremendously worrying reality in this day and age. The post-sexual revolution in the Global North has led to bodies and sex being celebrated in the large majority of popular culture, books being written on topics like the orgasm-gap, consent beginning to enter common discourse, and Pride events being attended by thousands every year. Yet, at the same time, misinformation reigns online, women's bodies continue being policed, violence and toxic masculinity are praised, and the lives of trans people are threatened more and more each day.

Now, perhaps more than ever, it seems crucial to understand and value the transformative impact of education on how we think about our socio-political structures and how we relate to ourselves and to one another. In thinking about this, I consider it pertinent to look at educators, as the primary agents supporting the educational structures that shape our early development years and largely contribute to forming our understanding of the world. However, this consideration demands us to engage with what authors such as Tobias Werler (2016) have referred to as the commodification of the teaching profession within European welfare states. This commodification has provoked a decline in Western European countries' regard for educators (Werler 2016), both from governments that manage the public school system, and from students, who feel detached from their teachers and curricular contents (Nguyen and Larson 2015; Stolz 2015; Wang and Zheng 2018).

A common denominator in this increasing separation between teachers and students, as well as between public schoolteachers and governments, seems to be the detachment of education from the concepts of care and empathy. Governed by standardised pedagogies and the pressure to meet curricular goals (Wagner and Shahjahan 2015), the current educational system construes its participants as commodified, alienated agents of knowledge production (Nguyen and Larson 2015; Werler 2016), stripping both teachers and students off their personhood and individuality. This estranged structure limits teachers' engagement and connection with their students, as much as it reduces students' capabilities to doing fractions or memorising historical dates, instead of encouraging them to learn how to relate to the world around them.

The goal of this thesis is, therefore, to understand the importance of featuring care and empathy as the baseline for discussions on education and educators, through a specific focus on the subject of sexuality education. I argue that, in focusing on the body, relationships, and sexuality, sexuality education is a compelling case for opening up the debate on topics like embodiment and feeling in education, thereby challenging the traditional, stagnated practice of knowledge production in school spaces. However, sexuality education is not only helpful to analyse in the context of school-based practices, but it is also significant for often being practiced by external entities. As such, my focus on outsourced practices of sexuality education points us not only to the topics of empathy and care in school-based educational practices, but opens up our understanding of these labour dynamics in the volunteer educational work of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and their alternative pedagogical approaches.

In order to understand the indispensable, yet largely unacknowledged, unpaid educational work being done on the side-lines of the formal education system, my research is centred on the work of volunteer peer-educators from the Portuguese LGBTQ+ NGO Rede Ex Aequo. Based on this case study, the thesis explores the overarching question: How can the experiences of volunteer peer-educators with emotional investment, personal experience, care, and empathy contribute to understanding emotional labour and affective labour in educational practices? This question will be answered through the following sub-questions:

- In which socio-political and legal context does the Portuguese non-profit organisation Rede Ex Aequo conduct their non-formal, peer-led educational sessions on LGBTQ+ topics?

- How can research on the outsourced work of peer-led sexuality education be situated in scholarship on formal education and non-formal education that critically addresses the shortcomings of standardised education?

- How do LGBTQ+ volunteer educators perceive their experience with care, empathy, and emotion in their own work?

- What are the implications for reading care and empathy in the work of LGBTQ+ volunteer educators as forms of emotional labour and affective labour?

Established in 2003, Rede Ex Aequo is an organisation of LGBTQ+ youth and allies, comprised of volunteers between the ages of 16 and 30. Centring the word "equality" in their name, Rede Ex Aequo aims to support young people by advocating against discrimination and for the integration of LGBTQ+ youth in society. Their work recognises the needs of LGBTQ+ youth, and seeks to implement social, scientific, cultural and/or political strategies for change (Rede Ex Aequo n.d.). Their multiple initiatives include the "núcleos" — local groups that provide safe meeting spaces for LGBTQ+ people across the country —, and the focus of this thesis, their educational project "Projecto Educação LGBTI," which organises peer-led, non-formal education sessions in schools across the country on the topics of sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.

Across their work and mission-statement (Rede Ex Aequo n.d.), the NGO employs the umbrella term "LGBTI" to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and intersex people. Across this thesis, I have stayed close, in the translation of all direct quotes from the volunteer educators, to the terminology employed by them. In my own work, however, I choose to refer to the same community through the acronym "LGBTQ+," for aligning more closely with my own personal use and perception of inclusive terminology. Furthermore, I largely employ term "sexuality education" instead of Rede Ex Aequo's reference to "LGBTI education." Whilst acknowledging and respecting the specificity that the term employed by Projecto Educação invokes, I have chosen the term sexuality education as an umbrella reference, in a conscious attempt to situate the work of Rede Ex Aequo in the wider debate on sexuality education in the Western European context. For similar reasons, although the volunteers from Projecto Educação refer to themselves as "speakers," I mostly refer to them as volunteer educators to highlight their active role within the educational landscape in Portugal. I expand on this topic in the first section of Chapter 1.

Methods and Positionality of the Researcher

In April 2022, I submitted a paper on the affective labour of LGBTQ+/sexuality education in Portugal (Candeias 2022a), with the contribution of Rede Ex Aequo, for a course in my research master's programme. The paper had a limited scope, yet it was the start of my research on the integration of the concepts of affect and affective labour in relation to the volunteer work conducted by NGOs like Rede Ex Aequo on inclusive sexuality education in Portugal. In that original paper, I integrated the contributions of Bruno and Rita, who were both educators and project coordinators of Projecto Educação when we spoke. I was encouraged by my professor at the time to practice research interviewing skills, which allowed me to talk to these experts in the field of LGBTQ+ inclusive sexuality education about their experience with the organisation, their work with a non-formal pedagogy, and their perception of the role of affect in their work.

This approach to qualitative research methods also inspired my later work during my research internship with InTouch Amsterdam and ISEX — "Integral Sexual Education and Empowerment in Schools" —, a multi-national project funded by the Erasmus+ programme. The unpublished pilot study (Candeias 2023) I conducted during this research internship was focused on the feminist non-formal pedagogy employed by InTouch in the ISEX project, specifically in relation to the early development stages of their work with an integrated, non-formal, teacher-led sex education curriculum in a Dutch high school.[1] During this internship, I had a chance to interact with educators from different European countries and subjects, and to discuss with them their own perspective in becoming facilitators in the subject of sex education. In reflection, this contact with educators and with their lived experience with sex education in each specific socio-cultural context became the most valuable aspect of my internship. On the one hand, I was grateful for being placed directly in contact with professionals in a field for which I am so passionate. On the other hand, I also cherished this experience as a feminist researcher, for helping my ability to sit in one-on-one conversations without the expectation to extract information from my collaborators, but rather to engage in thoughtful discussions as an equal participant in the learning process.

Reflecting on these research experiences, it became important to me to return to the work of Rede Ex Aequo, and to build my thesis with their contribution. This was based, to start, on my personal and professional curiosity about young people's experience with working in the field of sexuality education in Portugal. Adding to this, I was also intent on expanding my engagement with the field of Gender Studies beyond the abstract and theoretical discussions I had become accustomed to during my research masters, by exploring the practical work being conducted in this field. Accordingly, as I became progressively interested in the integration of emotion and affect

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[1] During the project for my research internship, I employed the terms "sex education" and "comprehensive sex education" interchangeably. This reflected InTouch's own references to their work (InTouch n.d.), and, at the time, I found it to fit best with their approach, in being more closely aligned with a "traditional" conception of sex education than that of Rede Ex Aequo's more LGBTQ+ centred approach.

in sexuality education, it felt imperative to complement my engagement with academic scholarship with the capacity to amplify the voices of those active in the field.

Following this methodology plan, I contacted Bruno again to request another collaboration with Rede Ex Aequo, this time on a larger capacity. With his help, I was able to open a call to volunteers from Projecto Educação who were interested in being involved in the research. As such, to supplement the original interview with Bruno and Rita, to which I return in the present thesis, I have also collected new material through (1) six additional individual interviews with volunteers that had varied levels of experience within the organisation, and (2) brief observational research of one school session moderated by Rede Ex Aequo.

Due to the relatively short scope of this thesis, as well as the limited time I had to conduct interviews, I worked with a very small group of participants — Beatriz, João, Ana Rita, Carolina, Violeta, and Marte. All participants in this thesis are white, under 29 years old, and they all identify under the "LGBTI" identity umbrella, some of them adopting the term "queer."[2] [3] Although, during the conversations, the topics of age and LGBTQ+ identities were mentioned as pertinent to the topic of peer-led education in LGBTQ+ matters, the matter of race in relation to the staff and work of the Rede Ex Aequo were not addressed by the participants during our conversations.

Most of the conversations for this thesis were held in person. In 2022, the interview I conducted with Bruno and Rita was held over Zoom, due to the fact that I was unable to travel to Portugal at that time. Although the kindness and openness of both volunteers allowed us to establish a conducive online environment for our conversation, I could not help but feel disappointed that it had not happened in person. Based on this experience, this time I was intent on travelling to Lisbon to take part, as much as circumstances would allow, in in-person interviews. As such, while the interview with Marte had to be conducted online through Zoom, I met in-person with the remaining five volunteers in cafes across Lisbon.

I grounded my research process in feminist qualitative research methods, drawing primarily from the methodological framework of Sharlene Hesse-Biber (2007). I approached my qualitative research collection process through the lens of feminist in-depth interviewing, taking each interview as "more of a conversation between coparticipants than a simple question and answer session" (134). All six conversations followed Hesse-Biber's outline of a semi-structured interview (115). While I had a set of questions and topics I wanted to cover, I let the topics flow according to the participant's tales, taking the opportunity to introduce a new question whenever a space in

[2] I was told by Beatriz, one of the volunteers, that the term "queer" is not often adopted by LGBTQ+ people in Portugal, which is why I refrain from employing it throughout this thesis.
[3] More information on the interviews can be found in the Appendix to this thesis.

the conversation occurred (116), instead of forcing certain topics into the conversation. As such, each conversation took beautiful, unexpected turns.

I collected audio recordings from four of the six recent interviews, including the one held over Zoom. The first conversation I opted not to record happened informally and spontaneously, after I observed Ana Rita's educational session at a high school in Lisbon. Afterwards, Ana Rita and I sat and talked in the terrace of a nearby café for half an hour, where I felt the atmosphere to be too noisy and windy for my microphone to capture any effective sound.

The other case I did not record was my conversation with Carolina. From the start of our conversation over breakfast, Carolina was generous and open about her personal experience with her Catholic faith and coming out to her parents. Throughout this conversation, I intentionally let go of my perceived control over the interaction, opting instead to allow Carolina the space to express herself. This decision came in line with my intent to cultivate, in my own feminist research, what Brigette A. Herron (2022) refers to as an "ecosystem of care." According to Herron, a caring feminist research praxis "should recognize and ethically invite human stories in feminist interviewing, rather than coercively courting headlines" (9). As such, in honour of Carolina's openness and respect for her privacy, I opted for an approach of active listening and occasional note-taking, rather than compelling myself to intervene or shift the conversation to a specific topic.

Based on the collection of audio recordings and handwritten notes, I guided the interview-analysis process by the inductive method of grounded theory (Charmaz and Belgrave 2012, 347). From the individual accounts of the volunteers' experience, I identified common themes among the conversations, such as the volunteer educators' generally positive involvement within the organisation, their approach to peer-led education, and their perception of affect and care within their practice. Following this inductive reading, I decided that my engagement with the contributions of the co-participants should not be theory-driven, but rather perceived in their own merit as equal contributors to our engagement with the subject matter. This related directly to my primary interest to understand the investment of emotions and personal experience involved in the emotional and affective labour of non-formal, peer-led sexuality education. In order to do this, contributions collected across the conversations with Rede Ex Aequo's volunteers are placed alongside theoretical works across all chapters.

Being new to ethnographic research, I found that there were aspects that made me uncomfortable across the interview process. For example, in line with the purpose of discussing their personal experience in an LGBTQ+ organisation that frequently enters cisheteronormative school spaces, I asked each volunteer their pronouns and if they personally identified as being part of the "LGBTI" community. Although I adapted the question of identity in a way that allowed the volunteers not to strictly label themselves, blatantly asking people how they identify still felt intrusive and dissonant with my own personal approach to navigating the topics of gender identity and sexual orientation.

A second issue that troubled me was the ambiguity of the power dynamics at stake in each conversation. I was consistently reflective of being, in Hesse-Biber's words, "both an 'insider' and an 'outsider'" (Hesse-Biber 2007, 114) in my research. On the one hand, I occupied a clear role as the "outsider" researcher, having never been an educator myself and being, therefore, dependent on the contributions of my co-participants. On the other hand, not only was I of a similar age to most of the volunteers, but the conversations often landed in our shared interest for taking part (either presently or in the future) in the field of LGBTQ+ inclusive sexuality education.

In the end, due to the latter aspect, I felt that my ethical responsibilities as a researcher fit naturally into the atmosphere created in each conversation. I believe I managed to soften into the "insider" role and engage in thoughtful conversations, as opposed to feeling as if I were artificially posing questions to the volunteers, from whom I needed to extract any information. I made it explicit to my co-participants that my research process was guided by my personal, professional, and political interest in advocating for LGBTQ+ rights and the improvement of the provision of sexuality education. In this context, I aligned with Tania Jain's (2017) conception of the "feminist researcher-advocate" (579), for rather than feel as if these subjective convictions hindered the objectivity of my research process, I believe they strengthened it (569), in aiding my proximity with my co-participants.

Structure of the thesis

In order to answer the research question presented earlier, my research combines readings of theoretical works from educational studies on formal education and non-formal education (Freire 2014 [1968]; Dib 1988; Hamadache 1991; Apple 1993; Shala and Grajcevci 2016; Wang and Zheng 2018; Latta 2020); feminist perspectives on care, empathy, and embodiment in education (hooks 1994; Cooper 2010; 2013; Noddings 2005; 2007; 2012; 2013); and theory from affect studies (Hardt 1999; Hardt and Negri 2000; Hardt 2007; Hochschild 2022 [1983]; 2013; Ahmed 2010; 2014; Sandlos 2010). As I mentioned before, my engagement with this scholarship is done in dialogue, across all chapters, with the voices from Rede Ex Aequo's volunteer educators.

As a starting point, **Chapter 1** begins with a general look at the recent history of the implementation of sexuality education within the European Union (EU), proceeded by an outline of the socio-political and legal context for its implementation in Portugal. The chapter provides a short literature review on the multiple flaws and limitations of the sexuality education curriculum across multiple EU countries, the lack of regulation by the Portuguese state to assure its consistent and high quality application throughout the country, and the systemic lack of teacher-training programmes for addressing these topics with students. It also includes a discussion on the antigender backlash that has been predominant in recent discussions of the brief inclusion of gender and sexuality-related topics in Portuguese schools. This extensive critique of the current educational landscape, with the contribution of my co-participants, contextualises the recent need for schoolteachers and students to rely on outsourcing sexuality education to external entities, namely NGOs working in the fields of sexual health and LGBTQ+ rights.

Chapter 2 moves from the wider, socio-political context, to position the study of the work of Rede Ex Aequo in a larger body of educational research. Firstly, Rede Ex Aequo's pedagogical approach is framed in the context of their presence in the formal education and non-formal systems of education (Coombs 1976; La Belle 1982; Dib 1988; Hamadache 1991; Hoppers 2006; Shala and Grajcevci 2016; White and Lorenzi 2016). Complementing literature on formal and non-formal education with a short review of works that focus on the issue of embodiment and feeling in education (hooks 1994; Wagner and Shahjahan 2015; Nguyen and Larson 2015; Stolz 2015; Wang and Zheng 2018), the chapter presents a critique of the inadequacy of the traditional education system, in the way it alienates its actors from the structures of knowledge production, creating a barrier between teachers and students. Here, bell hooks's work (1994) is emphasised as an essential reading for the integration of feminist principles like embodiment, situated knowledges, and an opposition to the Cartesian mind/body dualism into educational research. The employment of these concepts in relation to education expands the possibility of conceiving a more dynamic, holistic understanding of learning that includes the body, personal experience, and feeling, as much as it involves cognition, as is therefore also more politically conscious.

To expand on this desire to position educators and students in the learning process in a more significantly engaged way, the chapter also integrates theory on care and empathy in education, mostly engaging with the works of Bridget Cooper (2010; 2013) and Nel Noddings (2007; 2012; 2013). Noddings' work is relevant for understanding the relational nature of care in education, which encourages a reading of more actively engaged and emotionally attuned pedagogical strategies. At the same time, it is helpful to expand on her framework and critique of standardised curricula with the contribution of Cooper on the structural limitations experienced by formal educators, in their personal and emotional engagement with students and curricula.

The chapter ends with a consideration, based on the conversations with the volunteer educators, of Rede Ex Aequo's non-formal pedagogy within formal structures, pointing to the blend between formal and non-formal attributes in educational practices.

Finally, **Chapter 3** focuses on education as an affective practice. It is largely grounded on the comments of the volunteer LGBTQ+ educators on the motivation behind their volunteer work, and how they perceive the involvement of their personal experience and emotional investment in their educational practice. The goal of the chapter is to understand how this volunteer, peer-led form of sexuality education is structured around personal experience, empathy, and affect. It explores how Rede Ex Aequo's peer-led practices centres around relatability and care to foster empathic relationships between LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ individuals in the classroom, as well as to encourage the extension of empathy beyond the school space.

The chapter is based on a concern with the sustainability of volunteer LGBTQ+ educators' mental health and well-being, emphasising the need to explore the implications of the educator's involvement of their emotions in their professional role. To do this, I complement the accounts of the volunteer educators with a theoretical engagement with Karyn Sandlos' (2010) assertion of the role of the sexuality educator as one which requires, alongside informational expertise, an affective and emotional engagement with the students and the sensitive topics covered by sexuality education. It proceeds by returning to the works of Noddings and Cooper on care and empathy, to emphasise the benefits of practicing an empathic approach to education. Although their arguments are limiting in demanding teachers' continuity and frequency of contact with their students for establishing successful empathic teacher-student relationships, their frameworks help make sense of the emotionally attuned, empathic and caring traits shown by Rede Ex Aequo's volunteers in their work.

The chapter explores empathy as an affect cultivated through education for impacting students' future relationships. To understand this dynamic, I engage with Sara Ahmed's consideration of "sticky affects" (Ahmed 2010; 2014) for a conception of the empathic role of Rede Ex Aequo's volunteer educators in their activist practice for LGBTQ+ rights. I then explore the application of Arlie Russell Hochschild's *emotional labour* (Hochschild 2022 [1983]; 2013) and Michael Hardt's *affective labour* (Hardt 1999; 2007) to this volunteer educational work. The concepts of emotional and affective labour encourage a reading of the immaterial components of emotion and affect in both paid and unpaid jobs. Extending the use of the concepts to the field of education allows a reading of sexuality education beyond a neutral form of information-provision, shedding light on the importance of incorporating feeling and embodiment in that practice. The chapter ends with a proposal to not only explore the specific form of exploitation of LGBTQ+ people in sexuality education under the current educational landscape, but also to make room for acknowledging and celebrating the positive aspects of incorporating care and empathy into education.

Chapter 1: Sexuality Education in Portugal and Rede Ex Aequo

The aim of this first chapter is to introduce the recent socio-political and legislative context in Portugal for the work of NGOs in the field of sexuality education. The chapter starts with a brief note on my reasoning for including the work of the present case study, the NGO Rede Ex Aequo, under the umbrella term of "sexuality education," for which I also present a working definition. This is followed by a brief look at the limitations of sexuality education among countries in the EU, to contextualise the implementation and reception of the subject in Portugal since it was made compulsory in 2009. I explore the flaws of the current Portuguese biology-centred sexuality education curriculum, while also mentioning the systemic insufficiency of teacher-training programmes in sexuality education and the lack of regulation by the Portuguese state to assure its consistent and high-quality application across the country. The chapter also refers to the radical, conservative and Catholic-driven antigender backlash that has been predominant in recent discussions of the brief inclusion of gender and sexuality-related topics in the Portuguese national curricula. Chapter 1 ends with the comments from Rede Ex Aequo's volunteer educators on the need for NGOs to complement the school-based practice of sexuality education with expert, high-quality, inclusive resources.

Working Definition of Sexuality Education

There is no worldwide consensus on how to refer to education that focuses on the topics of sex, sexual orientations, genders, and relationships. In their review of the state of sexuality education across European countries, Parker, Wellings and Lazarus (2009) note that this distinction is culture-dependant, pointing out, for example, that in "some countries of Eastern Europe (Slovakia, Poland and Hungary, for example), adoption of the term 'family life education' reflects an emphasis on social structure. In other former Eastern bloc countries, and in Belgium, 'gender' enters the description" (228). Other examples include Portugal, where the subject is referred to as "sexual education," and the UK, which has recently embraced the term "relationships and sex education."

Elizabeth Schroeder and Judy Kuriansky (2009) argue that "sexuality education can be provided in many ways, using a range of pedagogies, methods, techniques, and resources." (7). For this reason, it is challenging, as well as misguided, to try to encompass all forms of sexuality education under one umbrella term. In fact, different terms seem to be useful indicators of the specific focus of various sexuality education-related programmes, which highlights the importance of clarifying their distinctions and specificities.

In the case of the present thesis, I wanted to stay close to the subject matter addressed by my case study — Rede Ex Aequo's "Projecto Educação LGBTI" —, which focuses predominantly on topics related to gender, sexuality, and the LGBTQ+ community. Rather than refer to this pedagogy as "LGBTI education," I wanted to place the initiative's pedagogical focus in the context of the wider debate around sexuality education for young people. For this reason, I have chosen the term "sexuality education," following Schroeder and Kuriansky's description of "sexuality" as "an expansive term that pertains to far more than our biology or sexual behaviors" (3). By emphasising sexuality, as opposed to sex, my aim is for the designation of this pedagogical practice to resist the traditional, biology-focused "sex education" curricula that tend to disregard "nonheterosexual and non-gender-congruent individuals (those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender), mention them in passing, or discuss them exclusively within the context of HIV and AIDS" (4). Instead, the term sexuality education highlights the importance of a more holistic inclusion of different experiences with sexual and gender identity, in relation to other aspects of relating.

This reasoning falls in line with UNESCO's (2012) definition of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) as a "curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality" (16). UNESCO defines sexuality as a multifaceted term that makes room for

> the understanding of, and relationship to, the human body; emotional attachment and love; sex; gender; gender identity; sexual orientation; sexual intimacy; pleasure and reproduction. Sexuality is complex and includes biological, social, psychological, spiritual, religious, political, legal, historic, ethical and cultural dimensions that evolve over a lifespan (17).

For this reason, UNESCO's conception of sexuality education aims to equip young people with not only knowledge to improve their sexual health and well-being, but also focuses on the interpersonal skills for developing "respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and, understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives" (16). A similar view of sexuality education as a tool for not only developing healthier social relationships, but also ensuring human rights, is shared by SIECUS, a large NGO based in the United States of America working in the field of sexuality education. They define CSE as "a means of building a foundation for a long-term culture shift that will positively impact all levels of society, particularly issues of gender and racial equity, sexuality, sexual and reproductive health, consent, personal safety, and autonomy." (SIECUS n.d.).

Rede Ex Aequo defines the two aims of their pedagogical practice to consist of (1) raising awareness on the topics of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sexual characteristics through non-formal and peer-led education; and (2) combating anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination in society and bullying in schools (Rede Ex Aequo n.d.). Following the definitions outlined so far in this first section of the chapter, I argue that Rede Ex Aequo's educational aims — in their combination of the clarification of topics on gender and sexual identities, as well as socio-political action — can be included within the framework of sexuality education. However, such a designation must imperatively recognise the specificity of their pedagogical materials dedicated to LGBTQ+ experiences.

I approached this subject across some of my recent interviews with Rede Ex Aequo's volunteer educators, several of whom agreed that sexuality education and LGBTQ+ education should co-exist. Violeta commented:

> **Violeta:** I think they [sexuality education and LGBT education] can be separate things, but because LGBT education is so intrinsically connected to sexuality and gender identity, they should go hand in hand.

João made a similar comment, in arguing that, although the approach of Projecto Educação focuses specifically on LGBTQ+ experiences, the topics addressed by the volunteer educators relate to being human, and are therefore applicable to everyone. He expanded on this topic of combining sexuality education and LGBTQ+ education:

> **João:** I think it's important to combine them. There are differences, right? There are specificities to different communities that should be differentiated. It's not the same thing to be straight and to be gay, because there's a social and general context to it. But it wouldn't make sense to separate things.

Despite this affirmed significance of combining both approaches, it is also crucial to understand, through the perspective of the volunteer educators, not just how LGBTQ+ topics fit into the framework of sexuality education, but rather how they *expand* on its current curricular limitations. On this matter, Marte argued that the organisation approaches multiple topics, in the hope of addressing what is not covered by the current sexuality education curriculum in schools. Violeta's contribution develops on this by highlighting the issues that LGBTQ+ education can bring to the forefront of the sexuality education debate:

> **Violeta:** LGBT education is about human rights — I believe sexual education should be political and focus on human rights, anti-racism, and anti-patriarchy. These topics should also be approached in sexual education.

Here, Violeta points out that sexuality education should encompass the political tone of LGBTQ+ education, by highlighting the importance of raising awareness for human rights. She added to this that sexuality education should stop overtly focusing on the dangers of sex and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), by also presenting young people with other topics, such as pleasure.

This way, Rede Ex Aequo's approach to sexuality education broadens the consideration of what should be approached in the matters of sex, sexualities, and gender identities and expressions with young students. At the same time, according to another volunteer, their approach also highlights the need for a change in how LGBTQ+ experiences are addressed in the school curriculum. Beatriz made a poignant note about her dislike for conflating sexuality education and LGBTQ+ education, given the current state of the subject in Portugal.

> **Beatriz:** When we talk about sexual education, we talk mainly of sexual and reproductive health, contraception, STIs. This type of sexual education […] involves the LGBTI community and it needs to be inclusive. But I prefer the separation… LGBTI education is not sexual education, but sexual education needs to be LGBTI [inclusive]. […] I think it can often lead to the hypersexualisation of the LGBTI community — we only talk about the community when we talk about sexual education, and when we do, it's all about sex and diseases.

Although, like João, Beatriz spoke of the need to acknowledge the specificities of the LGBTQ+ community within the context of sexuality education, her issue with conflating the terms seems to be predominantly grounded on the conception of the sexuality education curriculum as we know it. By failing to address the LGBTQ+ community in subjects other than biology, and therefore only mentioning it in the context of sex and STIs (if anything), there is a clear danger of the LGBTQ+ community appearing in school curricula only in connection to these negative topics, and being often the subject of tales of suffering and death. Rather than point to an inherent issue to sexuality education per se, this comment problematises the present conception of sexuality education in schools — what its curriculum entails, and how (as well as by whom) it is applied. I problematise these questions in the following sections of the chapter.

Sexuality Education in the European Union and Portugal

Sweden became the first country in Europe to implement sexuality as education as a compulsory school subject in 1955 (European Expert Group on Sexuality Education 2016; Cassar 2022), to be followed by other countries in subsequent decades. According to the European Expert Group on Sexuality Education (2016), the provision of sexuality education in Europe began with a felt need to tackle the prevention of unintended pregnancy, followed by the HIV/AIDS campaign in the 1980s, and subsequently the awareness-raising of sexual abuse and "prevention of sexism, homophobia and online bullying from 2000 onwards" (427).

Today, sexuality education is not compulsory in every country in the EU, and its practice differs largely across countries in the EU (Beaumont and Maguire 2013). One reason for this might be that the implementation of sexuality education in each EU Member State is not under EU competency, but is rather at the discretion of each country (Picken 2020). As such, sexuality education has repeatedly encountered barriers to its application at a national level in multiple countries by being, in the words of Schroeder and Kuriansky, "affected by various factors, including the culture of a given generation, the government in power at a particular time, [and] the current health issues and challenges" (Schroeder and Kuriansky 2009, ix).

Some issues with sexuality education curricula, however, transverse national borders. One of the ways in which the general implementation of sexuality education is negatively affected relates to the resistance of adults against the subject. According to Joanne Cassar (2022), "creating and constructing spaces in school curricula for learning about sexuality" has consistently faced resistance by policy-makers, due to the misguided view of sexuality education as an impediment to students' "overall academic learning and also as a threat to dominant, normative values related to sexual behaviour" (141). The idea behind this is that sexuality education encourages young people to have sex, when in fact studies report that there is a tendency for students who are provided sexuality education to delay their first sexual experience (Mueller, Gavin, and Kulkarni 2008; Ramírez-Villalobos et al. 2021) and to engage in fewer sexual risk behaviours (Weaver, Smith, and Kippax 2005; Reis et al. 2011; Ramírez-Villalobos et al. 2021). This misconception, in turn, leads to silence about sexuality (Cassar 2022). This can be highly detrimental to young people's healthy development by leading them to rely on informal resources (peers, parents, or media), which are either insufficient or not of the highest quality, due to the level of complexity of the topics at hand (Schroeder and Kuriansky 2009; European Expert Group on Sexuality Education 2016). Conversely, the provision of informed, good-quality sexuality education has been shown to have "an impact on positive attitudes" and to contribute to "the prevention of abuse and fostering mutually respectful and consensual partnerships" (European Expert Group on Sexuality Education 2016, 428).

Another issue that literature reports as prevalent across some EU countries pertains to the overt focus of sexuality education on biology and health-related aspects, and a "weaker or even no focus on personal relationships." (Parker, Wellings, and Lazarus 2009, 240). This shows that, although guidelines from large organisations like UNESCO (2018) and WHO (2010) advocate for a holistic, comprehensive approach to sexuality that encompasses the social, emotional, and psychological aspects of sexuality, the traditional approach continues to be biology-focused. Such has been largely reported to be the case in Portugal (Rocha and Duarte 2015; Rocha, Leal, and Duarte 2016; Cunha-Oliveira et al. 2021; Cassar 2022).

Sexuality education has been part of the socio-political debate in Portugal since 1984 (Cassar 2022), when a law (Law no. 3/84) declared sexuality education and family planning as a right and responsibility for the state to provide to children, young people, and families. However, it was only in 2009 (Law no. 60/2009) that Parliament approved the application of sexuality education in schools, defining its main goals, minimum contents required, and its compulsory integration within the curriculum of different school years. According to Cunha-Oliveira and colleagues (2021), this law reaffirmed the compulsory nature of sexuality education, and declared that "every child and youth should have a minimum number of hours of sexuality education in each grade" (Cunha-Oliveira et al. 2021, 17). At the same time, it left it to each school (or group of schools) to devise a sexuality education curriculum according to the legislation's guidelines. This created a problem in the consistent and quality application of sexuality education across the country, in that, according to Ana Cristina Rocha and Cidália Duarte (2015), it established a great discrepancy in how "SE [sexuality education] is understood (specifically, whether it is considered a priority or not), or implemented" across Portuguese schools (53).

As I mentioned, sexuality education in Portugal has been criticised for being predominantly covered in Biology, although, at the start, it was also approached in general, non-disciplinary curricular areas like Civic Education, Project Area, and Accompanied Study (Cunha-Oliveira et al. 2021). However, the 2010 economic crisis led to the elimination of these subjects as a governmental policy to contain costs (Rocha and Duarte 2015), thereby creating "a significant obstacle to implementing both sexuality education and the other components of the health education program" (Cunha-Oliveira et al. 2021, 18). Cassar develops on this, arguing that the "quality and frequency" of sexuality education (Cassar 2022, 152) are particularly vulnerable to financial crises and government policies.

Subsequently, although the law mandates the cross-curricular application of sexuality education, Rocha, Cláudia Leal and Duarte (2016) report that Portuguese schoolteachers have found this to be a challenging task. According to the authors, cross-curricular sexuality education "requires teachers to develop suitable skills and a favourable attitude towards sexuality and sexuality education. On the other hand, it requires school management to create space for this kind of activity along with allied staff development." (180). Essentially, a cross-curricular practice of sexuality education demands an investment of resources for schools and teacher-training, which the Portuguese government has not yet properly provided.

This issue of teacher-training is imperative to the discussion of school-based sexuality education. Rocha and Duarte point out that sexuality education classes "should be interactive, taught by teachers who have received training, in a continuous and holistic way, with the support of partnerships, and adequately evaluated" (Rocha and Duarte 2015, 47). However, Cassar argues that the compulsory nature of sexuality education and its inclusion in school curricula does not guarantee the quality of its teaching, often "due to poor or lack of teacher training in SE and/or lack of resources." (Cassar 2018, 42). This is helpful to question the recommendation within the Portuguese 2009 law for establishing the figure of the "teacher-coordinator," a professional within each school or group of schools who would be in charge of the “introduction, supervision, and implementation of sexuality education in schools” (Cunha-Oliveira et al. 2021, 17). The aim, according to Rocha and Duarte, was for this appointed teacher to coordinate a health and sexuality education team, support teachers through training, and help planning and delivering the subject in class. These guidelines, however, were vague, and failed to clarify what kind of training the teacher-coordinators themselves would have.

Furthermore, Rocha and Duarte argue, at the time of writing, that “the government has not made this training available so far.” (Rocha and Duarte 2015, 49). In the same study, they reported that, “when schools were asked about the support offered for SE from regional education departments, only 33% agreed that there had been some kind of support.” (52). Regional training programmes have since emerged, like PRESSE — a health and sexuality education programme developed by the Public Health Department in the Northern region of Portugal —, founded in 2016 to help equip teachers for delivering a holistic practice of sexuality education. However, I have found no indication in the existent literature on the subject that other local government initiatives like this have emerged, or that the country’s teacher-training needs in sexuality education have been fulfilled.

Overall, the literature shows that recent policies for the practice of sexuality education in Portugal have been relatively effective. Rocha and Duarte report that on top of the majority of schools delivering some form of sexuality education, there is also a “high percentage of documents wherein mention is made of a legal framework, and […] number of schools whose staff reportedly were aware of the current legislation, which is based on international recommendations for SE” (53). At the same time, the authors point out, there is still a considerable “number of schools not delivering SE and/or whose representatives do not know the legislation applying” (Rocha and Duarte 2015, 53). Adding to this, Rocha, Leal, and Duarte noted that, although the Ministry of Education is required to “supervise and evaluate sexuality education on a regular basis” (Rocha, Leal, and Duarte 174), this evaluation has failed to fully assess the state of sexuality education across the country.

As we have seen, sexuality education in Portugal, although covered by legislation, is still facing issues in its practical application. Adding to the insufficient programmes for teacher-training, the curriculum’s overt biology and health-related focus, and lack of regulation by the state, sexuality education has also faced a significant backlash in the public arena throughout the attempts at its implementation. As we will see in the following section, this backlash occurred specifically in the context of the country’s prevailing Catholic and conservative culture, and has more recently been instigated by advocates of the radical antigender movement against sexuality education and so-called “gender ideology.”

Backlash Against Sexuality Education in Portugal

Portugal has achieved greatly in the recognition of human rights and freedom since the end of the decades-long conservative dictatorship in 1974. Under the banner of "God, Country, and Family," the totalitarian regime of António Oliveira Salazar was grounded on the protection of family values. Under this regime, the primary conservative principle for ensuring traditional family values, according to Sofia Aboim (2013), relied on the submission of women under a rigid system of male supremacy. Moreover, this totalitarian regime also reinstated the role of the Catholic Church in the country, leaving a significant mark for decades to come.

As a consequence of Salazar's regime, by the final decades of the 20th century Portugal found itself behind on the feminist and sexual revolution. However, Parker, Wellings and Lazarus, as well as Aboim, argue that the situation has changed drastically since then. According to the former, "the modernization of Portugal in recent decades has resulted in a more open society, where the Catholic Church is more a symbolic and cultural reference for the majority of the population than an effective influence on sexual attitudes and behaviours" (Parker, Wellings, and Lazarus 2009, 238). On the topic of the change in attitudes towards sexuality, but without referencing Catholicism explicitly, Aboim writes that "the rigidity of the past has caved in and in its place has risen an ethic of hedonism, including in sexuality, which today has shifted from marriage and the strict reproductive function with which it was associated in the past" (Aboim 2013, 49).

This shift in attitudes and policies since 1974 is undeniable, especially if we account for the emancipation of women, the approval of the abortion law in 2007, or the country's consistent high-ranking positions in ILGA Europe's "Rainbow Europe Map and Index" in recent years.[4] At the same time, I argue that it would be misguided to undermine the legacy of the religious impact and the conservative morals cultivated in the totalitarian regime, which dates back only to my parents and grandparents' generations. We can see this effect in the relatively recent history of the implementation of sexuality education in Portugal.

Parker, Wellings and Lazarus argue that, in Portugal, "[a]cceptance of sexuality education is increasing among parents, young people, teachers and health professionals" (Parker, Wellings, and Lazarus 2009, 238). However, the impact of a hegemonic conservative mindset in the country has been continuously felt from the start of the implementation of sexuality education for young people. In the 1980s, sexuality education in Portugal faced a tremendous controversy, according

[4] Portugal ranked 11th in 2023's "Rainbow Europe Map and Index" (ILGA Europe 2023), coming two places behind the year before. The day the annual report came out, ILGA Portugal (2023) denounced the fact that Portuguese legal and governmental politics on anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination have stagnated, thus demanding urgent action.

to Cassar, from intolerant religious and political groups, "thus causing a stumbling block and consequent delay in implementation" (Cassar 2022, 151).

More recently, the most famous public case against sexuality education has been that of two parents in Famalicão, who, in 2020, declared themselves "conscientious objectors" to their sons' participation in the compulsory Citizenship Education classes, where modules on gender equality and sexual identity are addressed. According to Público (Henriques 2020):

> The Catholic parents of these two boys […] believe that topics like gender identity violate the principles and values with which they intend to educate their children. They have defended this position since 2009, when sexuality education became part of the school curriculum.

Their case is an example of not only radical religious views, but also of the detrimental conservative mindset that paints sexuality education as a form of ideological indoctrination. Moreover, it blatantly fails to understand the importance of complementing the informal education that happens within the family unit, with the expertise of professionals in the field.

In 2019, the issue of the morality of sexuality education in relation to the fear of indoctrination of children also arose in a political controversy, as consequence of a right-wing, religious Member of Parliament (MP) of Partido Social Democrata vividly expressing on social media his indignation and outrage against a talk, provided by an LGBTQ+ organisation on the topics of gender equality and sexual orientations, to students in a middle school (Mozos 2019). In this controversial social media post, the MP emphasises the expression "leave the children alone" — a sentence that has become the slogan for a movement of parents, politicians, and educators against sexuality education. Ricardo Figueiredo (2020) writes about this movement in a manifesto, claiming to prioritise the "defence of children's rights" (Figueiredo 2020) by arguing that sexuality education is a form of ideological indoctrination (Figueiredo 2020) imposed by the state on children. Other commentators like Alberto Veronesi (2021) and Maria Helena Costa (2022; 2023), without explicitly mentioning the same movement, have spread a similarly unfounded, alarmist antigender speech, which seeks to scare parents into believing that schools and activists are trying to encourage all students to have sex, and to make all children gay or trans.

These criticisms tend to appear under the banner of a fight against "gender ideology," a term which first emerged, according to Judith Butler (2019), "in the 1990s when the Roman Catholic Family Council warned against the idea of "gender" as a threat to the family and to biblical authority" (1). In an unpublished paper for my Gender Studies RMA (Candeias 2022b), I wrote that this movement relies "primarily on gender essentialism to dismantle feminist/queer critique, grasping onto the binary 'condition of man and woman' (Veronesi 2021) as foundational to society and interrelationality" (Candeias 2022, 1). This, I noted, is done by Veronesi, in his attempt to "disregard feminist/queer critique by portraying gender as a foreign concept that seeks to dismantle traditional values but has no application in the Portuguese context." (Candeias 2022, 1). Moreover, I argued that the "leave the children alone" movement not only "insinuates that education on inclusion is a form of harmful far-left indoctrination, but also perpetuates the queerphobic misconception that any references to non-cisheterosexuality are not age-appropriate and must be kept out of schools" (1/2).

Far from arguing that this radical, Catholic, antigender rhetoric is the hegemonic discourse in Portugal, as well as one of the primary influences in the current state of sexuality education, my goal in presenting these examples is to show the visible prevalence of conservative attitudes against the topics of gender and sexuality in Portuguese politics and media. Expressions of disgust against LGBTQ+ organisations, or insinuations of their attempt to indoctrinate children, carry a real power of spreading misinformation and causing alarm to adults who might not hear about sexuality education or the LGBTQ+ community until encountering these controversies in the media.

The lack of information about sexuality education provided to the general public is, in itself, an extremely significant problem. However, the fact that sexuality education is rarely addressed by the Portuguese government or by the media (outside of the aforementioned controversies) speaks not only to the neglect of sexuality education per se, but also calls out how the current government has relegated general education to the bottom of their political agenda. This has become exceedingly clear across 2023, a year marked by long general strikes of schoolteachers, gathered to fight against the government policies that reinforced their long-standing precarious working conditions.

In this socio-political context, it seems difficult to imagine that the assessment and improvement of sexuality education would be a priority to the current government. However, this issue demands attention, if we consider the effect that conservative, antigender discourses might be having on the very conduct and practice of educators who work directly with children and young people, and yet receive very insufficient to no sensitivity training.

A study by Gato et al. (2020), conducted in Portugal on the perceptions of self-identified LGBTQ+ youth about their school context, revealed that prejudiced attitudes against LGBTQ+ people are systemically reproduced by schoolteachers. According to the study, along with non-teaching school staff and family, schoolteachers were "characterized more frequently as agents of victimization than as support networks. For instance, teachers were mentioned 20 times as agents of victimization but only two times as sources of support" (5). Even more concerningly, teachers were mentioned repeatedly by the LGBTQ+ youth in the study as the largest perpetrators of discrimination in the school space (6).

The reproduction of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and violence by schoolteachers is an issue that research has proven to have a clear, significant impact on queer youth. Rodrigues et al. (2015) provided a short review of research from countries in the Global North, with an emphasis on the United States of America, on the impact of heterosexist and androcentric discourses in schools for LGBTQ+ youth. They found that a "considerable amount of research has shown that heterosexist and androcentric discourses and practices of violence in workplace, school and other social institutions are significantly correlated with LGBT people's suffering, depression and suicide" (2). Moreover, the authors found that the consistent experience of discrimination endangers LGBTQ+ youth's healthy development by increasing their "absenteeism due to feelings of discomfort and insecurity, growing problems with discipline and lower levels of school engagement and academic success" (3).

Although these tendencies for anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination are not, of course, the case for all teachers in every Portuguese school, the findings from Gato and colleagues do show that discrimination against queer youth in school spaces is an unacknowledged systemic issue within the Portuguese educational system. Moreover, it highlights the argument brought forward by Rodrigues and colleagues that it is "indispensable to question, not only what is taught, but how it is taught and how students understand it. It is also crucial that the community and the school professionals are attentive to homophobic language and practices inside and outside the schools" (Rodrigues et al. 2015, 14). For this reason, and following the aforementioned insufficient efforts by the state to develop a quality sexuality education curriculum and teacher-training throughout the country, it becomes imperative to question who is working to challenge cis-heteronormativity in Portugal. As such, I now turn our attention to the non-governmental entities that are working to deliver comprehensive and inclusive sexuality education, despite the outspoken backlash from conservatives.

Non-Governmental Sexuality Education in Portugal and Rede Ex Aequo

Scholarship reports that school-based sexuality education tends to be complemented, in several European countries, by the contribution of external experts (Parker, Wellings, and Lazarus 2009; Cunha-Oliveira et al. 2021; Cassar 2022). In the Portuguese context, there is a tendency for these experts to be health professionals who go to schools, primarily, to discuss the prevention of STIs and unwanted pregnancy (Cassar 2022). Less attention is given in the literature to experts who approach the subject of sexuality education through the lens of human rights and social justice, specifically the initiatives and resources developed by NGOs to combat prejudice and anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination in schools.

This attention to expert LGBTQ+ NGOs and inclusive resources is crucial when we consider the limitations of the guidelines for sexuality education, which, in the Portuguese case, tend to be significantly vague. The Portuguese Public Health Administration, for example, defines under their guidelines for health education (Carvalho et al. 2017) a goal of "developing awareness of becoming a unique person in respect to sexuality, identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation" across all school ages. Under this goal, they establish minimal guidelines and a very weak distinction between the curricular points for different levels of schooling — going to the extent of claiming that "understanding and respecting sexual diversity and sexual orientation" and "respecting and accepting sexual diversity and sexual orientation" are distinctive goals for different school years.

On top of these vague guidelines, there is little assessment of the practice of sexuality education that ensures that young people are being given adequate information on these topics, in a way that might help them feel safe exploring their sexuality and gender identity, as well as make them more empathic to others they encounter.

Empirical research on this topic also rarely refers specifically to the provision of information on gender and sexual diversity, or mentions how often, and in what way, LGBTQ+ representation is addressed in school spaces. In fact, Rocha and Duarte point out how challenging it is to get a full perspective of the type of sexuality education being applied in Portugal, given the limits of the existent research, which once again tends to be biology and health-centred. According to the authors, most of the information on "school-based SE in Portugal […] consists of academic theses and studies on SE (A. C. Rocha, C. Leal and C. Duarte, unpublished) and adolescent sexual health indicators, and annual reports on health education" (Rocha and Duarte 2015, 49).

Rocha, Leal and Duarte argue that the failure of schools and the government to meet the recommended requirements for quality sexuality education, "along with weak and inconsistent teacher training, may explain the substantial involvement of NGOs in school-based work" (Rocha, Leal, and Duarte 2016, 180). In line with this, to ensure that schoolteachers, parents, and youth have access to verified expert information on matters regarding gender and sexuality, several initiatives and resources on the subject have been created in the past few years by non-governmental entities (Rede Ex Aequo 2005; Alonso, Puche, and Muñoz 2019; Ferreira, Correia, and Neves 2020; Leal and Castro 2020; Sándor 2021; AMPLOS, n.d.; n.d.). One of these initiatives is the case study of the present thesis — Rede Ex Aequo's "Projecto Educação" —, which aims to target anti-LGBTQ+ bullying in schools via a non-formal, peer-led pedagogical approach that prioritises open conversations with students on the topics of sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.

Rocha, Leal and Duarte acknowledge that the neglect of governments to help the cross-curricular implementation of sexuality education leads to a reliance on the work of NGOs. In doing so, they seem critical of the effects of this phenomenon to the "implementation of more effective forms" of school-based sexuality education (Rocha, Leal, and Duarte 2016, 180). The authors refer to a study conducted with schoolteachers in Spain by Martínez and colleagues (2012), who found that, where the involvement of NGOs in sexuality education was more significant, sexuality education was "more sporadic and less coherent because of the lack of involvement of school teachers themselves." (428). Their argument speaks to the crucial need for schoolteachers to receive training from experts, to help them get more involved in the subject, ensure a more systematic application of sexuality education in their classes, and help teachers support their students with their questions and explorations of their identity. It also highlights a similarly significant problem of the insufficient funding of NGOs, which limits their capacity to reach more schools and be present more often in those spaces.

An analysis of this issue, however, should reject an extension of these arguments to a critical assertion that the help of NGOs on the subject of sexuality education hinders the establishment of a school-based practice, given that, as we saw before, that is largely a responsibility and failure of local governments and administrations. It seems, thus, that in this context, the ideal method for implementing sexuality education in schools should prioritise a more active and consistent collaboration between schools and NGOs. As Martínez and colleagues argue, "there needs to be a clearer focus on teacher training […]. Resources and teaching materials for sex education require development, and schools need to use external support from specialists and health professionals to enable them to do this." (432).

The topic of collaboration between schools and NGOs came up during my conversations with Rede Ex Aequo's volunteer educators, when I asked the participants what role an NGO like Rede Ex Aequo could take on if/when teacher-training in sexuality education became more widely available to schoolteachers. In some way or other, all volunteers agreed that the work of Rede Ex Aequo would remain necessary in that context. Some affirmed that high-quality training and expert resources will always be necessary to combat misinformation and help schoolteachers deliver an inclusive sexuality education curriculum. In this context, Violeta argued that their work is important as a source to which teachers can guide students, either when they cannot answer specific questions, or to help them find a sense of belonging. In parallel with this, it was also mentioned that, once teachers cover the basic topics related to sexuality and gender identity/expression, this will expand the opportunities for NGOs like Rede Ex Aequo to cover more complex topics within the realm of gender and sexuality. Marte emphasised that teacher-training will "open more doors" and help expand Rede Ex Aequo's action towards more schools.

> **Marte:** We'll always be necessary, I think. Whether it's for students or for teachers. […] I want to feel that schools start calling us to address more complex topics, because they already know the basics and want to develop certain topics. That's when I'll feel like we've reached a new level. Any teacher could already provide information on general topics.

The final reasons that stood out from the volunteers' responses relate to the specificity of Rede Ex Aequo's focus on LGBTQ+ topics and experiences. Ana Rita argued that, in parallel to the importance of teachers providing basic information on gender and sexuality, NGOs like Rede Ex Aequo remain crucial to raise awareness and motivate socio-political activism for human rights and LGBTQ+ rights. Furthermore, the volunteers also often mentioned that Rede Ex Aequo's emphasis on personal experience and personal investment in the LGBTQ+ topics stands out in their approach, because it highlights the topics as something real, something with which students can identify.

> **João:** That personal aspect, when we address not only basic concepts, but also share our personal experience, my friends' experience, my community — that has a different impact and I think it's irreplaceable. […] Although it would be amazing if all teachers had training […], that's not very realistic. So [with] our non-formal training, our school sessions, I don't think we would disappear.

Concluding Thoughts

This chapter established the working-definition of sexuality education in this thesis as a term which expands on the traditional conception of sex education beyond its biological focus, to make room for the topics of sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. Although sexuality education is not yet widely applied in the comprehensive way outlined by entities like WHO or UNESCO, my work emphasises that sexuality education should integrate LGBTQ+ experiences in its curriculum beyond the questions of risk and diseases, while also understanding the importance of the LGBTQ+ community's social, cultural, and political specificities.

The chapter also looked at the limitations of sexuality education curricula across the EU, highlighting the complex history of its implementation in Portugal. Despite Portugal's legislative efforts to make sexuality education compulsory across all school years, the educational scholarship presented in this chapter shows that the practical application of these efforts have been successively hindered by a multitude of limitations. These included the vague governmental guidelines for the implementation of inclusive, comprehensive, and age-appropriate sexuality education across all schools in the country; lack of time and funding for schoolteachers to incorporate the subject in a cross-curricular model; the overt biology-centred approach of the current curriculum; and the insufficient provision of teacher-training on the subject. On top of these structural limitations, I also pointed to the prevalent conservative and Catholic cultural mindset as a significant boundary to the development of the sexuality education curriculum. Based on these limitations to a successful application of high-quality sexuality education across the country, literature also shows that Portugal has come to rely on NGOs for the provision of sexuality education resources, among which Rede Ex Aequo stands out for their school sessions on LGBTQ+ topics.

My reading of this complex socio-political context to the application of sexuality education in Portugal reveals the urgent need to tackle the emerging antigender movement, as a significant set of voices against the LGBTQ+ community and sexuality education. My brief engagement with this issue suggests that, in a context where sexuality education is largely neglected in public and political debates, alarmist and misinformed voices against the subject can carry a relevant negative impact for parents, as well as future policies on the subject.

At the same time, I also conclude from this chapter the pressing need to understand sexuality education beyond its school-based practices, in a way that encompasses a reading of the work being outsourced to non-governmental entities in this field. In doing so, we find organisations like Rede Ex Aequo, whose non-formal, peer-led methodology expands beyond the traditional conception of sexuality education, to prioritise LGBTQ+ topics in education. Rede Ex Aequo is helping demystify and destigmatise the LGBTQ+ community, by making it visible in the largely cisheteronormative school space. As such, I conclude that their work is imperative to run in collaboration with sexuality education in schools, as it would help schoolteachers address certain basic topics with their students and, in the process, help students feel supported in their identities.

At the same time, I also argue that the work of Rede Ex Aequo can co-exist with that of schools, by expanding on the curriculum with more complex topics, and putting youth in contact with openly LGBTQ+ people and allies. This is something I explore in the next chapter, by looking at the structures of formal education and non-formal education, and the ways in which Rede Ex Aequo bends that enforced structural dichotomy.

Chapter 2: Researching Volunteer, Peer-led Education in the Context of Educational Research

Chapter 1 outlined the primary issues with the current policies on the application of school-based sexuality education in the EU and, specifically, Portugal. It also pointed to the outsourced work of NGOs in the field of inclusive sexuality education as a way of supplementing the gaps left by the inadequacy of the Portuguese school curriculum on the topics of sexualities, gender identities, and gender expressions. Having begun with a look at this socio-political and legislative dimension, this second chapter narrows our focus to the role of peer-led sexuality education in relation to the traditional education system, currently predominant in multiple countries across the Global North, including Portugal. The chapter tackles the question: how can research on the outsourced work of peer-led sexuality education be situated in scholarship on formal education and non-formal education that critically addresses the shortcomings of traditional education?

To answer this question, the chapter positions our understanding of Rede Ex Aequo's non-formal, peer-led pedagogical approach in a larger body of educational research. In order to situate my research in the field of educational studies, I present a review of literature that focuses on formal education and its limitations to the emotional and personal engagement of teachers and students in the learning environment. This is followed by a look at the concept of non-formal education, from its roots in the Global South to its adaptation in the Global North. My goal is to expand on the current literature on non-formal education in the Global North, by referring to the case study of Rede Ex Aequo. I point to the NGO's Projecto Educação as a form of non-formal education that incorporates both formal and non-formal elements, collaborating within the school system, rather than seeking to exist outside it. I finish the chapter with the inclusion of comments from Rede Ex Aequo's volunteer educators on their non-formal pedagogy, its challenges, and its role in the practice of empathy in education.

Formal Education and Pedagogical Limitations on Care and Emotional Engagement

Rede Ex Aequo identifies their educational approach as being non-formal (Rede Ex Aequo n.d.). Their extracurricular sessions are performed in school spaces by young volunteers, trained by the organisation to encourage and moderate informal conversations with students on LGBTQ+ topics. This coexistence of formal school spaces with a non-formal pedagogical approach led by volunteer educators situates the work of Rede Ex Aequo in relation to both formal education and non-formal education. I argue that this methodology allows Rede Ex Aequo a certain freedom from the constraints of the formal education system on emotional and personal involvement with the teaching/learning process, while also revealing the potential of bringing alternative forms of relating to formal school spaces. To support this argument, I begin with a look at literature on the limitations of formal education and the standardised curriculum, in combination with theory on the challenges of practicing care in education.

The application of a national, standardised curriculum is a common pedagogical method applied in several countries around the globe, including Portugal. According to Esnard and Mohammed (2019), the standardised curriculum assumes that all schools and students "should be guided by expectations for specific knowledge, skills, and competencies" (59). This assumption guides the provision of a set of specific "standards, methods of instruction and assessment" (59), which are then uniformly applied across all schools in a specific country.

The standardised curriculum is situated in what we can refer to as the structure of formal education. UNESCO (2012, 11) defines formal education as "education that is institutionalised, intentional and planned through public organizations and recognised private bodies, and – in their totality – constitute the formal education system of a country." Other authors complement this definition by highlighting formal education's tendency to be structured systematically around a curriculum with rigid laws, norms, objectives, content, and methodology (Dib 1988; Shala and Grajcevci 2016), assessed by standardised testing, for the ultimate goal of the "attainment of diplomas and degrees" (Shala and Grajcevci 2016, 120).

The formulation of standardised education seems to have good intentions at its core. One of its primary motivations, according to Laura Latta (2020), is to "protect students' educational experiences and ensure that all students, regardless of where they live, have comparable school experiences resulting in similar learning outcomes." Latta writes that standardising the curriculum promotes an ideal of educational equality, which assumes "that if every individual is exposed to the very same sets of instructional conditions (also assuming that every teacher teaches the exact same way), the result will be that all students walk away with the same level of knowledge."

However, for decades, scholars like Paulo Freire (2014 [1968]) and Michael W. Apple (1993) have challenged standardisation's claim of promoting educational equality, arguing that, instead of establishing all students as equal in their access to the same educational contexts, the standardised curriculum enhances pre-existing structures of subordination, especially in relation to class and race divisions (Apple 1993, 236). In line with this, Freire conceives traditional power differentials between teachers and students as a means of sustaining a culture of oppression. He does this by pointing to the standardised form of education as a "banking system," an "act of depositing, in which […] the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat." (Freire 2014 [1968], 72).

Drawing from Freire's work, the feminist scholar bell hooks (1994) makes a similar critique of this system, by pointing to how it creates an "assembly-line approach to learning" (13). According to hooks, the detachment of education from a relation to the real life of the actors in the learning process was damaging, especially to the antiracist struggle and to the political commitment of education (3). Her reference to an assembly-line illustrates an important aspect perpetuated by standardised education, which seeks to create uniform, disciplined bodies, by neglecting to consider socio-historical dynamics of dominance and subordination. By ignoring gender-based, racial, and class disparities in heterogeneous groups of students in the backdrop of a capitalist, white supremacist and heterosexist system, standardised pedagogies are thus argued to exert a significant negative effect on how students learn. This, hooks argues, establishes a marked difference between "education as the practice of freedom and education that merely strives to reinforce domination" (4).

Both Freire and hooks are highly critical of the tendency for education to turn students into passive consumers in the learning process, while teachers are posed in opposition as the sole bearers of knowledge. They both argue that the liberatory potential of education can only emerge if teachers and students become equally involved in the learning and knowledge production process — in Freire's words, if both actors "are simultaneously teachers *and* students" (Freire 2014 [1968], 72). However, the authors argue this cannot occur through the structure of the banking system of education, which enforces a split between teachers' capacity to teach and their well-being (hooks 1994, 16), a split between teachers and students, and one between the body and mind.

This feminist critique of the mind/body split in education is prevalent in how educational scholarship has come to understand the progressive alienation of teachers and students from the learning process. On this topic, hooks argues that the objectification of teachers appears to "denigrate notions of wholeness and uphold the idea of a mind/body split, one that promotes and supports compartmentalization." (hooks 1994, 16). Other educational scholars, like Mei-qian Wang and Xu-dong Zheng (2018), build on hooks' reference to compartmentalisation, by arguing that

> curricular knowledge is separated from the context in which knowledge is generated and classroom teaching is separated from the everyday experience of teachers and students, profoundly reflecting the knowledge-based, disembodied concept of the curriculum. (219)

One consequence of this assembly-line educational strategy that privileges systematic, disembodied structures of knowledge acquisition, these scholars argue, is the emotional detachment of both teachers and students from the learning process. Two authors whose works help understand the inclusion and detachment of emotion and empathy from standardised education are Nell Noddings (2005; 2007; 2012; 2013) and Bridget Cooper (Cooper 2010; 2013). Through a feminist framework that is conscious of the systemic dimensions of gender in care work, Noddings conceives caring in education as a relational practice (Noddings 2005; 2007; 2012; 2013), a reciprocal expression between the "one-caring" (or carer) and the "cared-for." The scholar argues that standardised education can often lead to the loss of the joy in teaching or the deterioration of the aim of education, through the system's overt focus on "passing a course, getting a good grade, graduating, and transferring the same attitudes to occupational life" (51). However, she appears to correlate this issue with the attitudes of individual teachers, who, in having "decided a priori what students need — often find the standards movement compatible with their beliefs, and they may work hard to bring students to the established standards" (51).

Noddings' attribution to the issue of standardisation to teachers neglects to consider the wider, systematic issues at stake. A reading of Cooper's work on empathy and education helps expand on Noddings' theory, by highlighting the structural constraints of the formal education system imposed upon teachers. Arguing that "[h]eavy curriculum content and testing leaves little time for empathy and pleasure in teaching and learning" (Cooper 2013, 136), Cooper highlights that the pressures of a busy curriculum and assessment tend to create a time conflict that restricts teachers' capacity to "involve and engage students in learning, creating more pressure." (136). These curricular pressures faced by teachers are similarly highlighted by Anne Wagner and Riyad A. Shahjahan's (2015, 251) argument that "teachers face considerable pressure to conform to institutional and departmental expectations." This was an issue I similarly noted during my research internship for InTouch Amsterdam (Candeias 2023, 18), on the subject of developing a school-based sex education curriculum. In my pilot study, I noted that "lack of time and resources are often indicated by educators as a barrier to their participation in the development of sex education curricula, especially when it is not directly supported by their peers, institutions, and/or governments." (18).

What comes across most prominently from this short literature review is the externally imposed limitations on the capacity of schoolteachers to engage with care, empathy, and emotion in classrooms within the formal education system. Scholarship on formal education notes that this causes a constraint on teachers' capacity to develop more creative pedagogical strategies, as well as engage in more personal dialogue with their students beyond the set curriculum. As a consequence of this, it is argued that students and teachers become detached from the learning process.

From my reading of the work in educational studies, I propose that the emotional and personal detachment of students and teachers from formal education can carry negative consequences to the successful implementation of a subject like sexuality education. This is due to the way in which teachers' lack of time and resources limits their ability to create safe and open bonds with their students, elements which are imperative to the exploration of gender and sexuality. For this reason, in the context of the analysis of the present case study, it is compelling to complement the critical reading of formal education with a look at alternative methods of teaching and learning. In being less governed by institutional constraints, alternative pedagogical methods might help not only supplement the inadequacies of the standardised curriculum, but also encourage a more personal and empathic engagement from teachers and students.

Conceiving Non-Formal Alternative Pedagogies

A significant body of work in educational studies, such as the work with which I have engaged so far across this chapter (hooks 1994; Noddings 2007; Wagner and Shahjahan 2015; Wang and Zheng 2018), proposes the need to conceive alternative pedagogical strategies that tackle the inadequacy of formal education. Noddings, for example, is quite radical in arguing for the move beyond the standardised curriculum and calling for a complete restructuring of the educational system. According to Noddings, "teachers must be free to exercise professional judgement in constructing curriculum with their students, in choosing methods, and in evaluating student work. Almost certainly, this requires the abandonment of the present standardization movement" (Noddings 2007, 58). My approach, however, tries to takes on a more grounded and pragmatic approach to explore other existent pedagogical formats that might help read the work of NGOs like Rede Ex Aequo, in the context of its engagement with the formal education system. To do this, I turn briefly to literature on the topic of non-formal education, finishing with a proposal to understand the potential of the collaboration of formal and non-formal attributes in educational contexts, in order to devise more emotionally engaged pedagogies within formal school spaces.

Non-formal education is a practice that originated in the Global South as an alternative to formal education. According to Ali Hamadache (1991), "non-formal education was designed to compensate for shortcomings and contradictions in the traditional school system and to satisfy the often urgent needs overlooked by formal education" (113). Its aim was, thus, to widen the access to education to a larger number of the population who might not have access to schools, and thereby promote the increase of their life opportunities (Simac, Marcus, and Harper 2021, 707).

Non-formal education in the Global South is characterised as heterogeneous, and its flexible curriculum (Shala and Grajcevci 2016) allows non-formal educators in each context to tailor their contents to the needs of the population (Hamadache 1991). While for some in the Global South non-formal education worked as a complement to the formal education system, Hamadache argues that the appearance of non-formal education restructured the educational system by destabilising the belief in school as the only place where learning takes place (111).

Since its development in the Global South, the practice of non-formal education has also taken shape in countries of the Global North. However, the inclusion of non-formal education practices in the latter are markedly different from those in the former. For instance, in Latin America, non-formal education — to which Wim Hoppers (2006) refers in that specific geographical context as "popular education" — was practiced by "local authorities or social movements, […] raising awareness on socio-political issues" (26). Moreover, in many countries in the Global South, non-formal education actually became the only opportunity for many people to receive basic access to education (46) — a significantly different reality from the Global North. This discrepancy between the two geographical contexts, according to Hoppers, is a consequence of how access to education "is subject to different social and political pressures" (47). As such, it is important to understand the origins and initial purpose of this practice, as well as to acknowledge the contrasts of its application in countries in the Global North.

Certain basic traits presented by scholars on non-formal educational practices across the world include the flexibility of its implementation (Hamadache 1991, 114), as well as its tendency to have a more learner-centred (as opposed to curriculum and assessment-centred) approach (White and Lorenzi 2016, 774). However, I found that, despite being able to trace some common elements among literature in the subject of non-formal education, scholarship in this topic has not yet been able to fully capture the multiple and varied uses of the term in its application in the Global North. Currently, non-formal education is conceived predominantly by researchers as a practice situated outside of formal institutions, which establishes a marked dichotomy between formal and non-formal education. This dichotomy is presented by Irene White and Francesca Lorenzi (2016), who argue that formal education operates "in more restrictive conditions, subject for instance to curricular dictates, established roles, functions and organisational structures" (785). Conversely, the authors write, "[p]roviders of non-formal education are free from the restrictions which plague the performance-driven formal sector and enjoy greater freedom in terms of design and delivery of programmes and choice and location of environments" (775).

However, this formal vs non-formal dichotomy causes a limitation to a holistic reading of Rede Ex Aequo's in-school, non-formal peer-led practice. As such, my research follows Hamadache's argument that "it would be impossible […] to give this concept [non-formal education] a single, universal definition, as what distinguishes non-formal education is the variety of forms it can take on in response to the different demands and needs of different individuals or groups" (Hamadache 1991, 113). I take Hamadache's argument as an invitation to broaden the current scope of literature on the subject of non-formal education. This encourages an expansion of our understanding of non-formal education beyond an educational structure, into a consideration of it as a pedagogical approach in itself, thereby allowing an analysis of the inclusion of non-formal traits in formal education spaces.

To develop on this, I found it helpful to read the work of Claudio Z. Dib (1988), including his argument that formal education and non-formal education should not be considered mutually exclusive systems or approaches, since "one is not necessarily the antithesis of the other and in the educational universe there is rather more than enough room for both" (9). This assertion can be complemented through the encouragement of Colley, Hodkinson and Malcom (2006) not to conceive these systems as discrete categories, but rather to understand that their "attributes" can be present in different aspects of education (60). This, as the authors write, "acknowledges that both formal and informal attributes are always present and points to the need to analyse the balance of formality and informality in each aspect of any learning situation" (60).

Considering the mutual applicability of formal and non-formal attributes in education allows a more expanded framework for understanding the educational work of Rede Ex Aequo, and the way in which, as an NGO outsourced by schools, they occupy both an insider and outsider position in the school system. To help our reading of this case study, I close this chapter with a section dedicated to contributions from Rede Ex Aequo's volunteers on their perception of practicing a non-formal approach in schools, combined with my remarks on my visit to one of their school sessions.

Rede Ex Aequo on the Practice of Non-Formal, Peer-Led Sexuality Education

During the same week that I conducted most of the interviews with the volunteers from Rede Ex Aequo, I also had the opportunity to observe a semi-standard session of Projecto Educação, led by Ana Rita at a school in Lisbon. There, I witnessed the openness of the small group of students who had reached out to Rede Ex Aequo, as they guided Ana Rita and I through the school and into the auditorium. The experience revealed to me how Rede Ex Aequo breaks with the aforementioned formal/non-formal education dichotomy. This became apparent as I observed Ana Rita settling into the educator role at the front of the school auditorium, whilst adopting an informal position that sought, above all, to establish an open dialogue with students.

The importance of fostering dialogue with students came through across all my conversations with the volunteer educators. From those conversations, together with my observation of the school session, I noticed that Rede Ex Aequo's non-formal, peer-led pedagogy prioritises an active engagement with students. Although the session I attended was atypical, and more expositional than I had been expecting, the volunteers with whom I spoke argued that their pedagogical strategy is not, like João argued during our conversation, just "about absorbing concepts and studying for a test." Rather than focusing on conducting a lecture for students, the volunteers engage in conversations *with* students, through their own vocabulary and understanding of gender and sexual identities, thereby breaking with the restrictive norms of formal education that I highlighted at the start of the chapter.

Fostering dialogue with students speaks to Rede Ex Aequo's goal of teaching them about sexuality, gender, and the LGBTQ+ community through an encouragement for students to connect more personally to the topics. A large part of this strategy relies on the educational initiative's peer-led approach, which allows the volunteer educators to promote a sense of relatability between them and those they teach. In our conversation for my initial paper on this subject, Bruno argued that the peer-led approach is crucial to establish "a level of equality, a 'level playing field' of young people to young people [...] where none of us sees themselves as superior."

This deconstruction of hierarchies as a means of positively impacting the learning process was also mentioned by Violeta, who argued that this approach helps students be more engaged in the subject and more open to discuss personal questions and experiences with gender and sexuality.

> **Violeta:** I think it makes all the difference whether it's a teacher, another school staff member, or someone who's of a similar age to us — someone who's there as a friend, as support, not as an authority figure. […] I think it's positive to have someone who's at the same level as the students […], trying to keep a closer relation, because it allows them to ask more personal questions or to share stories, experiences, to ask for help.

Furthermore, the sense of relatability cultivated by the volunteers acts not only as a device for engaging students in the learning process, but I noticed it is also a pedagogical tool for the subject matter at hand. It became apparent to me that part of their pedagogical strategy for raising awareness of the LGBTQ+ community and combatting bullying relies on promoting the visibility of LGBTQ+ people and experiences in schools. Drawing, once again, from Violeta's contribution presented below, we can see that, for the volunteers, more important than the information they provide on these topics is their very presence in schools.

> **Violeta:** What is important is someone being there and saying, "look, I'm queer, now let's talk about it." And then they [the students] know […] that there are people being open about this topic. This is important because there is still so much stigma.

The volunteer educators from Rede Ex Aequo were all positive, across our conversations, about their attitudes towards Projeto Educação's non-formal approach. However, some of them also explained how, despite valuing that pedagogy, teaching through a non-formal approach does not necessarily come naturally to them. João and Beatriz mentioned how they both notice a tendency, in each of their sessions, to lean into the formal aspects of education. Coming from his role as a nurse, João shared the following.

> **João:** I try to have a balance between the formal and the informal, I make an effort to make it more informal. I personally have those things a bit mixed up […]. But if I feel like a session is getting too formal, then I share my personal experience and change things up.

Similarly, Beatriz shared her struggle to "break the barrier of being very expositional" for coming from a "super theoretical" law degree. I noticed from the two volunteers' reflections that they have observed their own tendency to be more formal and unable to "break the barrier" — to resist the pre-imposed register of formal education — during their sessions. This, according to them, tends to take them out of the moment through a sentiment of frustration, which leads them to adapt their approach as the session goes on.

Beatriz and João's difficulty in navigating the formal/non-formal dichotomy seems to me to be a consequence of the volunteers' training in Rede Ex Aequo's non-formal pedagogy being considerably shorter than their exposition to formal education throughout their lives. In this sense, it seems natural that people conditioned by the strictness of formal education might initially struggle to engage with a different pedagogy. At the same time, these comments, combined with Beatriz' assertion that Rede Ex Aequo's training has helped her become more comfortable in the non-formal approach, support the argument that formal and non-formal education can, and do, complement each other. This is clear in how non-formal education, in a way, might require a basic level of formal training to help educators incorporate it in their practice.

Despite these challenges, Rede Ex Aequo's continuous work towards cultivating a sense of relatability in a non-formal, peer-led pedagogy through LGBTQ+ visibility in schools speaks to the most pertinent aspect I found during my study of Rede Ex Aequo's approach: their goal to foster empathy for LGBTQ+ people through education. My conversations with the volunteers, as well as my brief observation of one school session, led me to interpret empathy as one of the central elements to Rede Ex Aequo's pedagogy. Students are encouraged by this pedagogy to apply empathy in their interactions with their peers, but also to cultivate it throughout their lives. This is something I found to be implicit in my conversation with Bruno, in his assertion that Rede Ex Aequo's non-formal educational approach aims to help students develop soft skills, "skills that will be developed and applicable not only in your work, but in your future, your day-to-day life, [...] that have the power to change society."

Concluding Thoughts

Chapter 2 framed my analysis of the non-formal, peer-led approach of Rede Ex Aequo in the context of educational research, by situating their work in relation to scholarship on formal education and non-formal education, and their critique of the shortcomings of standardised curricula. The chapter presented a literature review that pointed to the perils of the commodification and disembodiment of education to its liberatory, political potential, and to the engagement of students and teachers in the learning process. This critique of formal education was followed by a look at the concept of non-formal education as an alternative to the shortcomings of the formal education system. I also showed the limitations of this literature on non-formal education in the Global North for a reading of my case study, in its large theorisation of non-formal education outside formal educational structures. The last section of the chapter analysed comments from Rede Ex Aequo's educators on their non-formal pedagogy, and their challenges in navigating the formal and non-formal dichotomy.

The literature review in this chapter revealed how research has shown convincingly that formal education causes a constraint on teachers' capacity to develop more creative pedagogical strategies, and to engage in personal dialogue with their students. I also pointed to the negative impact of these limitations to the successful implementation of sexuality education, given its significant dependence on teachers' ability to show investment in their students and create safe spaces for identity exploration. My analysis of non-formal education in relation to my case study also expanded on the scholarship on non-formal education in the Global North, by pointing to Projecto Educação as a form of non-formal education that incorporates both formal and non-formal attributes, collaborating with the school system instead of seeking to exist outside it. This aspect is relevant for considering a wider, systemic application of similar projects at a national level, in showing that a complete restructuring of the formal school system is not necessary to motivate creative pedagogies or more engaged teacher-student relationships. Rather, smaller-scale efforts to integrate non-formal attributes in formal education can be seen as more accessible to implement, and can thus open up more opportunities for outsourced entities to collaborate with formal educators in devising more emotionally, personally, and politically engaged pedagogical practices with students.

I finished the chapter by referring to the volunteer educators' emphasis on a non-formal pedagogy as a helpful method for establishing an engaged practice with their students, aiding the ability to foster empathy and care in their activist-oriented educational initiative. The following chapter will explore this matter further through a more detailed look at the contributions of Rede Ex Aequo's volunteers on the topics of emotion, care, and empathy in relation to their non-formal peer-led pedagogy. This will be complemented through a reading of theory on care in education, emotional labour, and affective labour, as a means of understanding the positive and negative implications of Rede Ex Aequo's inclusion of emotion and affect in their educational practice.

Chapter 3: Peer-Led Sex Education as an Affective Practice

Chapter 2 contextualised the faults of formal educational structures, which impose a set of rules and guidelines that limit teachers and students' affective and political engagement in the learning process. In this context, and through the dialogue between educational research and the contributions from conversations with Rede Ex Aequo's volunteer educators, the chapter framed the work of Projecto Educação as a non-formal initiative, led by a peer-led, emotionally attuned pedagogy that engages with students through an emphasis on personal experience, empathy, and care.

This third, and final, chapter expands on these aspects by delving, firstly, into the question of how the LGBTQ+ volunteer educators perceive their experience with emotion, affect, personal experience, and care in their own work, which I develop by engaging further with findings from our conversations. Subsequently, the chapter tackles the question: what are the implications for reading care and empathy in the work of LGBTQ+ volunteer educators as forms of emotional labour and affective labour? To answer this, I complement the reading of Rede Ex Aequo's contributions by engaging with educational scholarship on care and empathy in education, starting from Karyn Sandlos's (2010) invitation to consider educators' feelings and emotional demands in their educational practice. The chapter proceeds by exploring theory on emotional labour and affective labour, to understand the different levels of engagement with emotion and affect in Rede Ex Aequo's peer-led educational practice. The goal is to understand what these theoretical concepts might bring to a reading of the negative and positive implications of peer-led, volunteer educational work in sexuality education. Additionally, the concepts help explore how we might conceive peer-led sexuality education as a sustainable relational practice that should not only demand to be valued and compensated, but also honours joy in its labour.

Rede Ex Aequo on the Personal and Emotional Investment of Sexuality Education

As we will see across this first section of the present chapter, the personal and emotional investment of the volunteers in their educational practice both sustains and destabilises their capacity to provide education on LGBTQ+ topics within cisheteronormative spaces. This section will look at how the volunteers perceive the investment of their emotions and personal experience in their educational work, how their pedagogy is firmly grounded on education towards empathy, and what challenges derive from the requirement of managing one's emotions in one's dual role as an educator and activist.

Personal Experience and Pedagogy of Empathy

From my conversations with the volunteer educators at Rede Ex Aequo, the encouragement by Projecto Educação for the volunteers to share tales of personal experience seemed to be largely perceived as an important tool to tackle misconceptions and prejudice against LGBTQ+ people in schools. At the same time, I also noticed different positions from the volunteers on their approach to sharing their own experience. These views ranged from the complete embrace and desire to partake in the sharing of personal experience with students, to a context-dependent degree of caution. Given that sharing personal accounts is not a compulsory aspect of Projecto Educação, the different views and approaches of each of the volunteers provides a relevant nuance to how we might understand the inclusion of personal experience in sexuality education, specifically as practiced through a peer-led approach.

Most of the volunteers acknowledged the importance of being present in schools as part of an LGBTQ+ organisation, and how drawing from their personal experience helps break the invisibility of LGBTQ+ experiences in cis-heteronormative spaces. Beatriz developed on this by arguing for the importance of Projeto Educação for encouraging their LGBTQ+ (and ally) volunteers to demonstrate how LGBTQ+ people can be out and authentic in cisheteronormative spaces, thereby challenging the misconception of the LGBTQ+ community as a reality detached from the students and teachers.

> **Beatriz:** When we learn [about the LGBTQ+ community] it's always from a very distant point of view, like, "it's the others… this happened to them." And teachers rarely consider that maybe there are queer people in the classroom, people who are dealing with these questions […]. This is part of us going to schools and sometimes saying "this is who we are" […] there's a feeling of belonging that's important and I feel that it's missing.

Beatriz affirms here that sharing their experience as young LGBTQ+ people can help the volunteers in their effort to shut down anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric, which then contributes to eradicating the isolation and invisibility of LGBTQ+ identities in school spaces. Although she is clear about how coming out to the groups in the sessions — "saying 'this is who we are'" — is optional, she does point to how it can aid the level of proximity and relatability the volunteer educators tendentially seek to establish with their students. Violeta made a similar point by mentioning that, despite it not being compulsory, it is important for the volunteers to share their own stories sometimes.

Other volunteers explained why, to them, it feels particularly important to share aspects of their personal experience as LGBTQ+ people. Carolina, for instance, explained the importance of sharing her experience as a butch lesbian, as well as other topics, like the use of binders —

experiences which, she argued, are rarely spoken about, especially in educational spaces for young people. Carolina's response links directly to her motivation as a volunteer educator at Rede Ex Aequo, specifically in her affirmed devotion to making sure young LGBTQ+ people feel valid in their experience, and are safe in their gender expression and coming out.

Carolina's response emphasised how sharing personal experience is employed as an educational tool that taps into the topic on which the volunteers consider themselves to be the biggest experts — their own identity and experience. This aspect was similarly highlighted by Marte:

> **Marte:** What I can talk about the most is my personal experience, and I don't think there's a more powerful example than your own story. People respect you more when you're the example. […] When I arrive in a session, I identify as a non-binary person who uses gender-neutral pronouns. People then tend to take me more seriously than they would if I was just saying something for the sake of it. No, it's me, I am that person who needs empathy.

I was positively surprised to hear from Marte that they feel identifying in person with the young students as non-binary brings about welcoming attitudes, as opposed to prejudiced ones. There is a significant shift in this response from Marte's observational tone in the second person throughout the response, to an affirmation of their need to be seen as a real individual "who needs empathy." In that moment of our conversation, I felt the impact of their passionate call for empathy in the first person. This appears as a pertinent aspect to the composition of a peer-led approach, which seeks to counteract the distanced approach of formal education, by emphasising personhood and identity as tangible aspects of Rede Ex Aequo's pedagogy.

Here, I find it important to point out the need for a nuanced awareness of why it might be more accessible for some volunteers than others to tap into their personal experience during the sessions. Across the conversations, I did not collect information from the volunteers about particularities of their experience that would indicate a complete reticence to share their personal experience, specifically for feeling uncomfortable or triggered by difficult aspects in their lives. As such, my analysis of how different experiences might influence how much and in what way the volunteers choose to disclose personal details is limited. Nevertheless, I want to highlight how the volunteers themselves demonstrated empathy for one another, in acknowledging that their own ease to discuss their experience should not imply that every educator in their position is, or should be, comfortable to do the same.

Violeta, for example, affirmed her privilege in having had a mainly positive experience as a self-identified queer person, which she acknowledges not to be a universal experience within the LGBTQ+ community. This, she affirms, allows her to be more comfortable in sharing her story.

> **Violeta:** I understand that for people who, perhaps, have had very difficult experiences in discovering themselves […] it might be more difficult, but I think those stories might be the most important ones. Those are the ones that might be the most helpful to young people who are maybe going through more difficult times.

It is challenging for me, given the limitations of the present research, to engage empirically with the suggestion that the negative experiences of the volunteers might be the most helpful accounts for the work of the organisation. I speculate that, on the one hand, they might be more helpful in allowing LGBTQ+ youth in similar negative circumstances to relate to the educators, seeing them as peers to confide in and examples to whom they could aspire (through the notion that, despite all the difficulties, these volunteers grew up and are now comfortable to stand and speak so openly in front of them). Such tales could also help raise the awareness of non-LGBTQ+ students to the difficulties cisheteronormative structures have historically imposed and continue to enforce on the lives of LGBTQ+ people. At the same time, I could also see a risk in positioning difficult accounts above positive ones as more impactful, for the possibility of indirectly pressuring those with a less privileged experience to come forward. Ultimately, this nuanced view reveals as the most important aspect for this type of pedagogical approach the capacity to allow space for the volunteers to reflect on how they feel about sharing their experience, thereby giving them the choice — as Rede Ex Aequo does — to either share or not share their own account.

Accordingly, although the inclusion of personal stories and the awareness of the importance of embodying non-cisheteronormative identities in the classroom was present across the conversations, not all LGBTQ+ educators seemed as intent to always integrate personal experience in their practice. For example, João seemed to engage more moderately with sharing his personal story. Firstly, on the topic of practicing peer-led education through an informal engagement with students, he affirmed the importance of making LGBTQ+ people and experience visible in the school space, as a way of demystifying the LGBTQ+ community and breaking with stereotypes. He supports this method through the notion of how a more informal approach that seeks to relate to students, as opposed to talking *at* them, encourages a better empathic interaction between non-LGBTQ+ and LGBTQ+ people. At the same time, he seemed more guarded when it came to discussing his own personal experience. However, it was clear to me that this wariness did not stem from his lack of confidence to be in the school space as an openly gay man, but rather from a concern related to the didactic potential of telling his personal experience.

> **João:** When I do a session, I'm cautious about what message I'm getting across. I wear my [rainbow] bracelet, I wear my rings, I'm comfortable in that aspect. Sometimes it's even helpful to address certain topics with groups and talking about my physical appearance.

João's response clarifies how he navigates presenting himself in a way that feels comfortable and authentic to him as a gay man, and how he might even choose sometimes to employ his appearance as a didactic tool in his sessions, whilst simultaneously being conscious of what each group needs and, in that sense, what is relevant or safe for him to share. His response reflects the absence of a set rule for how much to share of his personal life. Instead, this choice is a product of his ability to balance an awareness of the educational needs of the group, their attitudes towards the topic and the educator, as well as the educator's feelings when inhabiting that particular space. This balanced awareness, which seems to be a product of his self-reflection throughout the sessions, results in the establishment of boundaries that maximise the didactic potential of the occasion, while minimising the educator's discomfort.

Picking up on João's comment about his physical appearance, namely his use of accessories that make him connected with his identity as a gay man, it feels relevant to briefly mention here that, although the volunteers prioritise openness and being genuine (including in their appearance), some mentioned they feel, at times, a need to mask a part of their political identity.

> **Rita:** Despite having my own views, I try to mask my opinions, so it doesn't look like I'm bringing an agenda to the sessions.
>
> **João:** Then there's the issue of staying impartial... In that moment of conflict, all I wanted to do […] was shout "pride!," and see if that would solve anything, but I didn't feel like, well... So, I had to look more impartial. […] I personally feel a need to distance myself from things, to create a safe basis where I can calmly discuss these topics regardless of my personal opinion, so I can then resolve the conflict temporarily.

João's comment about having to contain himself from being vocal against anti-LGBTQ+ intolerance in the classroom, as well as Rita's confession about having to hide her true political opinions, demonstrate the pressure for educators to manage their emotions — namely, having to repress their rage in order to resolve issues more easily. As we will see in the second section of the chapter, this issue of emotional management is intrinsically connected to the perceived success of one's job performance. However, I argue that here it also speaks to a more systemic issue of pressure imposed on LGBTQ+ volunteers not to look as though they are "promoting an ideology" to young students, such as is argued by the antigender advocates presented in Chapter 1.

Returning to the topic of discomfort and boundaries, Marte also made a poignant reflection on the feeling of vulnerability involved in the practice of sharing personal experiences.

> **Marte:** When you appeal to people's empathy, you're a vulnerable human being in that moment. But at the same time that you're vulnerable, you're being brave, and I feel that if you do that confidently and at genuine ease, if you're not making yourself uncomfortable, then people will empathise with you.

Marte establishes vulnerability as an inherent consequence to the process of opening oneself up to others, specifically in relation to the pedagogical practice of fostering empathy. Even though, as I have already mentioned, Marte reflected on the immense positive potential of sharing their personal experience for the success of their empathic pedagogy, they do not neglect to acknowledge the negative affect that can often come from the act of being vulnerable with groups of people in their role as an educator. Furthermore, they elaborate on this in relation to the boundaries the educator must establish in order to feel comfortable and safe, admitting to finding this task accessible to them.

> **Marte:** That balance [between vulnerability and boundaries] is difficult, but personally I think I manage it easily […]. It's about me feeling I am in control. I expose myself, but only to the extent that I want […]. That's why I say not everyone might feel that way, because it might not be comfortable for everyone. But I personally enjoy that dynamic, that vulnerability, so that I can bring in my own emotion as well.

Showing an awareness of the difficulty to navigate how vulnerable one wants to be as an educator, and thereby knowing which boundaries to create to protect themselves, Marte is clear in their compassionate assertion that not everyone might be comfortable to embrace such a task. Yet, whilst alluding to this sensitive balance and to the potential discomfort of vulnerability, I was captivated by how they also mention "enjoyment" in connection to this dynamic. Drawing, as we have seen, from a goal to foster empathy among their audiences, Marte's experience in this type of activism has allowed them to find comfort in being open with their emotions with their students.

The contributions of the volunteers as we have seen so far in this section highlight the twofold application of sharing personal experience in a pedagogical context. On the one hand, we might take away from these findings how one's personal experience with sexual and gender non-conforming identities can help LGBTQ+ youth understand their own experience, as well as point them to safe ways of expressing themselves in a more comfortable and authentic way. At the same time, the way in which the volunteers seem to navigate sharing their personal experience — highlighting themselves as people with valid identities, such as was mentioned by Marte — indicates towards the volunteers' emphasis on what I perceive as a pedagogy of empathy.

Empathy took a central role in Rede Ex Aequo's description of their work across several of our conversations. Before delving into it, I find it important to highlight Beatriz' comment about how, despite being a central aspect to their pedagogy, empathy is not the single, essential element to the role of the volunteer educator. According to Beatriz, it is imperative for Rede Ex Aequo's educators to manage to combine informational expertise with empathic skills.

> **Beatriz:** If one of our speakers has a lot of knowledge, but then isn't empathic, it's not going to work. If we have someone who's super empathic, but then doesn't know how

> to pass on the knowledge to people in a clear way, then that's also not helpful. You need a balance between knowledge and empathy.

I argue that empathy materialises in Rede Ex Aequo's approach through two ways: one relating to the volunteers' relationship to the other actors in the educational environment, and the other pertaining to the affective pedagogical aim of their sessions. The former comes across through the volunteers' expressed understanding of the limitations of teachers to relate to their students, as well as to engage with LGBTQ+ topics in their daily practice. The latter reference to empathy materialises in their pedagogy, defined largely by their empathic way of relating to the heterogeneous groups of students.

During our conversation, Beatriz argued for the importance of understanding to whom their sessions cater, in a fine balance that seeks to engage LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ youth alike. Her contribution showed a significant level of self-awareness of her own practice and goal as an educator, as well as an empathic understanding of the reason why some young people might display homophobic behaviours. Understanding the impact of students' varied social, cultural, and religious backgrounds on their views seems to allow Beatriz to be more attentive to how she approaches LGBTQ+ topics in a way that allows LGBTQ+ youth to feel understood, while also captivating the engagement of non-LGBTQ+ people in the conversation. This sentiment echoes what Bruno had told me a year before:

> **Bruno:** I think the first goal of our sessions, beside information, is to create empathy. [...] We're talking to a majority [of students] that is maybe not LGBTI, but you want them to stand with us in the fight for LGBTI [rights], and that's achieved through empathy. [...] The goal is that we can, through our dynamic, [...] make them understand that we're in fact more similar than different, and that's the idea of empathy […] the connection between people who are different than them so that they might want to help.

Bruno's response clarifies that, although one of the primary goals of Rede Ex Aequo's educational initiative is to provide informative resources to young people (as well as teachers) on LGBTQ+ topics, this specific type of learning does not come in an emotional vacuum. Rather, it is intrinsically connected to the role of empathy. By allowing students to be more connected to the subject and invested in learning about other people's experiences, this peer-led pedagogy encourages students to practice empathy in and beyond the classroom. This highlights the last, and perhaps most clear appearance of empathy in Rede Ex Aequo's pedagogy, which involves not only the educators acting through empathic awareness, but actually prioritising the development of empathy as a soft skill among students.

On this subject of integrating emotion in education, Marte expressed their support for a pedagogy that is centred around empathy, arguing:

> **Marte:** People are still at a stage where they don't really sympathise. It's not even a question of not understanding mentally, it's not being predisposed to try to understand. […] There is a major lack of empathy worldwide, and not just for LGBT people. This capitalist world really denies empathy.

Marte's critique of a systemic lack of empathy worldwide is helpful to understand how the volunteers explicitly cover LGBTQ+ topics, whilst also being aware of the systemic structures of harm and oppression that affect society at large. This contextualises the extensive impact that an affective, empathic pedagogy can have to help people relate to one another, which could also create an immeasurable positive influence in the widespread understanding of LGBTQ+ experiences.

The emphasis of these last responses from the volunteers on the importance of cultivating empathy with students points to Rede Ex Aequo's approach as deeply personal and rooted on the desire of the volunteers to educate students on being more open and compassionate to other people's experiences. This work towards social change is inevitably intertwined with the personal interest of the volunteers to fight for the rights of LGBTQ+ people, whether they identify as LGBTQ+ themselves, or as allies of the community. This points not only to their personal investment in their work but, drawing from the volunteers' emphasis on empathy and emotion, it also highlights their emotional investment and, as we will see, a required level of emotional management.

<u>The Care and Emotional Investment of LGBTQ+ Peer Educators</u>

The subject of emotional investment came up more prominently in relation to the time the volunteer educators dedicate to smaller groups of students after each session, especially in the context of their role as listeners and support figures to LGBTQ+ youth. I did not gather enough information to understand whether this practice is something encouraged during the Rede Ex Aequo training, or if it is something each of the volunteers individually pick up and choose to practice. Nevertheless, according to those with whom I spoke, the moments after each session are dedicated to listening to the students who remain in the classroom for the specific purpose of talking to the volunteer educator. During that time, the students share with the volunteers stories of their exploration of gender and sexuality, often asking for advice on topics like coming out.

On the subject of these post-session conversations with students, the topics of listening and empathy came up strongly in my conversations with Violeta and João, both of whom highlighted the importance showing support for young LGBTQ+ people in this context.

> **Violeta:** Proximity, or just a sense of concern and genuine empathy, can be enough for young people to feel like they have some support. […] Listening is fundamental because it's part of empathy, of understanding others' perspective.

> **João:** Sometimes it's not so much about answering questions, sometimes it's just about giving people an opportunity to express themselves so that afterwards they can feel lighter and able to work through it themselves. It's about active listening, about being present and [letting them] feel someone is there to give them that support. Even if it's just through body language — I'm looking at you, nodding my head, […] you're being heard, […] it's super important.

It comes across prominently in these responses that the primary goal of their post-session conversations is not necessarily to provide answers and advice, but rather to be present and support young people questioning or navigating their identity, by listening and validating their experience. The volunteers mentioned that cultivating a listening practice in the plenary sessions is more difficult, given the insufficient time they have with students and the limitations of addressing these topics with bigger groups. As such, these post-session conversations prioritise active listening, which allows students to feel heard, understood, and validated in their experience.

According to the volunteer educators, most of their post-session conversations with students occur because, as representatives of an LGBTQ+ NGO, the volunteers might often be the first openly LGBTQ+ people the students meet or get the chance to talk to. If students generally feel unsafe both at home and at school to share their experience or questions about their gender and/or sexual identity, it seems logical that the LGBTQ+ volunteers of Rede Ex Aequo should be seen as a safe source of support. This perception is shared by the volunteers, some of whom claimed as part of their role to be, as Ana Rita put it, a "safe port" for students to come to.

I approached this subject of the volunteers' provision of support to students through the terminology of "care." However, my application of care in the context of the conversations with the volunteers requires a note on the translation of the term. In Portuguese, there is no specific word to differentiate "carer" from "care-taker" (cuidador). As a result, throughout the conversations, I had to sensitively navigate my own use of the terminology to emphasise a notion of practicing care that would differ from "care-taking," as well as expand on "caring about." This necessarily influenced the different interpretations of the term across the conversations and it might have impacted how each volunteer perceived care in relation to their practice.

Violeta, for example, was sceptical of the applicability of care in her role as an educator. As a psychology master's student, Violeta's response drew from her knowledge of the context of the term in the field of psychology, which implies a carer's continuous presence and assistance of the cared for. Her disidentification with the term "carer" (understood here as care-taker) seemed to stem largely from the limitations of the work of the volunteer educators, who do not get to be a long-term, consistent presence and aid to a cared-for's life (unlike parents, schoolteachers, or support workers). However, these limitations did not lead all volunteers to disidentify with care in their educational work. In the subject of the post-session conversations with students, Marte highlighted care as a core element to their practice.

> **Marte:** We have a role of care, of being carers and almost therapists, but with no training to do so.

Marte's responses in this topic emphasised the pressure imposed on the volunteers by this lack of training, combined with the demand of the job to be a supportive figure to LGBTQ+ youth. This shows that the work of listening to students in difficult situations cannot be seen as emotionally neutral. Rather, as it was reported by my co-participants, the active effort to support and listen to young, often struggling, students affects the volunteers by touching the very core of their motivations as activists and their empathy-based practice.

This emotionally charged practice, therefore, highlights how the volunteers' emotional investment also demands a level of emotional management, not only due to the sensitive topics at hand, but primarily as a consequence of their interactions with students. As such, I want to draw attention to how, in this context, many of the volunteers reported their emotional management to be impacted in their educational practice.

The volunteer educators often mentioned having to balance how much they care and feel for the students, specifically the ones who share their difficult experiences, while also having to stay somewhat distanced from the situation, in order not to be deeply emotionally affected. This fine balance was something both Bruno and Beatriz mentioned through the metaphor of being "cold." Firstly, Bruno mentioned:

> **Bruno:** The [volunteer at] Projecto Educação has to be someone who can be somewhat motivating [...], but also a bit cold, because you might come out of a session that might've gone very wrong, there might've been people with very negative impressions, and you can't let it affect you.

Bruno considers it to be important to be both motivating and distant, with the emphasis here being on the protection of the mental health of the educator. He does not employ the concept of being "a big cold" to argue that the volunteer educator should not be invested in conversations and interactions with students. Rather, Bruno's concern and advice for volunteers to affectively distance themselves from the work seems to stem from his years of experience with the organisation, and the subsequent sensitive awareness of the harmful impact that a repeated exposure to challenging stories might have on educators. Beatriz makes a similar argument, pointing out how the stories of students can negatively affect the emotions of the educator.

> **Beatriz:** When you invest your emotions, sometimes it's difficult. Not all sessions are good. At the end of each session [students] come to me with really negative stories and that moves me a little. But it's about having the openness and compassion to speak to

> them, to explain what they can do. I do that while containing my feelings, because there are some really complicated situations, but I also try not to be cold.

We see here a slight difference in the employment of the "cold" metaphor, for while Bruno related the capacity of being cold to how the educator might internally manage and process their emotions, Beatriz refers to *not* being cold by indicating how the educator interacts with the student. Similarly to Bruno, Beatriz claims to try to balance a level of "openness and compassion," while allowing herself to manage her feelings in a way that prevents her from being too affected by the interaction with the students.

It is clear from Beatriz and Bruno's responses that there is a deep impact on the emotional management of the volunteer educators from their interaction with students — specifically when listening to more difficult experiences with which the volunteers naturally empathise. One of the ways in which this impact on volunteers' emotional management came across was through the topic of the pressure to respond to the questions and emotional needs of the questioning/LGBTQ+ youth. The most moving response came from Marte, who confessed to the pressure they have felt, in the past, to support and respond to a vulnerable young person, and the impact this caused on their own mental health.

> **Marte:** Because you get emotionally involved, you also feel the weight of the responsibility. Sometimes, you don't know the best way to act. And that's a heavy and emotionally complex question to manage. I've felt that fear once, of something that was really difficult; fear of an immense responsibility and fear of acting wrongly. In that moment I thought to myself, when I started doing this, I never thought I'd be in this situation. I shouldn't have this responsibility, no one should have this responsibility.

Marte's response has resonated with me across the entire process of writing this thesis, and I find it difficult to analyse without stripping it off its honesty and power. As a researcher, it moved me to hear Marte's admission of the pain and fear that can come from being emotionally invested in activist work. Although, as is implicit in Marte's response, a degree of emotional investment is inevitable in this type of activism, the expectation of volunteers to draw from their personhood and emotional investment should not neglect to acknowledge the deeply emotional challenges that it might bring on the volunteer educators. Rather, such an affective and emotional awareness is imperative to understand the impact of these pressures on unpaid volunteer workers, such as the sense of "responsibility" imposed on them, despite the lack of recognition of their efforts and psychological needs. This awareness is particularly important for the sustainability of this volunteer educational practice, if we take into account Marte's assertion that issues such as lack of recognition or lack of engagement (from schools or students) lead the volunteers to have to repress their fears and frustrations in order to go on. Marte mentions this whilst sharing their feelings of discouragement and frustration.

> **Marte:** It's not easy to manage that [emotional] side of things. We offer our time to this and it is a full-time job, it's not just about showing up on the day. [5]

Marte's response builds on the aforementioned weight that is associated with the management of emotions whilst performing difficult tasks as an activist. At the same time, it calls out the tendency to neglect the value of volunteer work, specifically the time one invests in it, as well as how emotionally consuming it can be. This is certainly an aspect that needs to be considered further, given the potential detrimental consequences such a neglect of one's emotional demands can have on a person practicing volunteer work alongside other, perhaps paid, occupations. This aspect was not mentioned frequently by the volunteers across the conversations, apart from Beatriz, who confessed to sometimes having to take a break from her university studies for two or three days if a school session has been particularly challenging on her mental health.

One of the reasons why, I speculate, this issue of post-session emotional recovery was not largely mentioned by the volunteer educators, is due to their tendency for focusing primarily on their motivation for practicing their work, as well as the positive feelings they predominantly notice. As such, despite the challenges shared by all volunteers across our conversations on the sustainability of their volunteer educational practice, what stood out from their contributions was an unwavering passion for their work. This came through in how most of the volunteers openly shared their enjoyment of the school sessions, as we can see in the following quotes.

> **Beatriz:** If I'm down, and if there are sessions that don't require a lot of mental effort, I like to have a session, because they affirm my purpose. It's super gratifying to know that what I'm doing, I'm doing well.
>
> **João**: Doing sessions with young people is super interesting and super fun. It's challenging. […] I really like it. It's something I would like to do beyond volunteering, to do it professionally, because it's really cool.
>
> **Marte:** [This job] has a lot of tiny euphotic moments, like the PE [Projecto Educação] sessions, […] which make me so happy. I really feel like true change is in education.

Drawing from Marte's point about the potential for change in education, I noticed that, at the root of the volunteers' enjoyment and perseverance in this practice, tends to be their personal

[5] Marte made this comment in direct relation to their work as a coordinator of one of the "núcleos" of Rede Ex Aequo, referring specifically to the lack of engagement in the meetings they set up for their local group. However, at the root of this comment is the type of resistance and emotional strength one must have as an activist. As such, from the rest of contributions of my co-participants, I extrapolate that the essence of Marte's comment can be applied not only to the work in the "núcleos," but also to Rede Ex Aequo's educational work.

investment in their cause. I now turn to this topic to further explore how to frame the educational work of Rede Ex Aequo as a quintessential form of activism.

The Personal Investment of the Activist Educator

The personal investment of the volunteer educators came across prominently through their motivations for volunteering at Projecto Educação. One of the reasons that often came up in the conversations related to the volunteers' goal to improve the current state of sexuality education in the country. We saw this in Chapter 1, specifically when I mentioned Violeta's argument for expanding sexuality education beyond its overt focus on risk-prevention and disease, and highlighting the importance of placing a bigger focus on pleasure and other positive aspects of sexuality.

A more personal and affective reason that became apparent across several of the conversations was the volunteers' desire to become the person — the role model or listener — they wanted to have had in school as young LGBTQ+ people, discovering and navigating their identity. On this topic, Carolina shared she would have liked to have a role model such as herself while trying to understand her sexuality and gender expression. Accordingly, she noted how her role as a volunteer educator is important to ensure more and better visibility of sexual and gender non-conforming experiences in school spaces. Similarly, Beatriz shared how her motivation stems from her own experience of growing up as an LGBTQ+ person.

> **Beatriz:** I want to be sure no one goes through what I went through. […] To make sure that, whenever I lead a session, someone is provided the help or the guidance they need to start living their truth. I think it's about feeling I'm making a change in people's lives. And it doesn't necessarily have to be people from the LGBT community, it can just be about people ceasing to be homophobic.

While her response points to the very personal impact one can have on young people as a peer, Beatriz also points to the wider goal of inclusive sexuality education to make the experience of LGBTQ+ people more visible in school spaces. As Beatriz explains, sexuality education, as taught by volunteers of an LGBTQ+ NGO, is not only necessary to provide support to LGBTQ+ people, but also to combat anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination by raising awareness of the experience of the community.

To delve deeper into the question of motivation for volunteering with Projecto Educação, and the personal dimension this work encompasses in its peer-led approach, I inquired about how each volunteer feels their personal investment in their practice and balances their "educator persona" and self in their educational work. I found it difficult, however, to explore the topic of personal investment in the volunteers' practice, given the amount of interpretations a concept such as "personal investment" can have. As such, the question I initially formulated — "how much do you feel you invest of yourself" — was largely interpreted along the lines of "how true do you feel you are to your personality in your educational sessions?" To this, Beatriz responded:

> **Beatriz:** Sometimes I invest more [of myself] than I should? Of course, I maintain a certain discretion not to expose myself too much. [But] I like to think I am who I am in the sessions. I talk a lot and laugh, and I like to think I'm like that in the sessions to create a sense of proximity with them [the students]. Especially because I feel like if I were restraining myself, then I wouldn't be a good speaker.

Beatriz' response started with my prompt on personal investment, in her reference to the balanced approach of exposing one's personality in one's public practice. Quickly, however, it shifted from this preconceived notion I had developed when it came to approaching the volunteers' emotional investment in their practice. As a researcher, I embraced the turn this question took in the conversation, for guiding us towards a significant point about the personality of the volunteers when embodying the role of educators in the classroom. Beatriz' response shows an awareness of the crucial effect of how the educator feels, in the way they present themselves, to the success of their educational role. This appears prominently in Beatriz' reference to how her presence influences her relationship to the students. The latter point was also brought up by Violeta, who mentioned the importance of the volunteers being true to themselves in their sessions, as a means of creating a "sense of proximity" with the students.

These responses emphasise how the personal and emotional components of the volunteer educators' pedagogy underline both their didactic work and their connection to their students. In their capacity to be authentic to their personality and passion, the volunteers ground a peer-led approach that motivates students to connect to the topics of gender and sexuality more personally, thereby helping them see LGBTQ+ identities as close to them, rather than as distant myths and stereotypes.

As such, in my reading of the volunteer educators' contributions, I perceive their work as not only pedagogical, but also as a form of activism. Although, largely, the volunteers did not self-employ the term activist to define their work, I interpret them as such in their fight for the rights and acceptance of LGBTQ+ in Portuguese society through education. By raising awareness, through their pedagogical initiative and presence in the classrooms, to the lived experience of LGBTQ+ people, Rede Ex Aequo's volunteers practice an involved approach to education that understands the importance of demystifying queerness and building bridges among LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ people alike. In doing so, they expand the reach of their teaching beyond its application in the classroom, emphasising, instead, the importance of raising awareness of non-cisheteronormative experiences and of encouraging empathy in educational spaces.

In summary, across the conversations with Rede Ex Aequo's volunteer educators, I argue that Projecto Educação's pedagogy extends beyond the provision of materials and lectures for raising awareness of the LGBTQ+ community. I found that their approach emphasises the importance of fostering empathy and care for LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ people alike, which the educators practice through active listening and being present and supportive with students in schools. The aim of this approach is to not only deconstruct anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric in schools, but also to help LGBTQ+ youth feel validated and understood in their identity. Many of the volunteers mentioned how their work establishes a space for demystifying queerness and establishing identification and a personal connection between volunteers and students. They do so, by complementing the relatability of the non-formal peer-led approach, with the encouragement for their volunteers to share their lived experience as young LGBTQ+ people, thereby emphasising the affective and emotional dimensions of this pedagogy above the element of information-provision.

Theorising Emotion and Affect in Volunteer, Peer-Led Sexuality Education

Until this moment in the thesis, I have shown how I perceive the volunteer educators at Rede Ex Aequo as not only non-formal educators, but also as activists. In their peer-led educational practice, they recognise information-provision as a crucial tool for educating young people on what it means to be an LGBTQ+ person in a cisheteronormative society. Yet, their activist educational practice combines that traditional view of education with, above all, an awareness of the importance of humanising LGBTQ+ people. As mechanisms to demystify and humanise queerness, Rede Ex Aequo positions empathy, care, and emotion at the forefront of their approach. Following this, they achieve a more holistic, humanised version of education, through openness to sharing personal experience, prioritising informal communication with students, and encouraging a process of identification between students and educators.

To further examine the aspects of personal investment, emotional management, and affect in Rede Ex Aequo's pedagogical initiative, this section turns towards a dialogue between theory from feminist studies, educational studies, and affect studies. My goal in turning towards these theoretical fields is to explore how empathy and care are understood to be included in educational practices, as well as the ramifications of this practice for the educators' management of their emotions, and their role in the affective development of their students.

The first sub-section, on empathy in education, engages with theory from Bridget Cooper (2010; 2013) and Nel Noddings (2005; 2007; 2012; 2013), to present the benefits of empathy and care to the cultivation of healthy teacher-student relationships. From the conception of the benefits of an empathic pedagogy, the second sub-section picks up on the notion of empathy as an emotion, which functions as an interrelational tool for the maximisation of learning. Following this argument, the sub-section develops, through Arlie Hochschild's (Hochschild 2022 [1983]; 2013) theory on emotional labour, a theoretical reading of the demands of emotional management reported by the peer LGBTQ+ educators. Finally, the third sub-section explores how empathy and care extend beyond their direct, interrelational application within classroom relationships, to understand how Rede Ex Aequo's empathic pedagogy might point towards a systemic change through a wider affective reach. The sub-section firstly engages with Sara Ahmed's concept of "sticky affects" to help read the long-lasting, affective potential of LGBTQ+ educators' presence in schools. Through this concept, I point to the work of Rede Ex Aequo as a producer of affects, which I examine through works on affective labour and social reproduction theory, to point towards the wider implications of the emotional and affective dimension of Rede Ex Aequo's unpaid, affective educational work. The goal of this final sub-section is to expand our understanding of the immaterial value of Rede Ex Aequo's unpaid activist/educational practice, while honouring many of the volunteers' self-reported desire to maintain their role, despite its lack of recognition or paid compensation.

In the context of framing the affective and emotional dimensions of the volunteer work of Rede Ex Aequo, it is important to firstly note that the concepts of affect and emotion were not often explicitly acknowledged or mentioned during most of my conversations with the volunteer educators. In fact, I had already noticed, during my first conversation with Bruno and Rita, the difficulty of explicitly approaching the experience of emotion, affect, and embodiment with educators in relation to their own work in the classroom. This is similarly acknowledged by Karyn Sandlos (2010), in her work with sex educators, where she argues that, "[i]n the field of sex education, […] less often do teachers have opportunities to think about and discuss the emotional demands of their role as sex educators" (Sandlos 2010, 303).

Nonetheless, throughout my conversations with Rede Ex Aequo, I found that the aspects of affect and emotion appeared as essential indicators to researching the layers of labour exercised by the volunteers. This came through in my analysis specifically in the volunteer educators' allusions to empathy and openness to sharing personal experience; emotional investment and emotional management; and their motivation to do this work as LGBTQ+ activists.

<u>Empathy and Care in Education</u>

In her work on how adolescents, teachers, and sexual health professionals interpret sexuality and emotional meanings in media, Sandlos makes the significant argument that sex education is affected by the misconception of education as merely an information-based practice. According to the researcher, there is a "tendency for adults and educators to see sex education as a problem of information provision. The focus on giving youth information, while absolutely necessary, tends to reduce teaching and learning to a technical procedure" (Sandlos 2010, 299). Doing so, she continues, disregards the ways in which the topics covered in sex education bring teachers in contact with the "messy, at times difficult, world of adolescent emotion." (299). Sandlos argues, therefore, that sex education should be recognised as a combination of both cognitive knowledge and emotional awareness, for "both information and affect are at stake" (302).

Across the next sub-sections of the chapter, we will explore this argument for the combination of emotional and cognitive efforts in education, which I extend to my reading of sexuality education, by looking at the argument of scholars in the fields of emotional labour (Hochschild 2022 [1983]; 2013), as well as affective labour (Hardt 1999; 2007; Hardt and Negri 2000), that labour engages simultaneously with "rational intelligence and with the passions or feeling." (Hardt 2007, xi). This view of education as a field that necessarily encompasses cognition and feeling is complemented with my reading of Nel Noddings, who asserts, within her framework of care in education, that being a caring teacher requires both informational and emotional levels competence (Noddings 2005; 2012). In her words: "teachers in caring relations are continually pressed to gain greater competence. The caring relation is essential as a starting point and a continuous framework of support, but it is not enough by itself to ensure competent teaching." (Noddings 2005, 5). We saw, in the previous section of the chapter, a similar position being taken by one of Rede Ex Aequo's volunteers, when arguing that the ideal volunteer in Projecto Educação is not only eloquent and knowledgeable, but is also capable of attuning to their empathic skills.

My engagement with theoretical work that delves into the inclusion of emotion and affect in education begins, thus, with an analysis of empathy. From the contributions of the volunteers presented in the first section of this chapter, I argue that empathy presents itself explicitly in the educational work of Rede Ex Aequo as a tool that impacts the building of relationships of trust and care between the actors in the learning environment. My theoretical reading of empathy in its practical application in educational contexts relates to Rede Ex Aequo's pedagogical efforts, by highlighting the potential benefits of their empathic methodology. On the one hand, this empathic pedagogy invites the feeling of empathy in the direct teacher-student relationships in the classroom. On the other hand, as we will see, empathic pedagogies also develop a conception of empathy as a tool that comes to underlie the educator's emotional conduct and caring practice with their students.

To understand the role of empathy in Rede Ex Aequo's pedagogy, I return to the works of Bridget Cooper and Nel Noddings on the effects of empathy and care in the relationships established between teachers and students in the learning process. To start, Cooper's findings on the noticeable effects of an empathic relationship in education (2010; 2013) are significant to understand both how distinct forms of empathy can emerge in different educational contexts, as well as why empathy should be understood as a helpful device for teaching and learning relations.

Based on qualitative research studies conducted in the United Kingdom that accounted, primarily, for schoolteachers' own perception of empathy in their work, Cooper reported a series of benefits that derive from the application of an empathic approach to education. Among these benefits, Cooper highlighted how showing empathy in educational environments demonstrates care and emits a message of value and concern (Cooper 2010, 91). The researcher also speaks to the reciprocal nature of empathy, arguing that teachers' demonstration of value and care for students encourages "mutual response, engagement and shared enthusiasm leading to learning" (Cooper 2013, 121). This, Cooper states, naturally contributes to the optimisation of the learning process, by encouraging more engaged teaching and learning attitudes, along with "trust, security and enthusiasm" (121). A similar point is made by Nel Noddings (2005), in arguing that, "as we listen to our students, we gain their trust and, in an on-going relation of care and trust, it is more likely that students will accept what we try to teach" (4). Thus, an empathic approach is argued by these authors to be beneficial for fostering care and trust among teachers and students, which not only encourages students to be more engaged in the curriculum, but also more receptive to the educational practices of their teachers.

Cooper further argues that, "[a]s the teacher becomes familiar with students, by valuing their opinions, they feel increasingly understood, less alien and their self-esteem grows, along with interest and enthusiasm" (Cooper 2013, 113). In the subject of valuing students' opinions, the researcher noticed that teachers show an empathic approach "as much by non-verbal as verbal communication and in the stolen moments of time and personal interaction between lessons." (Cooper 2010, 91). Underlying the assertion that a teacher's effort to value students' opinions (through verbal or non-verbal communication) builds their self-esteem and engagement seems to be the act of listening. According to Cooper's findings, when teachers take time to listen to students, time becomes "symbolic of care and concern, and makes the child feel valued and develops their attitudes to others" (Cooper 2013, 106).

Other scholars in the field of care in education have similarly highlighted the benefits of listening to teacher-student relations. Owens and Ennis (2005) point out the importance of listening in the context of encouraging dialogue between "one-caring teachers" and "cared-for students to come into contact with ideas and understandings other than their own" (395). According to the authors, dialogue

> reflects an open-ended common search for understanding, empathy, and appreciation […]. Dialogue also contributes to the development and maintenance of caring relations

> because it allows students to connect to each other and the teacher through language and shared experience. (395).

Cooper makes a similar point that dialogue is made possible through teachers' openness to communicate their own experience, which in turn is valuable for "demystifying teachers and enabling students to feel more equal and adult" (Cooper 2013, 104). In this context, Cooper noticed that, "[b]y sharing themselves, teachers become more human" (105).

Noddings also makes an argument for the importance of dialogue and listening, arguing that dialogue "is fundamental not only to moral education but to caring itself. We have to engage in dialogue to learn what the other is going through." (Noddings 2007, 55). Her reflections on the role of dialogue to caring relations in teaching are heavily based on a notion of the perils of grounding a caring educational practice solely on empathy. Although, Noddings argues, it is crucial for caring relations to be motivated by empathy — which she reads as an instinctive feeling of relatability —, empathy should not be their only driving force. According to the author, "caring cannot be reduced to empathy. […] We are sometimes too quick to say, 'I know how you feel,' and misunderstandings arise easily. […] We have to ask questions and reflect on the answers" (Noddings 2012, 775). Rather than rely on their ability to respond according to their immediate feelings of empathy, Noddings argues that teachers should, instead, be prepared to listen and respond specifically to what a given student's emotional needs require. This points to the significant challenge of an empathic pedagogy — for while it requires educators to feel empathy, and thereby *show* empathy through verbal or non-verbal communication and active listening, it also demands a deeper empathic attitude that extends beyond instinctive emotional reactions. Empathic pedagogies, therefore, require empathy to not only be a felt emotion, but also an affective baseline on which educators can ground a more attentive and responsive caring approach.

This shift between empathy as a felt emotion and empathy as the ground for responsive caring teaching can be seen in Cooper's analysis of the development of empathic teacher-student relationships over time. When analysing the perceptions of schoolteachers on the effects of an empathic approach to education, Cooper noticed a change in teachers' attitudes from what she describes as "fundamental empathy" to "profound empathy" (Cooper 2010). The former refers to a baseline level of empathy with which educators can begin establishing a relationship with their students, adopting a non-judgemental approach that involves "being accepting and open in their beliefs and attitudes, paying close attention to others' feelings, listening carefully, showing signs of interest and being very positive in verbal and non-verbal communication." (86). Profound empathy is built on this baseline, developed over time "and with frequency of interaction […], resulting in deeper understanding and higher quality relationships where teachers demonstrate personal levels of care and concern" (87).

Cooper's argument for the progressive changes of the empathic attitudes of teachers relies on this need for "frequency of interaction." This point is similarly brought up by Noddings, who argues that the continuity "of persons and place increase the possibility that there will be continuity in education experience." (Noddings 2012, 776). Grounding both of these comments is a critique of the system of standardised education. Echoing the critiques to formal education and standardised curricula we saw in Chapter 2, Cooper denounces how the current structure of education disallows teachers to invest in their empathic relationships with students, specifically by limiting their time together and overwhelming their empathic capacity with highly packed classrooms. In Cooper's words:

> Profound empathy seems to require substantial quantities of time and frequency of interaction […]. A teacher's desire to deeply know individuals is thwarted by the number of pupils, the infrequency of contact and the continuous bombardment of curriculum and associated activities, leaving little space for the valuing of pupil understanding or personhood (Cooper 2010, 94).

This, according to Cooper, becomes an issue to the establishment of empathic teacher-student relations. This is due to how highly the continuity and frequency of contact between teachers and students impact the effects of empathic pedagogies developed over time. Cooper divides these effects into three categories: immediate, deeper, and consolidated (Cooper 2013, 103). Her model of the development of teachers' empathic attitudes and behaviours in teacher-student relationships refers to empathy as something felt by teachers in their contact with students, as well as an affective attitude that can be developed, with purpose, across time.

Cooper's and Noddings' arguments for the need for continuity to develop successful empathic teacher-student relationships can be helpful to understand the mixed views of Rede Ex Aequo's volunteers on whether or not they practice care as volunteer educators. The perception of work of care in its demand for continuity and frequency of interaction seems to naturally disregard the volunteer educator, in their sporadic school visits, as a caring figure. However, I argue that a caring and empathic pedagogy is nevertheless at the very root of Rede Ex Aequo's educational practice. This is reflected in how they emphasise a practice of active listening, demystify the figure of the educator by informally sharing their own experience, and demonstrate support for students through either verbal or non-verbal communication — even through the simple act of being present and validating students' identity.

Understanding the labour of care that underlies the volunteer work of Rede Ex Aequo's educators helps understand the limits felt by the volunteers to engage in deeper, empathic relationships with students, as a consequence of the structural inadequacies of the educational system in which they are embedded. At the same time, it also opens a conversation about the emotional work adjacent to Rede Ex Aequo's active efforts to foster a caring and empathic pedagogy.

<u>Emotional Labour of Sex Education</u>

In the previous section, I delved into theory on the traits and effects of empathic and caring pedagogies and educators. Despite the inability to provide continuous support to their students, Rede Ex Aequo's volunteer educators provide a caring and empathic approach to their practice. These traits of their approach emphasise the role of emotional investment, and thereby demand a consideration of the emotional dimension of this educational work. To do this, I start by engaging with theory on emotional labour, primarily through the work of Arlie Hochschild (2022 [1983]; 2013), which I extend to a reading of education. Rather than point to emotional labour as the most suitable lens to understand the questions of emotional investment and emotional management experienced by Rede Ex Aequo's volunteers, I want to briefly point towards traits of the framework of emotional labour that might fit the present analysis, and others that might limit our reading of this type of volunteer educational work.

Arlie Russell Hochschild's *The Managed Heart* (Hochschild 2022 [1983]) presents a sociological deep dive into people's emotional management in social and professional contexts. There, Hochschild introduces the concept of "emotional labour," which she defines as labour that requires the worker's capacity for "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*." (7). Defining it as the "coordination of mind and feeling," Hochschild argues that commercialised emotional management leads one to "induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others." (7).

To illustrate the concept of emotional labour, Hochschild's most prominent example is that of the work of flight attendants, which also extends naturally to multiple jobs in the service industry that require social interaction between workers and customers. According to the scholar, not only do flight attendants perform physical labour and mental labour, but they also engage in emotional labour. Emotional labour comes through in this particular example through the flight attendants' performance of comforting smiles that aim to "reflect the company's disposition — its confidence that its planes will not crash, […] its welcome and its invitation to return" (4). Comforting and confident smiles become, therefore, a job requirement to optimise the contentment of customers.

According to Hochschild, however, this appeal to clients through the worker's fabrication of actions such as smiling comes at the expense of the emotional management of the worker. A smile is not only the worker's immediate, faked emotional expression to an interaction with a client, but it becomes the expression of an internalised method for managing one's emotions in the workplace. This becomes clear to Hochschild in her observation of how service workers come to repress their negative emotions in the workplace, as a way of disguising their real emotions to please their clients. According to her, "part of the job is to disguise fatigue and irritation […]. Because it is easier to disguise fatigue and irritation if they can be banished altogether, at least for brief periods, this feat calls for emotional labor." (8).

Emotional labour, then, according to Hochschild, demands for the worker to "attune herself to a client's needs, to empathize with the client, and to manage her own emotions in the course of doing so" (Hochschild 2013, 27). As such, emotional labour comes as a consequence of not only the worker managing their own emotions, but doing so with an attentive perception and understanding of the "client's" own emotions. As is written by Dieter Zapf (2002), "[t]o be able to manage the clients' emotions, the accurate perception of their emotions is an important prerequisite." (240). This links directly to the aforementioned theory by Noddings on the importance of dialogue and listening, through which the carer can work to establish a meaningful connection with the cared-for that prioritises the cared-for's expressed needs.

Several scholars in educational studies have, across the last couple of decades, incorporated the concept of emotional labour to a reading of the teaching profession (Hargreaves 1998; Intrator 2006; Isenbarger and Zembylas 2006; Tsang 2011). Andy Hargreaves (1998) argues that teaching "is not just a matter of knowing one's subject, being efficient, having the correct competences, or learning all the right techniques. Good teachers […] are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and fill their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy" (835). This emotional charge embedded in teaching, according to Hargreaves, leads teaching to involve "immense amounts of emotional labor. Not just 'acting out' feelings superficially […], but also consciously working oneself up into a state of actually experiencing the necessary feelings […] required to perform one's job well" (840).

One limitation to the application of emotional labour to the present analysis of Rede Ex Aequo's volunteer-based educational work relates to how most literature on the emotional labour of teaching considers, primarily, the consistent, everyday practice of schoolteachers. The lack of theory on the emotional labour of outsourced educational entities, who work specifically on a voluntary, sporadic basis, reveals a challenge in understanding how emotional labour might differ according to the time spent by educators with their students.

Another limitation I found in my analysis is the extent to which we can identify emotional management in education as a fabrication of emotions for a specific purpose in the worker-client relationship. Teaching is an inherently different activity to working in the service industry. As such, the means through which the educator manages their emotions to improve the experience of "the client" (the student) are much more subtle, and thereby more difficult to perceive — by both the researcher and the research participants —, than the comforting smiles of a flight attendant.

One of the ways in which this became apparent in my own research was through my attempt at alluding, in my conversations with the volunteers, to their thoughts on "playing a part" in their role as educators, in line with Hochschild's notion of surface acting and deep acting (Hochschild 2022 [1983]). None of the volunteer educators ever mentioned "acting," or any resembling metaphor to refer to achieving a certain pedagogical effect with students. On the contrary, as we have seen from the volunteers' contributions across my research, they seem to prioritise being genuine to their personality (albeit, perhaps, in a more filtered way), for knowing that their intended empathic approach can only be achieved if the students see them being true to themselves and to their experience. In this sense, although a level of emotional influence might take place through Rede Ex Aequo's employment of an informal, empathic approach, which seeks to leave students more at ease and receptive to learning, this approach does not require the volunteers to make an extra emotional effort to influence their own emotions, and by extension their students' emotions.

Making an effort to be genuine as peer educators, does not, however, discount the level of emotional management that takes place in Rede Ex Aequo's work. One of the ways in which the labour of emotional management became clear in the conversations with the volunteers was through Bruno and Beatriz' assertions, quoted earlier in the chapter, of the need to show support for their students, becoming neither too invested nor too distant (or "cold"). In these situations, rather than fabricating a sense of empathy, the volunteers' mental health requires for them to restrain their empathic investment, in a way that allows them the objectivity to help and support the student, without becoming too close to their situation. The conversations with the volunteers revealed this effort to be a recognised form of self-care and protection from the negative charge of the challenging stories to which they listen on regular basis.

Another way in which emotional labour interferes with the volunteers' goal of being authentic in their personalities and emotions comes through the issue of managing conflict or misinformation in the classroom context. We saw this in the first section, when some of the volunteers acknowledged a frequent need in their educational practice to show impartiality in the classroom, specifically in a way that masks their frustration or anger at a specific negative comment.

Overall, the concept of emotional labour seems useful to reveal the forms of unacknowledged and undervalued labour performed by volunteer LGBTQ+ educators, by pointing to the difficult emotional tasks they must manage, in order to better relate to their students and ensure the success of their empathy-based pedagogy. However, emotional labour also has limits in its analytical scope for the context of the present research.

The first limiting aspect relates to how this framework largely defines emotional management as the artificial production of emotions (from the worker and onto the client), which has an often imperceptible application in educational contexts. A second limiting factor to the analysis of emotional labour in education relates to its dependency on educators' reflective accounts of their experience in classrooms. From my brief experience interviewing educators on these topics, I have noticed that, for the most part, educators tend to struggle to precisely articulate their emotions, due to their tendency to focus more on their students than on themselves. Thirdly, and lastly, the concept of emotional labour seems to be predominantly attached to the tangible emotions felt and/or fabricated by workers in the context in which they are face to face with the client. We can relate this to part of Rede Ex Aequo's empathic approach, which, as we have seen, prioritises helping students feel heard and validated in their identities. Nevertheless, this framework does not account for the wider effects of their empathy-based pedagogy on the affective development of students, which seeks to cultivate a practice of empathy that extends beyond the classroom and onto all their future relationships (with LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ people alike).

Therefore, in order to make sense of the wider reach of Rede Ex Aequo's pedagogy, which is intimately connected to their LGBTQ+ activism, I close this chapter by proposing another theoretical framework to consider the emotional dimension of this work. Returning to the practice of empathy, I firstly turn to Sara Ahmed's (2010; 2014) concept of "sticky" affects to understand the production of affects within sexuality education, which is followed by a brief exploration of the concept of "affective labour" (Hardt 1999; 2007; Hardt and Negri 2000).

Affective Labour of Sexuality Education

We saw in the sub-section on empathy and care that empathy is not limited to the feelings of an educator, which might influence how, and the extent to which, they are able to communicate and care for their students. If we return to the findings from Cooper's research, we see the potential of empathy to be cultivated in student-teacher relations, in a way that encourages both their immediate relationship to learning and with one another, while also helping students achieve a deeper affective engagement with others. This falls in line with Noddings' description of the effects of a model of care in education, through its emphasis on developing a "capacity to be moved by the affective condition of the other" (Noddings 2012, 773). This argument is particularly important to the present analysis of non-formal education led by LGBTQ+ educators and allies. Understanding how empathic pedagogies not only influence direct student-teacher relationships, but can equally impact the wider affective reach of students towards others throughout their lives, helps us question how an affective, empathic pedagogy might interact with LGBTQ+ awareness-raising in educational environments.

To describe empathy as affect is to understand the preconscious dimensions of empathy beyond what is felt in interpersonal interactions between the self and other bodies. Eric Shouse (2005) describes affect as a concept more abstract than feeling and emotion — "a non-conscious experience of intensity." According to Shouse, "affect plays an important role in determining the relationship between our bodies, our environment, and others, and the subjective experience that we feel/think as affect dissolves into experience." In this conception, despite it being difficult to pinpoint in its almost ethereal essence, affect is nonetheless present across all experience and relationships between physical bodies. This is similarly pointed out by Sara Ahmed (2010), when describing affect as "what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects." (29).

Ahmed's conception of affect is grounded on the impact of the inscription of specific emotions on objects, depending on socio-cultural norms and ideas. To conceive this impact, Ahmed refers to the "stickiness" of affects (Ahmed 2010; 2014). According to the author, "sticky" affects occur as a result of repeated impressions of cultural norms on bodies and objects, of "histories of contact that have already impressed upon the surface of the object." (Ahmed 2014, 90). Objects, Ahmed's theory goes, become sticky with specific forms of affect, when repeated encounters between bodies elicit the same emotional reaction.

The concept of sticky affects implies a circular phenomenon, wherein objects become associated with a specific affective state, perceived only insofar as we have been taught to perceive those objects before we encounter them. This is explicitly the case when Ahmed mentions the "unhappy queer" (Ahmed 2010). Related to the example of a queer girl coming out to her family, Ahmed describes the unhappiness projected by the girl's parents, not as a consequence of her being queer per se, but as a reaction of fear for the girl's own potential unhappiness. This constitutes the unhappy queer through a self-fulfilling prophecy, wherein the family's reaction "creates the very affective state of unhappiness that is imagined to be the inevitable consequence of the daughter's decision […], the unhappy queer is made unhappy by the world that reads queers as unhappy." (42). Essential to the concept of stickiness, therefore, is Ahmed's assertion that affects, such as disgust, are not inherent qualities of objects that we perceive through a "gut feeling" (Ahmed 2014, 83). Rather, our reaction of disgust towards objects is "mediated by ideas that are already implicated in the very impressions we make of others and the way those impressions surface as bodies." (83).

Ahmed's theory on the stickiness of affects highlights the explicit detrimental influence of socio-cultural impressions on our affective engagement with objects, specifically in relation to queer bodies and identities. Her work emphasises that this phenomenon is not inconsequential, but rather directly affects human relationships by moving us closer or away from each other. She emphasises this, on the one hand, in relation to disgust, arguing that, "through disgust, bodies 'recoil' from their proximity, as a proximity that is felt as nakedness or as an exposure on the skin surface." (83). In contrast with the power of disgust to make bodies recoil from one another, Ahmed also writes about the positive potential of affects, like happiness, to bringing bodies together. Ahmed writes:

> Happiness thus puts us into intimate contact with things; you are affected positively by something, even if that something does not present itself as an object of consciousness. To be affected in a good way can survive the coming and going of objects (Ahmed 2010, 31).

Through the concept of happiness, Ahmed puts a positive spin on feminist and queer theory, to understand how bodies might continue to be drawn to one another within the context of a cisheteronormative, white supremacist patriarchy. Yet, she does so whilst keeping in mind the histories of "bad feelings" (50) that allow for the good ones to come through. In Ahmed's words: "If injustice does have unhappy effects, then the story does not end there. Unhappiness is not our endpoint. If anything, the experience of being alienated from the affective promise of happy objects gets us somewhere" (50).

I find Ahmed's nuanced understanding of the implication of positive and negative affects on human relationships captivating to help us make sense of empathy in the work of Rede Ex Aequo as a positive sticky affect. Rede Ex Aequo's educational practice constitutes empathy as a tool for challenging and subverting socially ingrained myths and prejudices, as well as socially constructed affective responses like disgust, against people of the LGBTQ+ community. By being present in schools as an openly LGBTQ+ organisation, fostering empathy between students and volunteers, Rede Ex Aequo and their activist work in education involves a politically subversive production of affects towards the acceptance of LGBTQ+ people. For this reason, I propose we develop on this reading of this unpaid, activist work with affect through the concept of "affective labour."

Affective labour, as developed by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000), expands on the aforementioned theory on emotional labour. Their work on affective labour points to the reorganisation of the Western political economy, through its focus on the production of human subjectivities and information above the production of material commodities — specifically through the production of affects. Moreover, in referring to affective labour as immaterial, Hardt and Negri emphasise that, despite being corporeal and affective, "its products are intangible: a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, passion — even a sense of connectedness or community." (Hardt and Negri 2000, 292/293). Echoing Hochschild's (2022 [1983]) argument for emotional labour's coordination of mind and feeling, Hardt (2007) also states that the concept of affective labour "is meant to bring together […] the corporeal and intellectual aspects of the new forms of production, recognizing that such labor engages at once with rational intelligence and with the passions or feeling" (xi).

Although the differences between Hochschild's emotional labour and Hardt and Negri's affective labour might seem subtle, Shiloh Whitney (2018) makes a succinct distinction between the two frameworks. While, Whitney argues, Hochschild's work "drew attention to the commercialization of affective life such that paid work expanded into affective activities that had previously been understood as […] private," affective labour illustrates the "dissolution of the boundary between work and life, commodity production and social reproduction." (640). Johanna Oksala (2016) also relates affective labour to social reproduction, by arguing that "affective labor, when it is understood as reproductive labor, not only produces positive externalities such as socialization, education, and interpersonal values of belonging, but it produces, essentially, human beings." (297). Taking the form of either waged on unwaged labor, Oksala argues that affective labour does not seek to "directly reproduce labor power but instead aims at producing affects." (290). This is achieved, according to Whitney, through the "direct investment of affective energy from worker to consumer through some modality of contact." (Whitney 2018, 642).

This affective energy from worker to consumer is, as we have seen, prevalent in the work of Rede Ex Aequo. Through their practice, which involves not only informational and didactic skills, but above all an emotional and affective capacity, their educational initiative works towards "producing human beings" who are not just opposed to anti-LGBTQ rhetoric, but are actively empathetic towards their LGBTQ+ peers. This capacity to produce empathy is in direct correlation with Rede Ex Aequo's activist work, which demands a profound level of dedication from the volunteer educators to their social cause, and motivation for their volunteers (the majority of which identify as LGBTQ+) to continuously enter cisheteronormative school spaces, and face a myriad of reactions towards their identities and pedagogical contents.

I find it important here to reiterate that this motivation and commitment to sexuality education is, in the end, an unpaid occupation for most of the workers at Rede Ex Aequo. Although their work is, as we have seen across this thesis, imperative for the provision of information and affective development of both LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ youth, the volunteers report frustrations at the lack of resources and funding of the NGO. This limits Rede Ex Aequo's scope of work, and it necessarily imposes an added pressure on educators to invest more of their time and emotion, whilst balancing volunteer work with other paid or educational occupations.

This issue of lack of resources and waged compensation for Rede Ex Aequo's educators' work calls for me to turn again to Hardt and Negri, and how their framework of affective labour, following emotional labour and social reproduction theory, seeks to call attention to social inequalities in the labour market. In pointing to the increasing appreciation of the production of affects under capitalist structures, Hardt and Negri employ the concept of affective labour to point to the types of unrecognised immaterial labour and "social value of what has traditionally been considered women's work" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 274). The concept has, since, become progressively used to attend to the labour disproportionately performed by women, especially women of colour, in Western capitalist societies (Weeks 2007; Oksala 2016; Whitney 2018). By applying the concept of affective labour to the present analysis of Rede Ex Aequo's work, I could not help but be curious as to whether we could expand on this recognition of affective labour as gendered and racialised, to include the potential unequal exploitation of LGBTQ+ people to perform affective and social reproductive work in schools.

Because Rede Ex Aequo's unwaged educational work seems imperative to the social reproduction of accepting cisheterosexual people, as well as healthy and happy young LGBTQ+ people, this problematises how unwaged social reproductive work in sexuality education might carry a specific form of exploitation, due to the majority of Rede Ex Aequo's volunteers identifying as LGBTQ+ people. This issue was present in my mind as I began the conversations with the volunteers. However, focusing on the issue of exploitation progressively seemed to be paying a disservice to the volunteers themselves. As I have argued, the volunteer educators seemed to predominantly focus on the joy and fulfilment of their work, rather than dwelling on their specific form of oppression or their lack of resources. As such, although I maintain the hypothesis that there is a level of specificity to the LGBTQ+ experience in affective labour that could potentially be under exploitation under the current educational system, the scope of my thesis project led me to focus predominantly on the volunteers' perception of emotional investment and affective production, without turning it to an issue of exploitation.

It is crucial to consider the specificities of the emotional and affective labour of LGBTQ+ volunteer educators for proposing improvements to the funding of projects such as Projecto Educação. However, it is also important to honour the volunteers' passion and dedication as a way of remembering why such projects demand our consideration. As such, I became drawn to Hochschild's reflection on the possibility for emotional (and, I read, affective) labour to be enjoyable (Hochschild 2013).

In "Can emotional labor be fun?" (Hochschild 2013), Hochschild writes of an awareness that certain issues are not inherent to emotional labour, but are rather a consequence of the conditions of capitalism that consistently undervalue this labour. According to the author, in "an age of public budget cuts, layoffs, high turnover, and public criticism of the public sector and its workers, it can be hard to enjoy doing emotional labor" (27). This, she continues, comes as a consequence of the "devaluation of care," perceived as "'easy,' 'natural,' and — like parenting — not quite real work.'" (30). However, Hochschild contends this does not have to be the case. Instead, she argues, one can enjoy emotional labour, as well as take pride "in cultivating warm, trusting, and resilient relationships" in their work (27).

Oksala writes that, "while labor struggles aiming to achieve political recognition for affective labor are undoubtedly important, the more fundamental problem concerns […] how certain affective services can be properly compensated at all. How do we monetize affective labor?" (Oksala 2016, 292). The question of financial compensation is undeniably important to the present analysis, especially considering some volunteers' expression of their desire to work in the field of sexuality education, if only it were a stable, waged occupation in Portugal. For this reason, it seems fitting to answer this question of monetising affective labour through Hochschild's proposal for structural changes, which might allow workers to feel fulfilled in their performance of emotional labour. Fixing the broken system that disregards affect and care, according to Hochschild, "starts with recognizing the extraordinary emotional labor it takes to maintain a thriving childcare center, nursing home, hospital, or family" (Hochschild 2013, 31). If we include education and, especially, sexuality education in this framework, we can join Rede Ex Aequo's volunteer educators in hoping for change, and align with Hochschild in believing that, in a world that accepts emotional and affective labour, "jobs requiring emotional labor could still be tough, but they would be meaningful and even fun" (31).

Concluding Thoughts

This final chapter focused on how Rede Ex Aequo works with empathy, care, and emotion as mechanisms to demystify and humanise queerness. By engaging with the contributions of the volunteers on their experience as LGBTQ+ educators, I showed that their volunteer work prioritises an ability to encourage a sense of relatability with students through informal relating, and by making room for discussions on personal experience. This, in turn, constitutes an empathic pedagogy, which I showed to be grounded on active listening and on the demonstration of support of students through verbal and non-verbal communication. I also addressed the challenges that this unpaid educational work demands, especially in relation to the educators' emotional management, while acknowledging the feelings of optimism and positivity that came across in all conversations with the volunteers.

In dialogue with the volunteers' contributions, the chapter also delved into theory that contributed to our understanding of the different dimensions of empathy, as both emotion and affect, in this type of activist-driven educational work. I pointed towards empathy as a pedagogical tool that benefits the learning process, by making teacher-student relationships stronger. I followed this by exploring the application of the concept of emotional labour to my reading of peer-led sexuality education. This revealed benefits to understanding the emotional investment and emotional management of educators, whilst also carrying its own set of limitations to the reading of my case study. Moving away from the limiting notion of empathy as a felt emotion, I sought to make sense of the wider effects of an empathic pedagogy beyond the classroom walls. I thus explored the notion of empathy as affect through Ahmed's conception of "sticky affects," and subsequently framed the implications of Rede Ex Aequo's engagement with affect through the framework of affective labour.

I concluded from my analysis of the volunteers' perception of their pedagogical methods that their form of informal relating and personal engagement grounds Projecto Educação's empathic pedagogy. My analysis revealed that this empathic pedagogy — which seems to simultaneously encompass challenges, pain, passion, and joy — is intrinsically connected to the volunteers' LGBTQ+ activism. Their work with empathy functions as a form of positive "sticky affect," which is made clear from how their presence in schools as an openly LGBTQ+ organisation applies empathy as a tool for challenging and subverting socially ingrained myths and prejudices, as well as negative, socially constructed affective responses against the LGBTQ+ community. In the end, I conclude that, what I interpret as the volunteers' dual practice as educators and activists is visible in their commitment to providing young people with support, which not only allows questioning or LGBTQ+ youth to safely explore their identity, but also helps combat anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination in school spaces.

Conclusion

This thesis sought to explore as its main research question how the experiences of volunteer peer-educators with emotional investment, personal experience, care, and empathy contribute to understanding emotional labour and affective labour in educational practices.

To explore this topic, I had the privilege of collaborating with the Portuguese NGO Rede Ex Aequo, and the volunteers working at their educational initiative Projecto Educação LGBTI. Complementing the interview I conducted with 2 volunteers in a paper on this topic in 2022, I took part in 6 additional in-depth, semi-structured conversations with volunteer educators, who were open and generous in sharing their own practical and emotional experience with the NGO. These conversations were crucial to the development of my project, in making the subject matter of the thesis so much more personal, and grounding my commitment to sharing the volunteers' experience. At the same time, these conversations were fundamental to empirically engage with the organisation's non-formal approach to education, thereby helping me structure my thesis around an exploration of the inclusion of emotion and affect in peer-led sexuality education.

I approached my research topic by starting, in Chapter 1, with an engagement with the socio-political and legislative context for the implementation of sexuality education in the EU and, specifically, Portugal. Through the reading of research conducted in Portugal, I showed that, despite the relatively satisfactory application of sexuality education since it was made compulsory in 2009, the high-quality application of the subject is still facing significant structural and cultural limitations. I engaged with recent examples of the radical antigender movement, in their vocal backlash against LGBTQ+ people and sexuality education. From this engagement, I concluded that the antigender discourse carries potential negative consequences to the view of the LGBTQ+ community and sexuality education by the general public, including concerned parents, as well as politicians and other figures in charge of future policies on the subject.

In my analysis of the Portuguese socio-political context, I was largely driven by frustration at the systemic lack of attention to government-implemented, school-based sexuality education. However, my research journey through the Portuguese educational landscape led me to the realisation that, when it comes to sexuality education, we should not just examine school-based practices. Instead, we should consider the large body of work being performed by small NGOs, prioritising the topics of inclusivity and acceptance. In this context, I pointed to the outsourced work of Rede Ex Aequo on the topics of sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions as crucial, given the inadequate coverage of LGBTQ+ experiences in the current governmental guidelines for sexuality education. Through the contribution of Rede Ex Aequo's volunteer educators, I defined a need for schools to collaborate with LGBTQ+ NGOs on curriculum-building and teacher-training, in order to devise more inclusive materials and help schoolteachers support students navigating their gender and sexuality.

Following this, I proposed in Chapter 2 that the work of Rede Ex Aequo with a peer-led pedagogy, specifically in their capacity to relate to students through a more personal and engaged way, can be understood as an alternative to the restrictive format of formal education and standardised curricula, as theorised by educational scholars. By engaging with scholarship from educational studies, I noted a tendency for the commodification and disembodiment of education, as theorised by Paulo Freire and bell hooks, which hinders the emotional and political engagement of students and teachers in the learning process. My literature review of this work, in combination with a reading of Nel Noddings and Bridget Cooper's works on care and empathy in education, revealed how research has shown convincingly that formal education causes a constraint on teachers' capacity to engage in dialogue with their students beyond the set curriculum. This, I pointed out, carries negative implications to the successful implementation of sexuality education, given its significant dependence on teachers' ability to show investment in their students and create safe spaces for identity exploration.

Conversely, the emotionally engaged pedagogy of Rede Ex Aequo takes on an alternative, non-formal approach. I found their specific non-formal approach, practiced at large in school spaces, challenging to read in the context of educational scholarship that tends to largely conceive non-formal education in the Global North only outside formal structures. My analysis of Rede Ex Aequo's approach, thus, expands on this scholarship, by pointing to the way in which Projecto Educação incorporates both formal and non-formal attributes to collaborate with the school system, instead of seeking to exist outside it. I highlighted this as a significant aspect to consider in a future systemic application of similar outsourced, alternative pedagogical projects at a national level, for pointing to the possibility of motivating creative pedagogies and more engaged teacher-student relationships without the need for restructuring the entire formal school system.

The third and final chapter of the thesis focused on the way in which Rede Ex Aequo works with empathy, care, and emotion as mechanisms to demystify and humanise queerness. In this chapter, I shared my interpretation that the work of Rede Ex Aequo's volunteers positions them as both educators and activists. I pointed to how their engagement with informal relating and personal investment works towards establishing an empathic pedagogy that prioritises challenging and subverting socially ingrained myths and prejudices, as well as negative, socially constructed affective responses against the LGBTQ+ community. In order to understand the multiple dimensions of this empathic pedagogy, I engaged with Sara Ahmed's work on "sticky affects," Arlie Russell Hochschild's framework of emotional labour, and Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's concept of affective labour. Together, these theoretical works helped me make sense of the complicated implications of the involvement of pain, passion, and joy in Rede Ex Aequo's unpaid educational labour. They contributed to grounding my understanding of how Rede Ex Aequo's capacity to produce empathy demands a profound level of dedication and endurance from the volunteer educators to their social cause, in their mission to provide young people with support to safely explore their identity, as well as to help combat anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination in school spaces.

Recommendations for Researchers, Schools, and Administrators

Although my project achieved what it had predominantly set out to do, it also had its limitations. To start, my interest in balancing an understanding of the challenges and passion felt by the participants from my case study made me move away from the line of inquiry on the specificity of LGBTQ+ exploitation in affective labour. I believe further research into this topic should follow up on this issue, to understand how LGBTQ+ people might be vulnerable to exploitation under these types of activist practices in a largely cisheteronormative educational system.

Additionally, I want to see further research examine how gender and race might play into LGBTQ+ dynamics in sexuality education. Although these indicators were on my mind as I conducted my research, as I mentioned before, my findings and discussion were limited by the small group of participants I was able to work with.

I showed in this thesis that, despite its lack of recognition, funding, and resources, Rede Ex Aequo's work is imperative to the provision of inclusive sexuality education to young people, under the current socio-political and educational landscape in Portugal. For this reason, I would like to finish on a recommendation to schoolteachers, school principals, parents, and local governments and administrators for their future engagement with NGOs like Rede Ex Aequo.

I advocate that the outsourced educational work of NGOs like Rede Ex Aequo should be recognised and valued more for their efforts to contribute to the healthy development and well-being of young people in Portuguese schools. This improvement in the recognition of Rede Ex Aequo's contribution to education should be twofold. On the one hand, this support should have financial repercussions. Better funding for the NGO would help them expand their team, which would consequently allow them to reach more schools across the country, conduct safer and more dynamic sessions with more than one educator, and protect the mental health and well-being of all educators by lessening their workload and travelling demands. Moreover, the government and local administrations should invest in supporting schools in collaborating with LGBTQ+ NGOs on curriculum-building and teacher-training in sexuality education, in order to devise more inclusive materials and help LGBTQ+ students feel safer and supported. Basic teacher-training on sexuality education, guided by experts in the field, would provide support to more students across the country, as well as allow NGOs to address more complex topics in schools.

At the same time, there should also be an emphasis in the social recognition and protection of this activist-driven educational work, especially by public and governmental entities. The Portuguese government's consistent tendency to stay silent when sexuality education, especially that provided by LGBTQ+ people, is attacked in the media and accused of indoctrinating children reveals a level of prejudice and shame that limits open conversations on gender and sexuality and strongly contributes to halting progress. In this context, I argue for the importance of understanding that the progressive laws in place, on their own, are not enough for enacting change, but that they must be complemented by real policy and action. As such, my aim for this thesis is not to encourage a passive appreciation for the work of Rede Ex Aequo. Rather, I hope it inspires researchers, schoolteachers, parents, and administrators to search for ways to actively support these organisations in their fight for the right to high-quality education, as well as for the safety and well-being of present and future LGBTQ+ generations.

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Appendix

Information on Interviews

Beatriz

- Date of interview: 27/03/2023;
- Place: Café in Lisbon;
- Duration of interview: 1 hour;
- 2 years of experience with the organisation in the role of educator and project coordinator;
- Very relaxed atmosphere over coffee; I was nervous going into this first interview, but Beatriz was extremely kind and helpful at putting me at ease and establishing a comfortable register for our entire conversation;
- Medium of data collection: handwritten notes, audio recording;
- Pages where I quote/refer to her: 10, 17, 36, 37, 40, 45, 48-52, 61.

João:

- Date of interview: 28/03/2023;
- Place: Café in Lisbon;
- Duration of interview: 1 hour and 20 minutes;
- Over 2 years of experience with the organisation;
- Relaxed, comfortable conversation;
- Medium of data collection: handwritten notes, audio recording;
- Pages where I quote/refer to him: 16, 17, 27, 35-37, 42, 43, 47, 51.

Ana Rita:

- Date of interview: 29/03/2023;
- Place: Café in Lisbon;
- Duration of interview: 30 minutes;
- A few years of experience with the organisation;
- Relaxed conversation, even more informal than the other ones; I had not planned on being able to talk to Ana Rita after observing her leading the school session, so I was grateful to be able to talk to her for a few minutes, without focusing on taking notes or recording;
- Medium of data collection: reflective handwritten notes after the interview;
- Pages where I quote/refer to her: 9, 27, 35, 47.

Carolina:

- Date of interview: 30/03/2023;
- Place: Café in Lisbon;
- Duration of interview: 2 hours and 30 minutes;
- Over one year of experience with the organisation, in addition to previous experience in non-formal education;
- Very relaxed atmosphere over breakfast; open and in-depth conversation about Carolina's past and lived experience, without following many interview prompts; Carolina seemed very relaxed, but at times during this conversation, I felt very conscious of the fact that we

were talking in a public space, and unfortunately got taken out of the moment by worrying whether people might say something to us;
- Medium of data collection: handwritten notes;
- Pages where I quote/refer to her: 9, 41, 51.

<u>Violeta:</u>
- Date of interview: 31/03/2023;
- Place: Café in Lisbon;
- Duration of interview: 50 minutes;
- Recently joined the organisation — at the time of our conversation, Violeta had assisted 2 school sessions;
- Relaxed and open conversation; I worried, during the conversation, that it was not flowing as smoothly as it had with the volunteers with more experience, as Violeta had fewer stories to tell, but her fresh and more objective perspective was valuable in ways I could only perceive during my analysis;
- Medium of data collection: handwritten notes and audio recording;
- Pages where I quote/refer to her: 16, 26, 36, 40, 42, 47, 48, 51, 52.

<u>Marte:</u>
- Date of interview: 05/04/2023;
- Place: Online;
- Duration of interview: 1 hour and 20 minutes;
- Significant experience with the organisation in the role of educator and coordinator of a local "Núcleo"
- Comfortable, yet also intense conversation; I was nervous about navigating the online medium, but Marte's honest and openness quickly dissolved the walls that the digital distance tends to create;
- Medium of data collection: handwritten notes, audio recording, video recording;
- Pages where I quote/refer to them: 8, 16, 27, 41, 44-46, 48-51.