

Children's literature and sexual education: promoting communication between infancy and family

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Abstract

Sexuality is a core human dimension and needs to be dealt with and given attention from early childhood education in order to building strong foundations and foster sexual health. Although all factors in child development should play an active role in acquiring skills, tools, strategies, attitudes, aptitudes and knowledge regarding sexuality, families play a primary role. Children's literature is a pedagogical and educational tool to deal with sexuality since it contributes to family-child bonding. The main aim of this research is to consider the role of the family in this educational challenge through analysing children's literature. In this sense, the theoretical framework comprises a systematic review focused on family, childhood, sexual education and children's literature, supplemented by an analysis of a set of children's aimed at providing sexual education in line with three fundamental ideas: (a) how sexuality is dealt with, (b) narrative and aesthetics, and (c) the role of the family represented in the plot. Indeed, the research shows how the combination of sexual education and children's literature helps lead to family proactiveness, attending to children's needs and promoting children's rights. That being said, the main aspect considers communication, dialogue and reflection as facilitating factors in families' educational responsibilities and children's learning.

Keywords: Family relationships; communication strategies; children's literature; sex education; shared reading.

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Literatura infantil y educación sexual: fomentando la comunicación entre infancia y familia

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Resumen

La sexualidad es una esfera del individuo que necesita abordaje y atención desde el nacimiento para establecer bases sólidas y fomentar la salud sexual. Cualquier agente de socialización debe ser proactivo en el aprendizaje de habilidades, herramientas, estrategias, actitudes, aptitudes y conocimientos del infante sobre sexualidad, pero la familia tiene un papel principal. La literatura infantil es una herramienta pedagógica y educativa catalizadora del vínculo entre familia y niño/a, y que, mediante su uso, facilita su abordaje. El estudio valora el rol familiar y su reto educativo analizando diferentes obras literarias infantiles con este fin. Esta investigación se basa en una revisión sistemática sobre familia, infancia, educación sexual y literatura infantil complementada con un análisis de obras infantiles de educación sexual basado en las variables: (a) abordaje de la sexualidad, (b) narrativa y estética (c) rol familiar que presenta la trama. La investigación evidencia que la proactividad familiar, la atención de necesidades y la promoción de los derechos de los niños y niñas puede conseguirse con este tándem, pero lo más importante, es ver a la literatura, la comunicación, el diálogo y la reflexión como facilitadores de la tarea educativa familiar y de aprendizaje de los infantes.

Palabras clave: Relaciones familiares; estrategias de comunicación; literatura infantil; educación sexual; lectura compartida.

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INTRODUCTION

When children are born, they begin their individual adventure of discovery, development and understanding the world around them and through contact with people in them (Santi-León, 2019). Sexuality is a hugely important and vital area in an individual's life, playing a role in the development of all aspects of life. In order to ensure good health, it is imperative to approach and deal with it from life's early stages (Vega-Gallardo & García-Hernández, 2018).

Although the need for education has now been recognised for generations, doing so has led to debate, controversy and social stigmatisation, often making it invisible (Calvo-González, 2021). Nevertheless, science and pedagogy have framed this educational task as a priority for immediate action. On the one hand, sexuality is presented as a lifelong process for individuals which, thanks to proper education from early childhood, has positive effects to attain solid sexual health and represents a beneficial approach to relating to oneself and society at large (Burón-Prieto, 2022). On the other hand, it is clear that in order to achieve this goal, agents of socialisation must play a proactive role in education through bonding, guidance and communication. This learning can only be achieved by removing the stigmas surrounding sexuality (Dextre-Peralta, 2022).

Focusing on an effective approach with solid foundations, children's literature in all its guises (stories, books, fables, tales, etc.) provides an optimum way to work on sexuality in childhood (Gamella-Gómez, 2021). The educational and pedagogical value of this tool provides educators with the chance to alleviate any unease when dealing with possibly uncomfortable topics by creating a space to nurture positive outlooks on prosocial behaviour and sexual health.

When framing the importance of educator involvement, the family is highlighted as the primary agent for education who, through closeness and trust, ensures lessons are effectively internalised, is able to create spaces for communication, and plays a key role in self-knowledge and solving any problems or issues children may have. The ability to talk, dialogue and discuss creates a communicative setting to pass on the required skills, tools, strategies, attitudes, abilities and knowledge for healthy and integral sexuality (CEAPA & Gobierno de España, 2009).

Individuals are born and develop within a group and, little by little, acquire rules, models and beliefs that make living within society possible. From the time they are born, human beings begin constructing their persona, forge their identity, mature, and adapt to the surrounding social and historical setting. Family is the most important element in socialisation in terms acquiring lessons and values, since interaction within the closest of units enables children to develop as social beings and play an active role in society (Martínez-Mejía et al., 2019). The process is at its most intense in childhood due to two factors: firstly, the lack of children's prior experiences and secondly, the immense flexibility and attitudes towards experimentation seen during this evolutionary stage. In this sense, early knowledge supports, hastens and intensifies informative inputs (Fernández-Mostaza, 2023). These early years of life provide children with the chance to create a solid basis to adopt roles, attitudes and information through emotional family bonds, as well as internalise and embrace them (Mead, cited by Alarcón-Cebrián, 2012).

The family unit is in charge of meeting the needs of young children through closeness and full attention, and has overall responsibility for growth at any level (Fernández-Mostaza, 2023). Sexuality systematically and inherently develops alongside nature and culture. It is externalised through biological, social and psychological aspects which, together, affect how individuals relate to others, define and accept themselves, etc. (Vega-Gallardo & García-Hernández, 2018). Sexual natures and ways to express sexuality materialise and form within this sexualisation process. As the Government of the Balearic Islands noted (2023), sexuality includes sex, gender identity, sexual identity, sexual orientation, erotic preferences and sexual behaviour.

When developing sexual education, it is important to include the complex nature of sexuality in order to meet the needs of individuals and promote their right to sexual health. Therefore, it is essential to adopt a positive comprehensive approach and ensure people's well-being (WHO, 2023).

Society's poor or incomplete approach to sexual education to date has repercussions in the present day and particularly impacts early childhood. Current problems requiring immediate attention include sexual victimisation (Villajos, 2021), the high risk of rejection or school bullying of LGBTI children (Dólera-González et al., 2022) or appropriate access to online content and its consequences (Guevara-Hermenegildo et al., 2022).

Children's literature is presented as a powerful educational and pedagogical tool for the personal enrichment of children and families as part of this search for improvement, connecting them to the surrounding world, culture and values (Mateo-Peñalver & Gómez-Amorós, 2023). Works for children are a frequent and popular element in early children to introduce sexuality to children in a simple way. The combination of images and text appeals to readers, sparking an interest in and openness to learning (Gamella-Gómez, 2021).

As Rondón (2018) points out, this shared resource establishes a valuable framework to strengthen bonds and foster values such as attention, trust and active listening. Communication is key to creating family dynamics that lead to prosocial behaviour and promote harmony both inside and beyond the family unit (Marín-Irial et al., 2019). Providing a safe and positive upbringing based on communication, bonding and proactiveness with regard to sexual education is a further step in ensuring childhood well-being (Defaz-Gallardo et al., 2019).

METHOD

Firstly, a document search was conducted in the WoS, Scopus, Scielo, Dialnet and Redalyc databases, focusing on the thematic areas of early childhood sexuality, sexual education, families and children's literature. The search prompts in Spanish and English were:

“infancia y sexualidad” AND “educación sexual integral” / “childhood and sexuality” AND “comprehensive sexual education”

“educación sexual” AND “Literatura infantil” AND “famil*” / “sexual education” AND “children's literature” AND “famil*”

“educación sexual” AND “comunicación intrafamiliar” / “sex education” AND “intra-family communication”

“educación sexual” AND “Análisis de cuentos” / “sexual education” AND “short story analysis”.

The criteria for including the selected documents were based on:

- Time: studies undertaken and/or published from 2011
- Topic: analyses of children's literature, sexual education and/or communication analysis in childhood
- Sample characteristics (studies linked to early childhood and families).

Secondly, works for children that directly deal with aspects linked to sexuality and are aimed at families were selected, in line with the following criteria:

- The most popular publications on the children's literature market aimed at childhood sexual education (7). Six of the most popular online marketplaces were selected and search prompts used to find the publications, adjusting and limiting the filter on each website to obtain those with the highest score, sales and relevance. Following this, the 20 most visible from each marketplace were selected and the most frequent works in all search operations formed our sample

- Works promoted and/or financed by the Spanish government (3). These were obtained through search prompts and were required to offer free open access
- Literary works used by non-profit organisations as part of sexual education initiatives, one of which ran at a national level in Spain and one specifically at regional level in the Balearic Islands. Again, search prompts were used to collect the data.

Based on the criteria above, a total of 11 works of children's literature were selected. The most popular works on the benchmark marketplaces that aligned with the methodology were:

- *Sexualidad contada para niños y niñas* (Martín & Viana, 2014)
- *¿Qué es eso? La sexualidad explicada para niños* (Blanco & Löwy, 2017)
- *Mis primeras preguntas y respuestas: Cuaderno de sexualidad* (Díaz-Morfa et al., 2012)
- *Tell Me: What Children Really Want to Know About Bodies, Sex and Emotions* (Von-der-Gathen et al., 2019)
- *Yo sé de verdad como se hacen los bebés* (Monsieur-Mouch & Maria-Paz, 2020)
- *What's Happening to Me?: The Answers to Some of the World's Most Embarrassing Questions* (Mayle & Robins, 2000)
- *El gran libro de la sexualidad* (Migallón-Lopezosa, 2017).

Works promoted or financed by the Spanish government:

- *Cuentos para educar en familia - Dirigidos a niños y niñas de entre 6 y 12 años para fomentar la Educación Sexual* (CEAPA & Gobierno de España, 2009)
- *No le cuentes cuentos* (De la Cruz y De la Cruz, CEAPA, 2011)
- *Kiko y la mano* (Romeo-Biedma y Horno, 2011) (FAPMI & Gobierno de España).

Lastly, one work used by a regional Spanish charity was included:

- *¡Estela, grita muy fuerte!* (Olid & Vanda, 2008).

Instrument

The selected analysis indicators for the publications were based on two pillars. The first focuses on indicators concerning sexuality. The dimensions of research were based on the document *Amb tots els sentits* (2023). This institutional consultation paper on sexual education is for teachers and published by the Department of Health at the Government of the Balearic Islands (table 1).

Table 1

The sexuation process

Concept	Influence on the process
Biological sex	The development of physical and bodily features, as well as how sexual and bodily characteristics function. Society determines a baby's biological sex through external genitalia: boy or girl. There may also be cases of intersexuality: people with ambiguous external genitalia.

Concept	Influence on the process
Gender expression	The acquisition of behaviour and mannerisms, or an individual's identification with roles society deems masculine or feminine. In other words, gender expression is an individual's way of being towards others and the rooted gender stereotypes in each.
Sexual identity	The process of self-identification with or belonging to one, two or no gender.
Sexual orientation	The individual gradually discovers what attracts them when establishing an affective and sexual relationship.
Erotic preferences	Analysing and determining what triggers desire, what one likes or what generates erotic attraction.
Sexual behaviour	How desire and sexual practices manifest.

Note. Created by the authors based on [Aranguren-Balardi \(2023\)](#).

The second pillar analyses sexuality based on [García-Piña's \(2016\)](#) understanding of it as not only linked to genitalia or eroticism, but rather incorporating a wider perspective ([table 2](#)).

Table 2

Manifestations of child sexuality

Manifestations of sexuality	Relationship with the child's growth and development
Gender	Belonging to one gender or another based on physical differences, the way of expressing oneself or relating to others. This process emerges from imitating adults or close circles to be able to replicate them. In turn, values or roles set by society are also internalised.
Reproduction	An interest in conception, pregnancy or birth. Parenting is gradually constructed from early childhood. This learning is worked on through play, asking questions and individual experiences.
Emotional bonding	The ability to relate to others and feel affection for family members, friends and close circles and, in this way, bond with them. The first bond children develop is with their mother and this is essential for them to establish patterns in order to bond with their surroundings. As they develop, children experiment with others and acquire rules to become aware of and respect boundaries.
Eroticism	Children experience physical sensations through experiences and bodily and sensory development. Masturbation is part of their individual development and a source of knowledge for individuals. As they develop, they learn the social norms governing it.

Note. Created by the authors based on [García-Piña \(2016\)](#).

Analysis of the selected works

The analysis of the 11 literary works was based on aspects they contain that align with the three variables mentioned in the previous section: how sexuality is broached, narrative and aesthetics, and the role of the family represented in the plot.

With regard to the approach to sexuality and its different components, the analysis focused on the indicators provided by the Balearic government ([2023](#)) and [García-Piña \(2016\)](#), as summarised below ([table 3](#)).

Table 3*Approach to sexuality and its elements*

Elements of sexuality	Indicator description
Knowledge about the body, sex and reproduction	A focus on body knowledge and its physical characteristics to be able to understand the functions of the body, sexual characteristics, reproduction and birth as processes.
Gender expression	A focus on the individual's identification process towards a gender through roles society determines as masculine or feminine.
Emotional bonding	Thanks to contact with immediate surroundings and society, this is where the individual acquires tools and abilities to relate to and bond with others. In this vein, they may experiment with boundaries and develop skills to get to know and respect others.
Sexual identity and orientation	Through social contact, the individual defines their sexual identity and identifies with one, none or both genders. This individual construction is a learning process to discover what attracts them to other people to be able to establish emotional and/or sexual relationships.
Eroticism and sexual behaviour	This includes the experience of individuals in discovering and recognising bodily sensations, and creating their own ideas of the things they like or reject in order to manifest desire.

Note. Created by the authors based on [Aranguren-Balardi \(2023\)](#) and [García-Piña \(2016\)](#).

Different aspects are posited with regard to narrative in order to understand how information is transmitted, in line with the items set out by [Lluch \(2003\)](#) (table 4).

Table 4*Approach to narrative*

Narrative elements	Indicator description
Narrative structure	How the work presents language sequence.
Time	How time is constructed in the book. How the work presents information, as well as frames events to understand the content.
Narrator	The voice that tells and recounts the events in the story. It is used to control course and time.
Characters	The protagonists who play a role in the plot and possess individual features making them unique in the story. The name, features, role, etc. represent information complementing the story.
Space	Where the facts or events take place.
Era	The specific era where the work is set.
Possible worlds	The reality of the events or the fantastical setting where they take place.
Relationships between texts	The necessary skills and abilities to understand the work and the suitability of the content to the reader's developmental stage.
Linguistic analysis	How the narrative is constructed, as well as how information is presented.

Note. Created by the authors based on [Lluch \(2003\)](#).

As for visual and compositional analysis, [Gamella-Gómez \(2021\)](#) or [Lluch and Chaparro \(2007\)](#) note that the visual code is a further element to consider as, alongside the written code, it facilitates learning and stimulates analytical ability. The authors observe that in order to assess the publications, aspects such as the use of illustrations, photos or drawings, the layout and typography used, condensing and organising images, etc. as supporting elements must be considered. These elements should be seen as a further source of knowledge and support for what is set out in the publication.

Lastly, the family is included as another variable to analyse. As [Villa-García \(2022\)](#) states, this social structure is undoubtedly a source of knowledge for children to learn about different ways of life, relationships, conflicts, etc. through everyday experiences. This is why it is essential to discover how this unit is symbolised in children's literature.

The analysis of the indicators categorised in the four dimensions was performed with the NVivo.11 computer program.

RESULTS

[Table 5](#) sets out all the analysed dimensions and the number of publications that include each item. The four analysed dimensions are detailed more specifically below.

Table 5

Information collected from the literary works

Analysis of the sexual sphere	
Knowledge about the body, sex and reproduction	11/11 books cover this aspect.
Gender expression	6/11 books cover this aspect.
Emotional bonding	10/11 books cover this aspect.
Sexual identity and orientation	7/11 books cover this aspect.
Eroticism and sexual behaviour	11/11 books cover this aspect.
Narrative analysis	
Structure	6/11 books present a question/topic and provide information about it. 4/11 books follow a narrative thread and tell a story. 1/11 books functions through questions and answers.
Time	11/11 books use the present as the verb tense.
Narrator	In 1/11 books, the author is the narrator. 2/11 books combine dialogue and a narrator. 2/11 books have characters who narrate the action. 6/11 books use an omniscient narrator.
Characters	3/11 books present their characters in a complex way. 7/11 books present their characters in a simple way. 11/11 books have child protagonists.
Space	3/11 books do not specify any space. 7/11 books set the action in everyday spaces.
Era	11/11 books take place in the present.
Possible worlds	7/11 books are set in the real world. 3/11 books include touches of fantasy but are set in the real world.
Relationships between texts	11/11 books require a prior skillset from children and/or families.
Linguistic analysis	11/11 books use clear, simple and direct language.
Image analysis	
	11/11 books are colourful.
Analysis of the family role	
	1/11 books spur families to take part in reading. 1/11 books present diversity in family synergies. 2/11 books do not include any family presence. 2/11 books characterise the family as a place of love and trust. 5/11 books frame the family circle as the context where children learn.

Note. Created by the authors.

Sexual sphere

The analysis of the first dimension (sexual sphere) includes five items. All the books include the following two indicators: (a) knowledge about the body, sex and reproduction, and (b) eroticism and

sexual behaviour. In turn, half of the works include the following two indicators: (c) sexual identity and orientation (7 out of 11), and (d) gender expression (6 out of 11).

With regard to (a) knowledge about the body, sex and reproduction, the publications focus on different topics related to the body (reproductive system, naming parts of the body, etc.), the changes it undergoes over time or the signs of puberty. Moreover, very specific information is given about intimacy and privacy, including boundaries. In turn, the works contain information on different processes such as reproduction, pregnancy or menstruation, looking at male and female physiology.

Gender expression focuses on the importance of equality and the need to dispel myths in society that impede gender expression. Positive messages are provided to avoid discriminating between feminine and masculine, such as professions, colours, clothing, housework, etc.

Where the books look into emotional bonding, their messages are highly rooted in explaining the need for feeling valued and loved within society, the family, etc. In other words, individuals feeling present within social structures. The meaning of affection, the different bonds that may arise or different ways to show love, friendship, sympathy, etc. are explained through clear examples readers are able to internalise (shared time, playing, talking, etc.). In addition, certain works also look at validating feelings, emotions and bodily sensations (butterflies in the stomach when there is an attraction, discomfort or rejection with regard to an invasive act, etc.).

In terms of sexual identity and orientation, the books spread positive messages about diversity to naturalise, accept and respect any type of love, giving any individual both freedom and a voice. One book specifically focuses on diverse families.

Finally, eroticism and sexual behaviour are included in all the books. This item of sexuality is broached by looking at different actions that may be pleasurable for individuals, providing positive messages on self-awareness and dispelling any fears regarding experiences with others. Furthermore, the individual capacity to place limits on others is included, instilling the value of respect for one's own decisions and those of others. Moreover, different contraceptive methods are looked at and one specific work explains prostitution and a situation of sexual abuse.

Narrative

The narrative dimension includes nine items. [Table 5](#) also includes the analysed sub-items for each. All the analysed works use plain, direct and simple language, require a prior skillset from children and/or families, use the present tense and take place in the present day, and have child protagonists.

In terms of structure, simple approaches are used to help understand the information or narrative thread of the story. The works use questions and answers, short simple stories or chapters on a full topic in order to depict issues, provide information, resolve characters' internal dialogue, etc. The structures in place help readers internalise lessons and provide a clear sequencing of events or the topic. One book uses a structure based on previously collected questions asked by children and answered by the author.

As mentioned, all of the books use the present to the past on information. The narrator role is either usually omniscient or played by the protagonists themselves who guide the action through questions, dialogue, etc. Conversations are sometimes used to provide information about a situation or characters, or to introduce actions that are then enlarged.

Children are the main characters in all the works. Most of the books present protagonists and characters in a simple way and only provide basic details about them, i.e. they do not delve deeper into physical or emotional aspects. Where certain works do present characters in a more complex way, the intent is for readers to empathise with them or understand how they feel about what is happening to them. Children are the protagonists in all the books. In terms of characters, both children and adults appear (family members, friends, doctors, teachers, etc.).

The most common spaces used in the books are everyday settings and popular places, where scenarios for learning naturally occur (family homes, schools, parks, etc.). Some works do not specify

the place where the action takes place. With regard to era, all the books are set in the present day. An indefinite era is used in only one instance.

When it comes to possible worlds, events are mostly set in the real world. Fantasy is only used occasionally, mentioned as a character's dream or thoughts, or to make the story more exciting.

In terms of relationships between texts, certain books are presented directly as a shared moment for the family and, therefore, envisage a minimum skillset in order to work on the content effectively. All the publications require a learnt skillset in order to follow the information provided. With regard to families, skills such as proactiveness for sexual education, dispelling fears or taboos, a predisposition to inform, explain, etc. confidently and the ability to stir dialogue and communication all appear. The main skills for children are an analytical ability to combine written and image-based coda, linking concepts, following the narrative thread and/or interpreting images or abstract information.

Finally, with regard to linguistic analysis, the works all broach sexuality with simple, easy-to-understand language. They do not use metaphors or double meanings to refer to the topic. Certain works include a glossary of the most important information/concepts.

Use of images

All the literary works are colourful. The variety of colours, textures and finishes play an important role in appealing to readers.

Different typography, explanatory drawings, images, etc. are used to draw attention and foster understanding. None of the books use real photographs.

The role of the family

The family setting is presented in a highly positive way and as a benchmark in the different stories. Families are typified in different ways:

- As allies in reading and providing information to effectively achieve goals
- As a source of affection and trust for support with regard to doubts or problems
- As a focal point of curiosity, a stimulus for learning and a space to make queries or ask questions.

Communication is presented as a core value in all representations for learning and maintaining healthy, wholesome and beneficial relationships. In turn, the family is framed as the place for learning.

CONCLUSIONS

Thanks to the legacy from earlier times, the overwhelming certainty underpinning this research is that society conceives and experiences sexuality with a bias and, therefore, lacks the tools to properly deal with sexuality and support future generations. In this sense, our currently problems hinder individual well-being and determine any future problems society will face.

The need to act and play a prosocial role is indisputable. In order to do this, it is important to analyse the current situation, assess shortcomings and requirements, set targets to achieve, and evaluate current and required resources to attain social transformation.

In light of this, we need to open up our horizons and involve different scientific disciplines in unlocking this legacy, join forces and come up with joint strategies for effective action. Thus, the need for spaces to talk, reflect, communicate and debate is evident. Initiatives underpinned by and based on research would be a further step towards suitable sexual education. With solid foundations, we will be able to involve the entire population, with a view to understanding the role of every agent of socialisation,

and jointly and collaboratively coordinate implementation. The many activities required to attain this level of involvement include knowledge, research and a framework of effective educational and pedagogical pathways, as well as coordination. However, one of the first steps is to recognise the potential of families in education, and the need to raise their awareness, make them feel understood and support them in this educational task through fluid communication, involvement and constructing collaborative approaches for their empowerment.

Art is a product of society, a result of how individuals understand and interpret their surroundings. For this reason, it is a space to discover diversity and express criticism, desires, rights, etc. By leveraging it as a precursor to change, we will shape a powerful and convenient pathway to deal with a complex topic; create an ideal space to nurture values and new ways of understanding the world, question our surroundings and ourselves; and foster a healthy, comprehensive and integral perspective on sexuality. By sharing clear and simple approaches and practices, we will show families how much their input is needed and how they can take on the mantle of education.

A range of benefits will come from creating a shared space and close-knit atmosphere that fosters critical thinking, the ability to ask questions and children's active participation in their own learning, including face-to-face work on values (rather than using screens) to enjoy quality family time. In turn, a trusted environment will develop to look into fears, frustrations or doubts, promote prevention and create a context of support to check and contrast information.

Moving on now to the selection and analysis of children's literature, it is important to remember that these publications reflect society and are created by individuals. Therefore, it is essential to assess works both globally and specifically, as well as uncover what type of reflection they offer, the values they promote and what challenges lie ahead.

Firstly, the books contain a highly positive and enthusiastic reflection on both sexuality and the need for a proactive family role. They contain clear and concise messages on how sexuality is life and, through parent-child support and communication, how frameworks can be established where both parties can learn. This aspect strongly supports our analysis: family bonds, good relationships and closeness are the basis to set out hand-in-hand on a shared learning pathway. The specific appendices for families included in some of the books are an example of encouraging families to be confident and trusted reading partners, providing them with information to act in conviction when they are faced with questions or doubts.

In turn, another aspect becomes clear when looking at the books in detail: most focus their content on the body, physical changes, reproduction and, to a lesser extent, other aspects of sexuality. This therefore leads us to ask: do we have this literary legacy because historically more focus was placed on genitalia and reproduction? Are these aspects the main focus and others merely supplementary issues? Does any concept need to be broached more comprehensively today? Should all topics be worked on in the same way?

As a set of books, a further issue involves how the importance of recognising and validating feelings, emotions and bodily sensations is framed. The works take a highly positive stance on the need to listen to our bodies and recognise the different signals it sends to us.

Another aspect seen throughout the sample is the clear and simple use of vocabulary, presenting topics in a natural way, facilitating comprehension and supporting readers to internalise information. The same can be said for the structures and narrator role, since information is easily communicated through simple compositions and omniscient narrative voices.

In terms of images, we should highlight how they are beneficial for learning in different ways: they exemplify what is being presented; provide extra information through visual language; stimulate analytical ability; are powerful tools to capture readers' attention, and support the creation of individual ideas regarding sexuality. As has been demonstrated, illustrations or drawings helps children situate the story within the present day and in everyday settings, thus boosting self-identification with the story.

The visual code is also noteworthy for the wide range of colours and hues that shape the works. A further interesting highlight is the fact that none of the books use real photographs of what is being discussed. Rather, they use visually appealing fun drawings and exaggerated shapes.

Lastly, it should be noted that when looking at protagonists and characters, there are general shortcomings in terms of details or the superficial nature of their characterisation. Offering a more detailed overall description could spark greater creativity, imagination and comprehension.

Although the selection of children's books enabled us to gauge their huge effectiveness and marvellous potential, it also outlined new challenges and targets.

Firstly, given the high number of books that focus on the physical side of sexuality, there is a clear lack of focus on gender expression or sexual orientation. How the selected sample broaches these topics highlights the superficial approach they contain and leads to the question: is this superficial approach enough right now or do we need to produce new material with a more substantial method?

Secondly, the prior reading skillset required of children should also be pointed out. In order to benefit from all the knowledge and information provided, abilities such as analysis, reflection and linking concepts are needed. In this sense, it is logical to assume that the works are aimed at children between the ages of seven and ten. Therefore, what about publications for younger and older children? Do families with children between the aforementioned ages read more books? Younger children would seem to be underserved and therefore we need to ask whether children's literature would be the most suitable tool for early childhood.

In short, it is worthwhile underlining the importance of broaching sexual education with children in order to foment well-being, health and a change in society's perspective on this vital life stage. Children's literature and communication with young children could be an excellent way to ensure a better, healthy and more integral world that values sexuality as a right for all.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE AUTHORS

Aina-Maria Duran-Mestre: Formal analysis; Design; Data curation; Writing: original draft; Writing: review and editing; Research; Methodology; Software; Validation; Visualisation.

Marga Vives-Barceló: Formal analysis; Data curation; Writing: review and editing; Methodology; software; Supervision; Validation; Visualisation.

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