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Exploring family models and SDG number five in picture books. Dialogical alternatives for secondary education

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Introduction: This contribution addresses the controversy that often surrounds the educational treatment of new family models. The literature, as a medium of fiction based on reality, reflects social changes, including the organization of families. Promoting gender equality—Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number five (United Nations)—is closely linked to understanding these new family structures. In this context, picture books—powerful literary resources that combine images and words—should be used to expose students to new realities and raise awareness of diversity, thereby fostering tolerance and respect.

Method: This study analyzes several picture books, including classics like *King and King* and more recent titles like *Well done Mummy*. The analysis will focus on their format and content to determine their suitability for secondary school classrooms, discuss family models, and raise awareness, potentially changing attitudes. Following the analysis, we explore how to incorporate these books into educational sequences, highlighting the use of dialogical discussions to promote critical thinking.

Results: The results of this contribution will include a list of suggested picture books, an evaluation of their suitability, and proposed didactic strategies.

Discussion: These aspects will strengthen the classroom treatment of this controversial topic, helping students grow holistically through axiological aspects and the development of SDG number five: gender equality. Additionally, this study will confirm the relevance of using picture books in the classroom within the context of liquid modernity, where audiovisual elements are key motivators for students.

KEYWORDS

education, culture, teaching education, literature, family

1 Introduction

In an era preoccupied with issues like artificial intelligence and its impact on daily life (Escotet, 2023; Strzelecki, 2023), this contribution addresses a controversial topic in education: the influence of new family models. Social conditions, the evolving understanding of interpersonal relationships, and changes in daily work dynamics have led to a broader concept of family. Medical, technological and legislative advances—such as the recognition of same-sex unions and the acceptance of unmarried couples—have also contributed to this pluralistic notion of family in the 21st century.

The notion that one type of family is better than another must not be accepted if respect for diversity and the development of inclusive education is to prevail. All family structures—regardless of whether these comprise single mothers, lesbian couples, homosexual parents, traditional families, families that unite but come from different nuclei, or adoptive

families—must be founded on communication, responsibility, care, and respect. And these diverse family models are increasingly represented in literary fiction.

Traditionally, a specific family typology has dominated the collective imagination and cultural manifestations. However, as society evolves, so do representations of the family (Jerez-Martínez and Hernández Delgado, 2015). Integrating different family models into the cultural system faces resistance, but the literature, particularly children's works, plays a crucial role in cultural transmission (Brown et al., 2016).

Our study will focus on new kinship and gender identities. As Butler (2004) noted, undoing gender involves rethinking personhood, recognizing rights, and fostering full social inclusion. Ashley (2023) emphasized that gender identity is inherently subjective. Through inter-subjective dialog, we aim to promote reflection on diversity, reducing discrimination and fostering acceptance. Our goal is to offer a more pluralistic vision and interpretation of reality, emphasizing knowledge and respect in accordance with democratic values.

Picture books, as artistic objects, transcend the realm of children and allow people of different ages to interact with them, establishing a narrative pact based on the interpretation of symbolism, mainly provided by the image (Nikolajeva and Scott, 2006). The appropriateness of using picture books is given by the context of the audiovisual era, where users, whether in their role as learners or not, become prosumers of audiovisual environments (Navio-Marco et al., 2022). Picture books would, therefore, perfectly meet the expectations of the inhabitants of this third decade of the 21st century by placing their attention on the image and its connotations as well as its denotations.

Using fiction as our starting point, we aspire to build a discourse based on SDG number five: gender equality. We propose a dialogic approach in educational contexts to present new family models, aiming to prevent rejection and controversy. Analyzing a selection of picture books will help us identify characteristics that facilitate dialogic action in classrooms or other educational spaces, aiming for social transformation and promoting respect for diversity.

2 The context of hypermodernity and liquid modernity in the third decade of the 21st century

We aim to provide some insight into the context of human education and literacy in the 21st century, considering concepts like liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000) and media literacy (Cho et al., 2022). It is necessary to delve into anthropological aspects that affect the use of literature to raise awareness of social models of family and gender identity.

Bauman's theory focusses on certain aspects, such as uncertainty, instability, and lack of continuity, by means of which traditional structures give way to new forms (including family models). In other words, they are structures that, rather than stagnating, tend to be evanescent and changing. Globalization, technology, and economic trends contribute to this, inducing insecurity and inciting people to move away from traditional norms. Adapting to social changes and individualization significantly shapes new identities and their cultural aspects. Given this social polarization, we emphasize the importance

of respecting diversity and trusting in educational proposals as a means of necessary social transformation.

As a framework for human actions, hypermodernism values information and communication technologies for overcoming natural limitations (Charles and Lipovetsky, 2005). This perspective leaves aside Lyotard (1979) when he mentioned the metanarrative, where scientific, historical, religious, and social facts were socially assumed in an absolutist way. The democratization of information increases access to knowledge and critical thinking but also poses a risk of infoxication (Heiss et al., 2023). Augé's (2009) concept of non-places complements liquid modernity, suggesting a flexible but potentially dispersed learning context.

The transposition of these conceptual pillars to the literary sphere connects with Eagleton (2003) when he questions the cultural and literary theory of our times, indicating that there is a fusion between the two. This fact highlights the value of considering cultural issues relevant to people and their inclusion in works of fiction. Controversial topics can thus become part of the narrative arguments, and taking into account the aforementioned progression of collective thinking, they can be dealt with in a way that overcomes possible social censorship. In this sense, Stephens and McCallum (1998) already warned us of the versions of literary classics, whether children's or otherwise, in which myths and other works were reluctant to develop reinterpretations from the point of view of gender differences. Furthermore, taking into account the contribution of Zipes (1983) where he warns us of the subversive power of classic stories, motivates the need to search for texts that satisfy social needs and help in the formation of citizenship that should be governed by the construction of critical and autonomous thought.

Picture books are a literary resource that—through their use—we can approach in a didactic way topics that are still culturally and familiarly seen as problematic. The progress toward total democracy (Wolk and Labbo, 2004) through the display of these books will be the fundamental goal of the educational proposal that we want to carry out. To this end, we must be aware that we are supported by different contexts and institutional references—which are international—and which allow us to think about the design of socio-educational interventions aimed at intercultural dialog and the acquisition of intercultural competencies by individuals (Shuali, 2022).

3 Citizenship education in a changing society

We agree with Harari (2012) on the power of narratives. The ability to create collective human imaginaries enables cooperation and coordination among large groups of people. Paying attention to people's productions allows us to identify societal trends and symbolic elements that can be interpreted. This involves recognizing that, as human beings, we create semantic fields or constructions of meaning that guide the behaviors of social actors (Majfud, 2018). Therefore, we need to be aware of the significance of the narratives and texts that are culturally available to us, as they encode human thinking and behavioral orientations.

Today, citizenship education takes place in a context of liquid modernity, which induces uncertain social conditions (Meirinhos and de Portela, 2023). While access to information is immediate, there is no certainty that it can be recontacted or fully assimilated.

For this reason, written texts and literary works take on greater value because they preserve people's thoughts, experiences, beliefs, and attitudes, especially in their physical forms. These texts reflect cultural changes and enable comparisons with past times or future projections.

Logically, if, as we mentioned in the introduction section, the work in classrooms and other educational spaces that we propose is going to be developed through picture books, we will have to bear in mind that this type of artistic manifestation is associated with children's and young adult literature. In this assimilation, it is key to think that evolution also affects this literary demonstration and that children and adolescents are not the same as in previous decades (Nikolajeva, 2019). For this reason, reflecting on the identity and characteristics of these in the years in which we live and in the years to come will significantly help the socio-educational intervention approaches that are carried out (López-Valero et al., 2021).

The relative speed with which we perceive social change affects educators, and we cannot think of traditional teachers who, with their resources already acquired in previous times, manage to do their job well. In this text, by focusing on SDG number five: gender equality, we call for teachers who can adapt to current times and to a consideration of gender identity that gradually moves away from heteronormativity and toward greater diversity and inclusion (López-Valero and Encabo, 2021; Markland et al., 2022). In the following section, let us look at what is expected socially and educationally from the development of the above-mentioned UN target.

4 Sustainable development goals

Humanity's concern for survival and the maintenance of cultural conditions that facilitate it has led to the formulation of certain postulates common across societies. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) embody this quest. The 17 goals set by the United Nations aim to ensure that human evolution follows axiological guidelines centered on democracy and the common good, valuing shared resources to promote their preservation.

The call for social responsibility (Fallah Shayan et al., 2022) and awareness of the elements concerning these objectives is crucial for their implementation within the framework of each society's culture. The 17 goals are divided into different aspects, some focusing on the environment, others on labor and welfare conditions, and others on more sensitive elements—such as the one we address in this contribution: gender differences. All of these goals are underpinned by SDG number four: quality education. While this can be approached from an institutional or political perspective, we believe it should be addressed through classroom interventions and other educational spaces that form the foundation of people's education.

An ethical perspective is essential for making the SDGs effective (Arroyo, 2021; Gómez Gil, 2018; Puig Gómez, 2022). This approach involves moving beyond hypermodernism, where technology is postulated as a solution to human problems. The recovery of the axiological is the way to raise awareness of sustainable development and, therefore, to address the specific objectives to be achieved. The preparation of educators will provide the necessary bridge between the education system and the citizens it seeks to educate for the achievement of the SDGs. Currently, full access to knowledge about the 17 goals has not been sufficiently developed (Encabo-Fernández

et al., 2023; Serafini et al., 2022), preventing us from being optimistic about their optimal social implementation.

5 Goal five: gender equality

Gender equality, as a fundamental human right, is a crucial pillar in building a society that advocates for peace and sustainability. SDG number five targets the eradication of discrimination, equal opportunities in political, economic, and public life, and the empowerment of individuals regardless of gender in traditionally excluded contexts. Education must play a role in achieving these targets by analyzing social realities and guiding people to be educated in conditions of equality, being able to choose life and professional paths that are not constrained by reasons of possible gender discrimination.

The United Nations' guidelines for this goal align with recommendations from various political and educational systems, which advocate for equal opportunities between genders (Vaughan and Longlands, 2023). These aspects are recognized as transversal, cutting across different cultural and social dimensions relevant to people (De Miguel-González and Sebastián-López, 2022). In education, addressing this goal involves critically analyzing classroom materials, such as textbooks (De Miguel-González and Sebastián-López, 2022), acknowledging emerging realities like new masculinities (Heinz et al., 2023), and recognizing affective-sexual diversity (Kelly, 2012). These elements extend beyond promoting equal opportunities for women, encompassing current aspects with significant social impact. Next, we will explore the characteristics of society in the third decade of the 21st century.

6 The concept of family

In today's world, events and circumstances often lead to undesirable situations such as isolation and loneliness (Luhmann et al., 2023). Despite this, the human tendency toward social relationships fosters groupings that give meaning to culture, allowing people to transcend their instincts and manage key survival elements. Within this configuration, the family remains a fundamental concept of social organization. Therefore, it is crucial to pay attention to its presence and evolution within the cultural framework that supports human existence and development.

Living together in the same dwelling, organizing roles with or without blood ties, and sharing a common economic and social lifestyle are usually characteristics the World Health Organization provides to define the concept of family. The evolution of this concept is clear, broadening to include a core that does not necessarily entail blood relationships. Additionally, social circumstances give rise to diverse family models, all of which deserve respect and social legitimacy without anyone being deemed superior due to tradition or other reasons.

Collins (2023) reflected on how new visions and practices of sexuality have transformed the concept of family in recent decades. Nowadays, we encounter various possibilities: childless families, two-parent families with children, same-parent families, composite (or reconstituted) families, single-parent families, foster families, adoptive families, and extended families. Tradition and persistent discourse have traditionally exalted the two-parent family model with children as the most frequent and valid societal reference. However, as mentioned in previous sections, the paradigm shift in collective

imagination and cultural meta-narratives necessitates visibility for other family models, which are equally legitimate.

Academic literature already includes several studies on single-parent families (Chick, 2008; Hedberg et al., 2022; Kelly, 2012; Sunderland and McGlashan, 2012), as reflected in picture books. This suggests that potentially controversial topics can be addressed through the reading and pedagogical use of literary works. Given this context, it is essential to train educators to become effective mediators between the artistic object—a picture book, in this case—and students in the learning process. Fortunately, the educational field is sensitive to social change and programs and experiences; for example, Davis and Hanline (2018) and Farr et al. (2019) are already addressing these potentially controversial issues.

7 Controversial issues

Certain issues elicit varying sensitivities among people, sometimes generating dichotomies of thought, conflicts, and tirades. When an issue touches on axiological questions and varies in acceptance based on individual sensitivities, it becomes controversial. Scientific literature indicates that addressing these topics, and the didactics linked to them is one of the most powerful tools for activating and training democratic and critical citizenship (Ortega-Sánchez, 2022). It follows that such issues should be a subject of pedagogy, especially for educators and trainers. Their perspective and attitude are crucial for discussing potential conflicts with cultural and family values in classrooms or educational spaces.

Gender identity and its formation are controversial societal issues. The previously mentioned absolutist meta-narrative in societal development is giving way to a more plural discourse, offering more possibilities of expression beyond androcentric or heteropatriarchal views (Apaolaza-Llorente et al., 2023). Moving toward the concept of personhood is a challenge, but acknowledging and settling differences is essential. For example, Van Houtte's (2023) study highlighted educational differences in disruptive behavior and academic commitment between males and females. These differences persist in social and working environments, with disparities in working conditions between women and men (Antón et al., 2023). Coeducational models are urgently needed in educational, social, and family contexts (Heras et al., 2021), along with openness to new social realities and situations, such as changing family structures based on diverse choices about love, sexuality, and lifestyles.

Children's literature can significantly influence social and cultural transformation due to its impact on early years and beyond. Reflecting on gender attributions or the construction of identities should be a relevant premise in teachers' daily actions (San Martín and Ortega Sánchez, 2022). In this case, we already highlighted the fact that picture books are not pigeonholed in terms of age groups. For example, this fact allows working groups such as secondary school students to access potentially controversial content such as sexual diversity through the reading and prior or subsequent teaching of picture books (Leung and Adams-Whittaker, 2022; Soler-Quílez et al., 2022). The link between this perspective and family models informs our focus on literary works that reflect new realities and contribute to inclusive awareness, fostering a truly tolerant and democratic society.

The concept of an implied reader is key to understanding our contribution in terms of the importance of controversial topics in children's literature. The conceptualization of this potential reader in the author's mind suggests that the user is expected to reconstruct the text based on their previous life and cultural experiences. If and when engaging actively and interactively with the text, reading becomes a social, active, affective, and intertextual framework rather than a solitary act. In doing so, individuals are enabled to understand and construct ideas, participate with their voice in society, and even form critical and autonomous opinions on controversial issues.

8 The use of picture books to address axiological and controversial issues

Previous research, such as that by Ortega-Sánchez (2023a), has highlighted the importance of literature in educational treatment of the affective-sexual diversity. The same author's didactic exploration (Ortega-Sánchez, 2023b) serves as a precedent for analyzing the impact of digital literature on the educational approach to affective-sexual diversity.

Training teachers in children's and young adult literature, including the knowledge and selection of picture books and distinguishing them from traditional stories, is challenging at various educational levels (Hernández-Delgado et al., 2023). The unique typology of picture books requires a specific conceptual understanding to avoid social stereotypes that equate them with children's stories. Therefore, the didactic guidelines provided to trainee and in-service teachers are crucial for identifying gender representations in picture books. These guidelines will help reflect on and shape critical thinking in students (Haghanikar et al., 2022).

Despite the stereotypical view of picture books as simple texts for young children, their value and complexity extend beyond this narrow perception, making them suitable for all ages. Studies have shown their successful use in secondary education (Bintz and Ciecierski-Madar, 2022; Carr et al., 2001; Giorgis, 1999). Content analysis of picture books reveals their diverse content and attention to diversity (Koss, 2015). The creation of picture books involves a significant esthetic component—illustrations—and a complementary creative aspect—the written narrative.

The pursuit of SDG number five in picture books fits perfectly with the target of education for social justice (O'Neil, 2010). Their narrative content, both visual and written, addresses controversial issues, and recognizing these through reading and interaction makes raising awareness more feasible. Previous studies support our study. Therefore, Evans (2015), Gunn et al. (2022), and Pomerantz (2018) have proposed specific work with picture books containing controversial topics, emphasizing the importance of critical awareness to change attitudes toward socially controversial topics. Similarly, we note that López-Valero et al. (2012) highlighted the value of using picture books to create European awareness from an intercultural perspective, thus demonstrating the above-mentioned effectiveness. Therefore, based on these studies, in this article, we would like to consider the work on equal opportunities between genders, focussing on the family models that can be seen in current times.

9 Method

We will adopt a hermeneutic paradigm, striving to understand the complexity of texts through reflection. We aim to interpret the

symbolism in the works by considering the culture and context of their creation. As Ricoeur (1986) pointed out, we will study the problem of the appropriation of the text, meaning the application of the text's meaning to the reader's life. This approach links themes to culture, transcending the individual. By studying picture books, we will assess their suitability for classroom or other educational settings.

The content analysis will involve a selected sample of picture books. We will access the literary works as documentary sources and identify the context of their creation, inferring both explicit and implicit messages. The selection criteria for the picture books correspond to the presence of family models in the texts and affective-sexual diversity. Additionally, the picture books should have a certain social presence, that is, dissemination among the educational and social community. The range of years established for the selection of these picture books is from 2000 to 2022. The 10 works that will be analyzed by means of a rubric aimed at detecting the topics and, above all, the didactic possibilities for socio-educational intervention with these literary texts are included in this category.

10 Sample

Our sample selection process was based on several criteria to ensure the chosen picture books would effectively engage pupils and allow them to reinterpret the messages and illustrations. First, we prioritized editions with significant literary value and excluded works that were mere contributions without depth (for our purposes, the texts with the least value will probably be those that are purely pedagogical, non-fiction or those that constitute merchandizing, for example, because they come from audiovisual productions, although this does not mean that they should be completely ruled out). Another essential criterion for selection was the narrative capacity or, in other words, whether illustrations and text complemented each other. That would allow the reader to complete and develop the horizon of expectations in accordance with the theme proposed—logically, an implicit criterion was that the topic corresponded to the main argument of the work. Additionally, the esthetic quality of the picture books was closely linked to these criteria. Enhancing imagination was also a key factor, as the combination of imagination and focus on the chosen theme determines the educational value of the work when used in the classroom.

The 10 selected picture books, published over three decades, address different family models with various affective-sexual sensibilities. The first book, *La familia del Ratón Pérez* (Riera, 2014), has a main character whose equivalents are the *Tooth Fairy* in English-speaking countries or *Le petit Souris* in French-speaking countries, uses a girl's question about the tooth fairy's family, to explore different models. The second, *Well done Mummy* (Haughton, 2022), presents a penguin mother as the referent for the little penguins, challenging androcentric traditions and demonstrating alternative family perspectives. The third book, *Red: a crayon's story* (Hall, 2015), while not focussed on family, involves the family in accepting the identity of a red crayon that feels blue, showcasing a classic narrative in picture books.

King and King (Nijland and De Haan, 2003) recreates a classic fairy tale by focussing on the prince's search for a marriageable princess, but what the court did not expect was that love with a person of the same sex would triumph. The creation of a same-parent family shows another of the models we already mentioned. The fifth text is

along the same lines: *And Tango makes three* (Richardson and Parnell, 2005). Sometimes censored, this picture book presents a model of a diverse family, raising the validity of same-parent families. The use of penguins in the zoo is a possible anthropomorphization that facilitates debate and awareness-raising.

The sixth picture book we selected is *Mom and Mum* are getting married (Setterington and Priestley, 2004) where the announcement of a gay wedding shocks Rosie, the main character. Once again, the presentation of diversity makes it possible to work with this work in educational contexts. The seventh book is in this same line of family type: *Molly's family* (Garden and Wooding, 2004), where, while drawing a picture of her family, *Molly* is scolded by other children for having a same-sex family. This motif will allow us to reflect on the acceptance of diversity and the weight of tradition in terms of family types. *Heather has two mommies* (Newman and Cornell, 1989) describes *Heather*'s two-mum family. The fact that they do not have a father does not prevent them from being a happy family and, therefore, allows us to show diversity through this picture book. Closely linked to it is *Felicia's favorite story* (Newman and Romo, 2002), where the main character demands the story of when she was adopted into a same-sex family, allowing us to see, in this case, the family structure that is both adoption and the presence of same-sex parents. Last but not least, the tenth book selected is called *Dragon's extraordinary egg* (Gliori, 2013), where another kind of family is shown, as the penguin who gets lost finds a mother in the dragon. As the story progresses, she returns to her penguin mother, but they will join the dragon to create a heterogeneous but equally valid and happy family.

The fact that these books have been published and translated into multiple languages may indicate a lack of severe censorship. However, the drawback is that their usage depends on teachers or family members discussing the included topics. By fostering a dialog between cultural progress and inclusive education that respects affective and sexual diversity as well as traditional family concepts, we aim to overcome censorship that contradicts modern times and SDGs.

11 Analysis of the selected picture books

In this section, we analyze the content of the 10 selected picture books. We focus on three dimensions: the potentially controversial subject matter of the work, the type of family presented, and the context of creation. These dimensions address the semantic and argumentative aspects of the books. Additionally, we consider the format, including illustrations and text length (see Table 1).

The use of picture books makes it possible to develop critical thinking in students as they engage with both images and text. The multimodal nature of these books allows them to be adaptable to different age groups. In secondary education, where students are transitioning from adolescence into young adulthood, their cognitive abilities are well-developed enough to explore these themes and form opinions that align with contemporary social trends.

Methodologically, the classroom strategies for using these picture books benefit from their treatment of same-sex and traditional families. This juxtaposition will act as a springboard to address stereotypical issues, forming the basis for dialogical classroom activities. Deconstructing these stereotypes is essential for nurturing a critical perspective on controversial issues.

TABLE 1 Content analysis of the selected picture books.

| Picture book | Content | | | Format | |
	What is a potential controversial issue?	Type of family presented	Cultural contextualization. Date of release	Illustrations (typology)	Length of the book
La familia del Ratón Pérez	Existence of different families in the school environment.	- Two-parent family with children - Same-sex family - Single-parent family	2014. Published in Spain. The political and social predisposition toward the issue is positive.	Classic. Similar to the successful text in Spain, *Teo* (Violeta Danou) in the 1970s.	32 pages. Balance between text and pictures, although the pictures are longer.
Well done Mummy	Sexist stereotyping of women's role (attributions) in the family.	- Two-parent family with children	2022. This picture book is in line with the times of women's empowerment.	Appealing. In line with the author's other works (Haughton).	40 pages. Supremacy of pictures over text.
Red: a crayon's story	Gender identity. Feeling other than social attribution.	Two-parent family with children	2015. The symbolism involved in the use of waxes does not allow us to gage the true social reception.	Appealing. Associating identity with colors means that the text revolves around them.	40 pages. Pictures are more important than text.
King and King	Same-sex couple versus tradition.	Two-parent family with children - Same-sex family	2000. The use of the classic story structure allows for better social acceptance.	Simple. They do not stand out when compared to, for example, Disney illustrations.	32 pages. Pictures stand out from the text, which is brief.
And Tango makes three	Same-sex family versus tradition. In this case, it is represented by two penguins (an aspect that generated social criticism).	- Same-sex family	2005. The choice of penguins was controversial, as the story could sometimes be misinterpreted literally.	Appealing. Trend toward *avant-garde* illustration.	36 pages. It emphasizes illustration over storytelling.
Mom and Mum are getting married	Same-sex family versus tradition.	- Same-sex family	2004. The book is released in a year when the reception of this kind of family is not as problematic as it used to be.	Classic. Similar to other texts such as *Oliver Button is a Sissy.*	24 pages. Pictures prevail over the text.
Molly's family	Same-sex family versus tradition. Non-acceptance in the school environment.	- Same-sex family	2004. The book was released in a year when the reception of this type of family was not as problematic as it used to be.	Classic. Situation similar to that of *Mom and Mum are getting married.*	32 pages. Pictures prevail over text.
Heather has two mommies	Same-sex family versus tradition.	- Same-sex family	1989. The text becomes a reference when looking for literature related to the topic. This work has a social impact and a subsequent route.	Classic. Situation similar to that of *Mom and Mum are getting married* and *Molly's family.*	30 pages. Pictures prevail over text.
Felicia's favourite story	Same-sex family versus tradition.	- Same-sex family and adoptive family	2002. The book was released in a year when the reception of this type of family was not as problematic as it used to be.	Classic. Situation similar to that of *Heather has two mommies.* However, it is the same creator (Newman).	24 pages. Pictures prevail over text.
Dragon's extraordinary egg	Are you family, even if you are not genetically related?	- Adoptive family	2013. The social acceptance of adoption means that the text *a priori* has no problems of acceptance.	Appealing. Trend toward *avant-garde* illustration. More along the lines of Donaldson and Scheffler.	32 pages. It emphasizes illustration over storytelling.

We now explore the educational intervention possibilities for each selected work. Based on the controversial topics they address, we provide guidelines for classroom action, focussing on dialogical discussions, debates, and literary creation.

As noted above, the 10 works are suitable to be dealt with from an educational point of view, delving into the possible controversial issues that they denote and connote through their narrative—mainly visual. In the next section of this contribution, we will discuss this evidence.

12 Discussion of results and pedagogical possibilities

The analysis of the selected picture books shows that diversity in family models has the potential to be a controversial topic, largely due to the long-standing tradition of the two-parent family model, which often emphasizes women's self-sacrifice. Deviating from this model can generate issues of acceptance, as societies exhibit a notable reluctance to change. Historically, it was uncommon to find cultural expressions depicting family structures different from the dominant model. However, social transformations and the emergence of diversity now allow for more varied representations, particularly in literary works like picture books, which narratively and visually explore different family structures.

Affective-sexual identity significantly influences family organization. Overcoming traditional constraints means that familial ties no longer need to be strictly genetic but can be based on emotional or shared interests. Many of the analyzed works depict same-sex families or advocate for equal opportunities among family members, highlighting significant social changes. These works serve as valuable educational resources, offering visibility to diverse social circumstances embedded within culture. The nearly three-decade span of the selected period attests to these social changes and encourages debate on the prospect of further transformation.

The suitability of picture books as a resource for work, in this case in secondary education, but at the same time appropriate for other age groups, is reflected in their visual strength. The aspect that fits perfectly in today's society, where, as previously mentioned, the liquid prevails over the dynamics of people's daily behavior and interaction. The ability to combine the viewing of the images with the narrative of the stories themselves has an impact on the possibility of making people reflect, thus making it possible to modify their thinking or at least make them aware of diversity and the need to respect and include family structures that are different from the traditional ones.

In our opinion, the literary contribution must be complemented by pedagogical actions (see Table 2) that integrate the narratives into the lives and thoughts of students and the broader community.

TABLE 2 Possibilities for socio-educational intervention based on selected picture books.

Picture book	Possible controversial issue to be addressed (relevance in secondary education)	Possibilities of didactic intervention in secondary education after reading and interacting with the picture books.
La familia del Ratón Pérez	Diversity in family models	Classroom presentation of the models. Dialogical discussion on the social acceptance of such models. Search for the models in the picture books in the student's immediate environment and share them.
Well done Mummy	Women's empowerment	Dialog discussion on women's empowerment. Search for characters in literature—it can be children, young adult or general literature—where the heroine is a woman.
Red: a crayon's story	Gender identity	Dialog discussion that addresses gender identity. Deepening the discussion in the form of a debate that explores the need to promote respect for the thoughts and feelings of all people, trying to avoid prejudices and stereotypes.
King and King	Same-gender couples	Dialog discussion that addresses the same-sex marriage. Recreation in literary text form of the King and King text—keeping the theme—with another classic tale different from the one given in this picture book. Sharing and debate on the new productions.
And Tango makes three	Same-sex family	Dialog discussion on same-sex parent families. Deepening the discussion in the form of a debate that explores the need to promote respect for the thoughts and feelings of all people, trying to avoid prejudices and stereotypes.
Mom and Mum are getting married	Same-sex family	Dialog discussion on same-sex parent families. Deepening the discussion in the form of a debate that explores the need to promote respect for the thoughts and feelings of all people, trying to avoid prejudices and stereotypes.
Molly's family	Same-sex family. Acceptance problems in the classroom	Dialog discussion on same-sex parent families. Deepening the discussion through a debate that explores how classrooms should be dealt with, whether there should be no debate at all, and whether it should become a normal situation within the framework of diversity.
Heather has two mommies	Same-sex family	Dialog discussion on same-sex parent families. Deepening the discussion in the form of a debate that explores the need to promote respect for the thoughts and feelings of all people, trying to avoid prejudices and stereotypes.
Felicia's favorite story	-Same-sex family and adoptive family	Dialog discussion on same-sex parent families. Creation of a literary story about a fictional family that addresses this structure among its members. The story is narrated with the same enthusiasm as that of the girl in the original.
Dragon's extraordinary egg	Adoptive family. Legitimacy	Dialog discussion on adoptive families. Deepening the discussion through a debate exploring the legitimacy of using the term family for people who do not share genetic characteristics.

Dialog-based discussions are particularly well suited to this goal. Allowing students to express their opinions on controversial social issues can significantly impact societal reconstruction (García-Carrión et al., 2020; Rapanta, 2021; Van der Wilt et al., 2023). This pedagogical approach has roots in the work of Freire (1970) and Habermas (1984, 1987), who laid the groundwork for communicative action aimed at achieving consensus and moving beyond a solely logical positivist framework, where technological rationality dictates human actions (Laird-Gentle et al., 2023). The objective should be to enable students to articulate, deconstruct, and reconstruct their opinions based on arguments they formulate themselves (Kim and Wilkinson, 2019). These arguments will be grounded in evidence from literary works inspired by real social events. Consequently, we advocate for the use of picture books in pedagogical discussions as an educational strategy for fostering social and educational change. Such discussions can equip individuals with the critical capacity needed to navigate controversial issues.

13 Conclusion

In conclusion, achieving SDG number five, gender equality, necessitates deconstructing traditional concepts and incorporating them into teaching and learning processes (Eschenbacher and Weber, 2023), regardless of the educational space in which they take place.

Social changes related to diversity in behavior and associations that are taking place in the context of a changing culture must be reflected in cultural displays and educational and social spheres. Furthermore, in the context of education, attention should be paid to the transformations in the modes of formal and informal learning carried out by students. Therefore, if social trends are based on audiovisuals, these aspects should ideally not be neglected, given their motivational character.

Picture books, often stereotyped as children's literature, should be recognized for their broader applicability across age groups due to their symbolic and visual impact. This study reviewed 10 picture books addressing family types and gender identity, including affective-sexual preferences. The quest for responsible citizenship fits perfectly with the use of these literary works and caters for the visual everyday life of secondary school students. The axiological approach advocated is compatible with more contemporary literacy practices, which should not always be based on literacy alone. It is thus clear that we pursue citizenship in line with current social trends (Anditasari et al., 2023; Houser, 2023; Shaw, 2023), including potentially controversial issues.

The content of the literary resources proposed through the 10 selected books should be approached from a critical perspective and the possible empowerment of students' thinking (Guajardo and Vohra, 2023). As suggested, the literary gatherings will allow the themes to be addressed in the classroom. Language and literature classes may be the most suitable subjects for them, but other spheres can also adopt a cross-curricular perspective, and this critical debate can be addressed in the other subjects. We thus firmly believe in the power of the word and its potential to generate attitudes and thoughts of respect and acceptance in the face of diverse situations that do not correspond to hegemonic traditions. Addressing gender equality as a cross-cutting issue at various educational levels is crucial, especially in secondary education, where students face significant physical and emotional changes that arise and require reflection, and it should

be the educational institutions, formal or non-formal, that provide the appropriate frameworks for debate on possibly controversial issues that find acceptance and solution in consensus.

This article has limitations that could be addressed in future research. For example, in order to verify whether the emerging trend of publications on controversial topics is significant, the sample size could be expanded in future studies. Additionally, conducting classroom experiments with the selected works and using data collection instruments to assess their effectiveness in conveying ideas would be an area of great importance for future development. Another way to overcome the limitations of the present study would be by broadening the analytical perspective, that is to say, by incorporating an intersectional approach, examining how gender, ethnicity, social class, and sexual orientation intersect (Crenshaw, 1991). This consideration of potential double discrimination could be explored through fieldwork with secondary education students. Such a multidimensional approach would provide deeper insights into identity formation among adolescents and young people.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author/s.

Author contributions

AL-V: Conceptualization, Investigation, Visualization, Writing – original draft. LH-D: Conceptualization, Investigation, Visualization, Writing – original draft. IJ-M: Conceptualization, Investigation, Visualization, Writing – original draft. EE-F: Conceptualization, Investigation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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