

## Comics reading for the welfare of adolescents in residential care


### Lectura de cómics para el bienestar de los adolescentes en acogimiento residencial

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### Abstract

Comic book reading, as a vernacular and informal practice, has been shown to be a useful tool for narrating and working on complex and painful events with adolescents. Young people in Residential Foster Care (AR) have suffered multiple violations of their rights, experiencing situations of abuse, with affective-destructive models based on violence and lack of empathy, with little social support network, feelings of guilt and stigmatisation together with behavioral, cognitive, emotional and school adaptation difficulties. RA does not have to be a traumatic experience per se, but a life opportunity. Reading comics is a novel socio-educational intervention strategy that can be very effective for your well-being. For this reason, 16 works have been selected and analysed that will serve as support for socio-educational interventions, according to the topic criteria: maturation stories starring adolescents who face problematic situations where they deploy coping strategies. Synthesising its content, starting from the development factors of the well-being of adolescents in RA, which have to do with understanding family history, empowerment, family-social recognition, self-concept-acceptance, affectivity-emotions-love, autonomy, social support networks and interpretation of the world.

**Keywords:** Adolescents; residential care; reading motivation; comics; content analysis; bibliotherapy

### Resumen

Se ha demostrado que la lectura de cómics, como práctica vernácula e informal, es una herramienta útil para narrar y trabajar sucesos complejos y dolorosos con adolescentes. Los jóvenes en Acogimiento Residencial (AR) han sufrido múltiples vulneraciones de sus derechos, experimentando situaciones de maltrato, con modelos afectivos-destructivos basados en la violencia y falta de empatía, con escasa red de apoyo social, sentimiento de culpabilización y estigmatización, dificultades conductuales, cognitivas, emocionales y de adaptación escolar. El AR no tiene que ser una experiencia traumática *per se* y sí una oportunidad de vida. La lectura de cómics supone una novedosa estrategia de intervención socioeducativa que puede ser muy eficaz para su bienestar. Por ello, se han seleccionado



y analizado 16 obras que servirán de apoyo a intervenciones socioeducativas, atendido al criterio de temática: historias de maduración protagonizadas por adolescentes que se enfrentan a situaciones problemáticas ante las cuales despliegan estrategias de afrontamiento. Sintetizando su contenido, partiendo de los factores de desarrollo del bienestar de los adolescentes en AR, que tienen que ver con comprender la historia familiar, empoderamiento, reconocimiento familiar-social, autoconcepto-aceptación, afectividad-emociones-amor, autonomía, redes de apoyo social e interpretación del mundo.

**Palabras clave:** Adolescentes; acogimiento residencial; motivación lectora; cómics; análisis de contenido; biblioterapia

## Introduction

Reading is an educational obligation or an amusement rather than code-breaking. It brings meaning to being, thinking, feeling, doing and being in the world, recognising the other and allowing the collective fabrication of other realities. It is a political act of rebellion, resistance, freedom and transformation in the face of social injustices and inequalities, which is why government technologies have tried to domesticate it through prohibitions and censorship (Caride & Pose, 2015; Mata, 2016). Children's and youth literature maintains high levels of reading, but from 15 onwards it loses interest compared to other leisure activities (FGEE, 2021; Yubero & Larrañaga, 2010). New Literacy Studies differentiate between academic literate practices and informal and hybrid vernacular practices where comics could fit in (Aliagas, et al., 2008). Conceiving reading solely as an academic obligation subject to an evaluation of school profitability leads to rejection in marginalised contexts. However, voluntary reading accompanies in difficult moments, being a balm to heal wounds, allowing to give meaning to life, self-repair and self-management of socio-emotional suffering of young people, building an inner symbolic space that allows to understand a hostile and excluding reality, replacing afflictions with ideas (Petit, 2009; 2014). Reading cannot transform reality, but it can transform people to dream of a fairer and more equal world.

The origin of comics has been linked to the world of children and young people and to education. Töpffer - considered the founder of modern comics, an educator and headmaster of a boarding school for young foreigners in Geneva - already saw the potential of storytelling through cartoons, or prints, combined with text and their educational capacity to work with teenagers. Precursor works to the comic strip such as Busch's *Max and Moritz* (1865), Outcault's *The Yellow Kid* (1895) and *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (1905) by McCay, are starred by young people.

Research has shown that comics are useful tools for working with adolescents (DeGracia, 2012), especially for values education and the creation of critical citizenship, raising awareness of social issues, making them a very attractive medium (Ibarra & Ballester, 2015; Larrañaga & Yubero, 2017). Its pedagogical capacity is unquestionable, stimulating creativity, abstract thinking and critical awareness, enabling visual narrative literacy and facilitating the connection between readers' experiences and the characters' narratives (Barrero, 2002). This identification with the characters helps to give meaning to what happens in life, either by analogy, appropriation, estrangement and/or refutation (Jouve, 2002).

The comic is impossible to define, a non-identified cultural object (Pons, 2017), both because of the difficulty of defining its origin and because of the lack of agreement to differentiate between container (format, design and reproduction) and content (text, image, what it tells and how it tells it) and the consequent identification of its characteristics and techniques. The comic is defined as an art, a means of expression and communication, with its own language that writes through images, supported by texts or not, with the intention of telling stories where the feelings, thoughts and discourses of the main characters of the action are shown (Barrero, 2012). This elliptical, hybrid, graphic-textual language expands the possibilities of logocentric and reduced verbal thought (Sousanis, 2015), enabling the understanding of complicated situations, with a great capacity to narrate conflictive and painful life events, empathising with readers (Arroyo, 2012). The preceding turns them into the author's silent accomplices, easily incorporating themselves into the story, completing the closures, empty spaces between vignettes, which the creator plays with through ellipsis. Eisner (2003) and McCloud (1995), refer to this phenomenon as the sequential art of the invisible. Comics allow for leisurely reading (reading forward and backward as you please, losing yourself in the search for detail and symbolism), fostering (self-inter) reflection. Comics' language is characterised by the drawing (realistic, cartoon, iconic and symbolic), the text (cartoon strips, which can take on different forms, and cartridge-letters that give voice to the narrator), the story and the sequence. Their narrative structure is made up of different units, pages, vignettes and elements contained therein.

As for Adolescents in Residential Foster Care (AAR, as per its Spanish acronym), Organic Act 1/1996 on the Legal Protection of Minors (modified by Organic Act 26/2015 and 8/2015) defines Residential Foster Care (AR, as per its Spanish acronym) as a measure of the Child and Adolescent Protection System (SPIA, as per its Spanish acronym), considering it the last option, not recommended for children under 6 years of age. Although family contexts and stable and consensual measures are prioritised, in practice AR is one of the most commonly used measures, especially with adolescents (15-17 years old). In 2019, of the 50,272 minors cared for by the SPIA, 19,320 were in foster care (45%), 23,209 in AR (55%), of whom 1,301 were under 6 years old and 1,284 had reached the age of 18 within this resource (Ministry of Social Rights and 2030 Agenda, 2020). The data show that rather than resources being matched to children's needs, the opposite is the case. AR is a place of residence and cohabitation, linked to the community, which must guarantee the needs of protection (both physical and emotional), education (generating learning experiences), personal and identity development; and if necessary, therapeutic-rehabilitative interventions will also be carried out. Its purpose is to prepare the children and their families for reunification and when this is not possible to seek other alternatives such as foster care and/or adoption. It has an instrumental, temporary and educational character, subject to the *Case Plan*.

Adolescence is a state of transition from childhood to maturity characterised by uncertainty. Generally speaking, it is a particularly vulnerable stage of life and even more so for young people with life experiences of abandonment and disconnected from their families. During this stage, emotional autonomy is acquired and identity is formed, preferring to share their life experiences with their peer group.

AARs have suffered multiple violations of their rights, experiencing situations of mistreatment, fear and stress, with destructive affective models based on violence and lack of empathy,

fracturing their bonds and showing a conflict of loyalty between the biological family and the institution's socio-educational team (Galán, 2014; Horno et al., 2017). This results in a weak social support network, feelings of guilt and stigmatisation, behavioural, cognitive, emotional and adjustment difficulties at school (Barudy & Dantagnan, 2005; González et al., 2017; Isidro & De Miguel, 2017; Llosada et al., 2015). There is scientific consensus on the high incidence of mental health problems among these children. However, assessment of professionals is more accurate when problems are externalised, but there are difficulties in detecting internalised suffering and emotional distress (Sainero et al., 2015). It is unavoidable to incorporate concepts and explanatory models narrated by the adolescents themselves into professional knowledge, as they attribute the main cause of this discomfort to social interactions (bullying, problems with peers, absence of friends, dysfunctional family relationships, poor support network, studies, social pressure...) and abuse of power (Bello et al., 2019; Carceller, 2018). Experiences of abuse in childhood persist into adolescence, conditioning their expectations and future opportunities (Martínez-Reguera, 2002) and hindering their transition to adulthood. Projecting the future from the present mitigates the feeling of no-future and protects from risky behaviours (abusive consumption, risky sexual practices...) (Melkman, 2015). Undoubtedly, they also have great capacities for adaptation, recovery, sociability and resilience. The current socio-health pandemic crisis has increased emotional distress and school inequality among vulnerable adolescents (UNICEF, 2020).

RA is not necessarily a traumatic experience *per se*, but a life opportunity (Horno et al., 2017), as long as a series of regulatory and technical requirements are guaranteed, being necessary that it is adapted to the characteristics of the young people, prevailing socio-educational-affective models with a community base and based on social support links (Del Valle, et al. 2013). They are operated through the objectives of the *Case Plan*: family reunification, integration in an alternative family, inclusion in a specialised residential resource or preparation for independent living (with the support of *Autonomy Programmes*). This is enshrined in the specific results set out in their Individual *Socio-educational Projects* grouped into the following areas. Family context: child-family relationships, family cooperation and working with the family (if applicable); residential context: personal autonomy (personal obligations and care, feeding, homework, resource management/independence) and adaptation (social integration and readiness for learning and participation); community, school and work context (Del Valle & Bravo, 2007). They need to understand and (re)interpret their contextualised family-life history in order to build a future based on their capacities and supports.

## Method

Sixteen comics were selected to support socio-educational interventions with AAR according to the thematic criterion: coming-of-age stories (development of the main character - specifically *bildungsroman* - learning) starring adolescents in search of recognition, who are faced with various problematic situations (provoking conflicts, internal, personal relationships and with society): internal, personal relationships and with society) in the face of which they deploy different coping strategies, some negative (active-externalised: rage-aggressiveness-consuming; passive-internal: emotional) and others effective; bringing about personal and social changes; all follow the classical narrative in "Z" flow.

A content analysis study was carried out then, based on the factors for the development of the well-being of the AARs, which have to do with: understanding family history; empowerment (information, participation and importance in decisions about their lives); family and social recognition; self-concept and acceptance; affectivity, emotions and love; autonomy skills; social support networks (informal: family; peers at school; peer group; formal: link with socio-educational team); interpretation of the world (moral judgements and/or values: social justice, equality and respect for diversity) (Carpintero et al., 2007; Horno et al., 2017).

## Results

They were classified according to Guzmán's autocomic typology (2017). They are life comics where the author (re)presents him throughout the story, whether factual or fictional. These retrospective and existential narratives emphasise the causal and personal, confronting people with their life experiences, fears, traumas and sufferings in an attempt to overcome them. Autopathographies, post-traumatic narratives and autofiction fall within this category. To these has been added fiction, where we would have fantasy, mystery, superheroic and dystopian themes that match the tastes of teenagers.

The comics selected are the following (table 1):

**Table 1.**  
Selected comics

| COMIC   | AAR WELL-BEING FACTORS  | CONFLICTS   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>NON-FICTION. Autocomic: (auto)pathography - post-traumatic narratives</b>                      |   |   |
| 1. <i>Stitches: A memoir</i> (2010). David Small. 336 pp. W W Norton & Co.                        | Understanding family history; self-concept-acceptance           | Non-recognition dysfunctional family; illness                         |
| 2. <i>Speak</i> (2018). Anderson, Carroll. 380 pp. Farrar, Straus and Giroux (BYR).               | Empowerment; informal social support networks                   | Rape; blaming   |
| 3. <i>Guts</i> (2019). Raina Telgemeier. 217 pp. Scholastic.                                      | Family recognition; formal support                              | Anxiety/anxiety; emotional and physical stress (emetophobia)          |
| <b>NON-FICTION. Autocomic: autofiction</b>  |   |   |
| 4. <i>The tale of one bad rat</i> (1994). Bryan Talbot. 136 pp. Dark Horse Comics.                | Empowerment; autonomy   | Sexual abuse by the father  |
| 5. <i>Anya's Ghost</i> (2013). Vera Brosgol. 224 pp. First Second Books.                          | Informal social support networks; self-concept                  | Lack of support/friends; lovesickness                                 |
| 6. <i>Aquí vivió. Historia de un desahucio</i> (2016). Rosa, Bueno. 255 pp. Nube de Tinta         | Life-world interpretation: values: social justice               | Divorced parents; social injustice: housing law                       |
| 7. <i>Carne de cañón</i> (2019). Aroha Travé. 228 pp. La Cúpula.                                  | Informal social support networks; life-world interpretation     | Impoverishment; harassment  |
| 8. <i>Stargazing</i> (2019). Jen Wang. 224 pp. First Second Books.                                | Self-concept; informal social support networks                  | Disease; defiant behaviour  |
| <b>FICTION</b>  |   |   |
| 9. <i>Alone</i> (2014-2018). Gazzotti, Velmann. Cycle 1 (5 volumes). Volume 1: 158 pp. Cinebook.. | Autonomy; empowerment   | Absence of adults; insecurity about life; blaming others for mistakes |
| 10. <i>La favorite</i> (2014). Matthias Lehmann. 164 pp. Actes Sud.                               | Self-concept-acceptance; emotions-love                          | Family abuse; lovesickness  |
| 11. <i>Plutona</i> (2016). Lemire, Lennox, Bellaire. 152 pp. Image Comics.                        | Informal social support networks; affectivity-love              | Dissatisfaction with life; bullying; anger outbursts                  |
| 12. <i>El árbol que crecía en mi pared</i> (2018). Lourdes Navarro. 76 pp. Sallybooks .           | Informal social support networks                                | Divorced parents; harassment  |
| 13. <i>No mires atrás</i> (2019). Anabel Colazo. 132 pp. La Cúpula.                               | Informal social support networks; acceptance of past traumas    | Fears; losses; sadness; lack of energy                                |
| 14. <i>Harley Quinn</i> (2020). Tamaki, Pugh. 196 pp. DC Comics.                                  | Life-world interpretation: values: social justice; self-concept | Social injustices: gentrification, heteropatriarchy                   |
| 15. <i>Sentient</i> (2020). Lemire, Walta. 168 pp. TKO Studios                                    | Autonomy; informal social support networks                      | Absence of adults; insecurity about life; anger outbursts             |
| 16. <i>I kill giants</i> (2014). Kelly, Niimura. 308 pp. Image                                    | Understanding family history; self-concept                      | Family death, denial/defiant behaviour                                |

Source: Prepared by the authors, 2021

### **Non-fiction comics. Autocomic: (auto)pathography - post-traumatic narratives**

**a) *Stitches: A memoir*:** Tough story about an isolated identity created around illness, throat cancer, in 1950s Detroit. The absence of David's voice, a 14-year-old boy, is presented as a metaphor for the non-recognition of a family dissatisfied with its life, where (in)communication is shown through blows, silences and reproaches. David escapes from this reality by escaping through drawing and imagination, incorporating dreamlike stories that fracture the continuity of the story. In the end, he understands and forgives the mother-family. Simple drawing in grey watercolour through which emotions, mainly sadness, are conveyed. Through their reading, AARs can come to understand their family history and reflect on their self-concept-acceptance, linked to the recognition of their family members.

**b) *Speak*:** Adaptation of Anderson's novel with the same name. Close, direct and oppressive story. Melinda suffers sexual violence at the hands of a high school classmate.

Without gruesomeness, it conveys the emotions of the main character: shame, loneliness, self-blame. Faced with family indifference, his response is isolation, building a refuge in the centre, silence and self-harm. There is a process of personal/social empowerment through art and the breaking of silence, understanding that she is not to blame. The authors use metaphorical-symbolic and subjective language (tree, rabbit, erasing one's face...). AARs will become aware of the importance of social support networks for personal empowerment and overcoming trauma, thus avoiding self-blame.

**c) *Guts*:** A kind and funny story about the fears of Rania, a 9-year-old girl (nervous, shy, quiet and shy) of not fitting in at school (she is not bullied), which causes her anxiety, emotional stress and panic attacks that she somatises through gastric problems, a phobia of vomiting. She has a nurturing family and the support of her friends. She also receives professional assistance from a child psychologist. Rania is beginning to learn about and accept her fears, although she has continued to attend psychotherapy and mindfulness to better manage her problems. In addition to professional intervention, AARs will find that another key to their well-being is friendships that provide support in managing their fears and anxieties.

### ***Non-fiction comics. Autocomic: autofiction***

**a) *The tale of one bad rat*:** Helen Potter has been sexually abused by her father, covered up by a complicit mother. She runs away and becomes a homeless teenager. The story is told through the life/work of British children's writer/illustrator Beatrix Potter, herself a survivor of domestic abuse. In this life journey, Helen risks suffering other forms of violence (polyvictimisation) and distrusts those who offer her sincere support. At the end of the road, she understands and does not to herself for the mistreatment she suffered, confronting the dysfunctional love and abuse of power of her father. By reading it, AARs are provided with clues for emotional management in abusive situations, strengthening their autonomy skills based on trust in others.

**b) *Anya's Ghost*:** Friendly mystery story of a Russian girl with inclusion problems due to her physical appearance, dress and background, in a private American high school, suffering verbal and social violence. It also shows the problems derived from the first love affairs of unsuitable boys. She is supported by a young murdered ghost who tries to live through her and change her in her image (an example of a toxic relationship). Anya ends up accepting herself as she is, unique, and values her "living" friendships. The latter learning can be worked on with the AARs, highlighting the importance of having a positive self-concept, in this particular case, emotional and physical, providing security, decision-making capacity and tolerance of failure.

**c) *Aquí vivió. Historia de un desahucio*:** A committed and supportive story about the (dis)possession of the home told by Alicia, a teenager who, together with her recently separated mother, lives in a house from which a family was thrown out. In order to cope with these changes, they have the support of their parents and large family. The main character learns the story of the evicted family through the daughter's diary, a copy of Ana Franz's, and the memories of Carmen, the grandmother, who unexpectedly turns up at her house. When she knew the story, she contacted the *Plataforma de Afectados*

*por la Hipoteca* (Platform of People Affected by Mortgages, PAH, as per its Spanish Acronym). She becomes aware of social inequalities and injustices and how commitment and denunciation can be a driving force for social transformation. Colour is another element of the narrative (green: PAH; grey: flashback of the evicted family and the origin of the commodification of the right to housing). AARs will gain social awareness of social injustices and inequalities, seeing how involvement in the struggle for rights can broaden their social support networks.

**d) *Carne de cañón*:** A “viborised” genre story, close to the underground concept, about the daily life (and a touch of delirious fantasy) of a single-parent family with three children, the youngest with autism, in a marginal suburb where various social problems intersect, structured in four chapters: precariousness, drugs, paedophilia, harassment and the search for sexual identity. The council estate is yet another character, the scene of children’s games and pranks, just like the *chav* language spoken by its inhabitants. Yanira and Kilian, the older children, with the support of their family, peer group and community, are developing a great capacity for resilience, self-acceptance and self-knowledge. This will facilitate the analysis with AARs of various types of support (affective-emotional, instrumental and informational) provided by the neighbourhood networks in the context of impoverishment and vulnerability.

**e) *Stargazing*:** A bright story of friendship in the face of diversity, about the need for two Asian girls to integrate. Moon and Christine, very different from each other and their families (one extroverted and from a single-parent family with precarious economic circumstances; the other, shy and from a well-off, religious family), are torn between two cultures (the culture of origin and the host culture), to the point of feeling that they do not belong to either. The group’s mutual support for each other is strengthened by having to deal with Moon’s brain tumour, overcoming envy and selfishness. Drawing and k-pop dance music are key elements in the narrative. Expressive simplicity with some manga influences. AARs will be able to value the power of meaningful relationships with people who are different from us, raising awareness of the richness that diversity brings.

### ***Non-fiction comics***

**a) *Alone*:** A choral tale of dystopian adventure and mystery that straddles West’s *The Hollisters* (1953-70), Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* (1954) and the *Lost series* (2004-10). A cheesy version of Trillo and Altuna’s classic Argentinian comic strip *El último recreo* (1982-83; 2017). It is about the adventures of five children, aged between 7 and 14 from different socio-economic backgrounds, as they struggle to survive in a world where adults have disappeared, leading to an absence of rules, care and security. It is a story of emancipation and forced autonomy with a loss of innocence. Mutual support, leadership, complementarity of skills, and reconciliation with the past leads to personal growth through the group, self-learning, self-protection and confrontation of fears. All this will make it possible to work with AARs on autonomy skills, allowing them to see that they are not *alone* in their life processes.

**b) *La Favorite*:** A gothic tale, with family secrets, about the gender identity confusion (deception) of a 10-year-old girl who lives isolated in a mansion in a forest, with an abusive



grandmother and a homosexual, depressed and alcoholic grandfather. Constance experiences helplessness in the face of attempted sexual abuse. She copes with her isolation and mistreatment through imagination (books, television) and games (pirates, detectives), initiating a friendly relationship with a group of impoverished children, and first love, which brings her conflict and peer support. The discovery of love will facilitate reflection on different gender identities and sexual orientations with AARs.

**c) *Plutona*:** A choral story that links the everyday with the fantastic, reinterpreting Reiner's film *Stand by me* (1986) based on Stephen King's *The Body* (1982). A group of five youngsters, from different family backgrounds, form a mosaic of characters with complementary characteristics: courage-fear-intelligence-strength-innocence. They share bonding difficulties, as well as their obsession with the discovery of the corpse of a superheroine who has difficulty reconciling her responsibilities as a mother with those of saving the world. It deals with life dissatisfaction and the fan phenomenon. The characters support each other by creating a bond of affection. It is a rite of transition to (super?) maturity with an open ending. There are radio announcements giving more information about the superheroine and dialogues via WhatsApp. The (mis)adventures of this group of friends will facilitate the identification of emotional management skills and interpersonal strengths of AARs.

**d) *El árbol que crecía en mi pared*:** Local fantasy tale about a teenager who is bullied by his schoolmates and whose family ties are being fractured by the continuous arguments between his parents, who are on the verge of separating. In addition, a tree is taking over his room and his life. This tree is the metaphor used by the author to show a life colonised by conflict. Everything turns blue when the problem appears. At first, he runs away from the situation and then is supported by a friend and a botanist-mentor, which makes him confront the tree (problem) by transforming it into art, making wooden figures. The family and school conflicts symbolised in a tree will enable AARs to connect with their own sufferings and the various coping strategies deployed.

**e) *No mires atrás*:** A thrilling mix of fantasy, horror and reality. Blanca works as a waitress and remains petrified due to a traumatic accident that prevents her from moving forward in her life and projecting herself into the future. Getting back in touch with an old friend will allow her to move towards maturity. The pretext for confronting inner fears is articulated through *creepypasta*, short horror stories very popular among teenagers and circulating on the internet, mutating with each copy-paste (SlenderMan, Legend of Zelda cursed cartridge, Momo...). They are the evolution of the traditional urban legends told around a bonfire. The author handles the communicative codes of the "Z" generation: youtubers, WhatsApp... AARs sometimes find themselves petrified in the face of very complicated life situations, and the story will help them to become aware of the need to look back, take impulse and continue to move forward.

**f) *Harley Quinn*:** Superheroic story that reinterprets the origins of Harley, the Joker's psychopathic partner (*Mad Love*, 1992, by Dini & Timm). A 15-year-old girl from a single-parent family, rebellious, strong, eccentric and insecure, embarks on different social struggles against gentrification, commercialisation, sexism, racism, classism... alongside her friend Ivy and a group of drag queens, proving how thin the line between good and evil is. Unlike characters in other works, Harley cares little about fitting in at school, maturing through self-discovery. Narrative colour plays another key role in the narrative, with blue-

black predominating and red/orange being introduced for the flashbacks. The maturity, confidence and strength of the characters will be the key to think together with AARs how to assume the consequences of our actions and how the end does not justify the means.

**g) *Sentient*:** Dystopian science-fiction choral story about a group of children who travel on a colony ship (Earth is almost uninhabitable) and who have lost their family references when they suffer a terrorist attack that kills all the adults. Loneliness is shown in the face of the maturation process forced by circumstances. Maternal protection is replaced by Valarie, the “human” and overmatched artificial intelligence that runs the ship. There is a certain conflict of loyalties, not having been able to elaborate a healthy mourning process. The group distrusts a boy because he is the son of the leader of the rebel group, isolating him at first, and eventually accepting him. It shows how family inheritance does not condition future stories. The various abilities of the children make the group and the children themselves grow. The *USS Montgomery* - that is the ship’s name - is another character, becoming a safe home in the inhospitable space. This substitution/assumption of guardianship by an artificial intelligence of the ship will be a vehicle for reflection with AARs on diversity, family functions and structures and our role in this web of relationships.

**h) *I kill giants*:** Manga story with westernised narrative of a brave girl (named Barbara Thorson) who fights giants with a hammer. She takes refuge in the fantasy of role-playing in order for her (not) to cope with the process of his mother's illness and death. She can cope with bullying in a hostile school context, but cannot confront reality by hiding in fantasy. Finally, with the formal support of a child psychologist and the informal support of her new friend and her family, she accepts the inexorable fact that life brings death. The main character ends up declaring: “*We are stronger than we think we are*”. The theme of this comic will be the ideal pretext to talk to AARs about the taboo subject of death, the loss of loved ones and the mourning process.

## Conclusions

AARs problematic situations have become more complex (Bravo & Del Valle, 2009). Reading comics is a novel socio-educational intervention strategy that can be very effective in improving the situation of these young people. Subjective well-being is lower in AARs and foster care centres are less stimulating spaces than the family context, although innovative practices are being incorporated, they are still residual. ARs are convoluted learning systems, oriented towards participatory socio-educational rehabilitative work and connected to their environment (Palomares, 2017). Therefore, the ecological approach is essential to understand the social processes suffered by these children, considering the institution as an ecosystem of social relations in itself, where the dynamics of the different microsystem-exo-mesosystem-mesosystem-macrosystem-chronosystem levels are reproduced within the person-process-context-time logic. The introduction of reading comics, individually and/or in groups, as an intervention tool will contribute to the transition from welfare to socio-educational models, fostering restorative, protective and resilient affective bonding both with their own peers in the centre and peer group, and with the professional team.

The existence of a large number of works starring young people in the process of maturing has been verified; for this reason, the incorporation of works has been prioritised over an in-depth

analysis of them. In the sample, art and social support networks (material/tangible: physical or financial support; formative/instrumental: belonging, access to other networks and information-guidance-advice; affective/emotional: discharge, acceptance, understanding and self-esteem) have great relevance in the learning narratives of the boys/girls. The versatility in the graphic narrative construction, the diversity of stories and the creative freedom of the authors has been demonstrated. The fact that they are not *de facto* works for socio-educational intervention, but with literary interest, enhances the variety of interpretations, avoiding indoctrination and unilateral visions.

Reading is always plural, which gives different meanings to what is read (Chartier, 2007). The text-image combination allows different stories of coping with conflict to be told in different ways, making it possible to connect with the diverse personal, family and social characteristics of AARs. Hybrid language facilitates complex connotations rather than merely superficial denotative reading. Helping to understand stressful life events, stimulating creativity (ability to reconstruct the story) and personalisation (integration of the narrative into one's own experiences by identifying with the thoughts, behaviours and emotions of the characters) (Yubero & Larrañaga, 2015).

Narrative provides culturally situated meanings to lived experiences. Everyday life is organised through stories, sequentially structured in episodes, narrated dually (real world of action and mental world of knowledge, thoughts and feelings) giving meaning to existence; but there are also non-recounted experiences (Bruner, 1986). A group reading of comics, with the involvement of the professionals themselves, would make it possible to work on the well-being factors of AARs. An adaptation of Ncube's (2006) "Tree of Life" (ToL) methodology based on White and Epton's (1993) narrative approach developed in Africa with abused and war-traumatised children. The metaphor of the tree makes it possible to narrate life without revictimising based on: Roots (family history; significant and/or difficult events); Soil (present, daily activities); Trunk (capacities, skills, values); Branches (hopes, dreams, desires); Leaves (referents, lost people, links); and Fruits (supports, achievements). Placing AARs in their biographical journeys allows them to take on and make sense of their history. They reinterpret conflicts, separating the young person from the problem and generating alternative narratives that are not saturated with suffering and discomfort, rescuing extraordinary events. The basic structure is as follows: Presentation of the comic; Creation of the main character's ToL; Construction of their own ToL; Forest of Life (union of all the trees); Storms/Pests (conflict situations); Creative-participative evaluation and celebration. Other complementary activities can be added: soundtrack, alternative endings, silent sketches, collage/murals, deconstruction of vignettes-pages, getting into the comic, incorporating other characters, role playing, among others. This intervention approach can be adapted to work individually with AARs. However, the aforementioned complexity of graphic storytelling requires the guidance and mediation of professionals familiar with this medium.

In short, reading the selected comics can contribute to repairing the damaged identities of AARs in order to walk towards the future, without hating the present or the past. Reading them allows us to recall past events, reinterpreting them from the present. Narratives distorted by resentment and resentment are an obstacle that needs to be flanked by non-(self-)blaming narratives that critically understand, and allow for reconciliation, if necessary, with their families.

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