

IS THERE SEXISM IN THE SPANISH-LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS OF PRIMARY
EDUCATION? A COMPLEMENTARY TEXT FOR ANALYSIS

MSc. Ismary Lara Espina

Master in Clinical Psychology and Sexuality, assistant professor at the Faculty of Pedagogic Sciences, Matanzas University.

ismary@ucp.ma.rimed.cu

ABSTRACT

THE INTEGRAL EDUCATION OF SEXUALITY WITH A GENDER AND DIVERSITY APPROACH IN THE PEDAGOGIC FORMATION IS AN IMPORTANT AND NECESSARY EDUCATIVE GOAL. IN THE PEDAGOGIC SCHOOL OF MATANZAS CITY AN EDUCATIVE STRATEGY IS CARRIED OUT TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL. ONE OF THE ACTIONS TAKEN WAS THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A WORKSHOP SYSTEM FROM THE FIRST TO THE FOURTH YEAR OF TRAINING. DURING THE THIRD YEAR THE STUDENTS USE A COMPLEMENTARY MATERIAL FOR THE ANALYSIS OF THE READING TEXTBOOKS OF PRIMARY EDUCATION WITH A GENDER AND DIVERSITY APPROACH. THUS, THE STUDENTS DEVELOP METHODOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL SKILLS TO GUIDE THIS PROCESS IN PRIMARY EDUCATION. THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS PAPER IS TO EXPLAIN HOW THIS MATERIAL CAN BE USED IN THE PEDAGOGIC PRACTICE IN ORDER TO STIMULATE THE REFLECTION ON THIS TOPIC IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS. THIS STRATEGY PRETENDS TO MAKE CHANGES IN THE CONSCIENCE OF THOSE INVOLVED IN THE FORMATIVE PROCESS.

KEY WORDS: PEDAGOGIC FORMATION, COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION OF SEXUALITY, RIGHTS-ORIENTED APPROACH, GENDER, DIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

The professional training of the teaching staff and, consequently, the improvement of the curriculum, is a current problem with national and international relevance. Different authors have discussed and studied it from several angles including the initial or pre-grade and professional practice.

In Cuba, the pedagogic schools were reopened for the 2010-2011 academic year. The graduate profile states:

. . . must be . . . trained to run the educational process and the student's development, considering them the core of their activity, by being acquainted with the purpose, objectives and principles of primary education [1].

Sexuality is a dimension of personality; however, its school program does not include the theoretical and methodological work aimed at sexual education at that age, since it is oriented to teaching objectives.

The Educational Program for Sexual Rights and Gender-oriented Sexuality was then approved by Ministerial Resolution 139/2011 (2) which resulted in the inclusion of methodological orientations for sexual education and prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/aids with a gender, rights and socio-cultural perspective (3), to train the pedagogic staff. As indicated, contents associated with gender and sexuality should be developed in a cross-cutting manner by articulating them into the teaching, extra-curricular and out-of-school activities and provide a set of contents to be included in the

different subjects of the study program. Participatory, exploring and analysis techniques and deliberation workshops were suggested for this process.

Compliance of these orientations depends on the teacher's training and creativity. Studies and systematization conducted of scientific outcomes indicate that teachers are not prepared to assume this task.

The teaching training process should be conceived through a design that might allow students to get acquainted with the required tools to meet, under any circumstance and effectively, the demands of educational policies which, in turn, reflect the changes that have taken place at social level.

These transformations include the feminist movements, which constitute a milestone in human development, since they demanded social justice, provided visibility to the heterosexual standard imposed and the socio-political problems of women, which generate gender inequalities.

In Cuba, since the triumph of the Revolution in 1959, the main objective has been to vindicate the role of women and highlight their involvement in the construction of this social project (4). However, there are still some contradictions between the personal, academic, professional and social self-fulfillment process of women and the socio-cultural interests, needs and expectations.

The school, with a humanist and customized perspective, plays a highly responsible role in the implementation of these so badly needed changes. Communication spaces must be created on the basis of dialogue, honesty and mutual respect. The whole teaching community must be involved in the elimination of prejudices and beliefs, as well as in the development of a critical thinking in the students by providing them with a detailed, true and

complete information thus promoting values aimed at creating enriching relations and at assuming, in a responsible way, their own bodies and any relationship possibility.

The Pedagogic School Model states the comprehensive formation of personality in accordance with the current Cuban society's demands, namely, a democratic, equitable, pluralist and just society. Therefore, there are possibilities to lead sexual education with a scientific base. However, the educational practice reveals students' sexual manifestations which contravene the ethical principles of this social project, thus showing an inadequate sexual education based on rights, gender and sexual diversity (RGSD).

In order to achieve these changes, it is indispensable to think about individual attitudes, practices and representations expressed in the way professional actions are implemented. Therefore, the research states as a scientific problem the way in which we can contribute to a comprehensive education on sexuality with a RGSD approach in students from the Matanzas Provincial Pedagogic School. An educational strategy was designed for a comprehensive education on sexuality with a RGSD approach in the initial pedagogic training.

The educational strategy was applied to the four-year training throughout the academic year. With a weekly frequency of forty five minutes, the workshop system was included to the teaching schedule. The psycho-pedagogue acts as a coordinator. Its implementation was carried out in the pedagogic collective made up by the teacher/guide leading the orientation and control of the students' evolution, as well as the interdisciplinary cooperation in the different activities conceived.

Contents were provided step by step: in the first year, a debate on the theoretical and conceptual body of this approach, as well as the sexuality basic notions; in the second year, prioritization of regulations, conventions and programs associated with this field and development of specific diagnostic abilities in this area; in the third year, analysis of

textbooks, under a broader scope, either institutional or not, with a RGSD approach; and in the fourth year, the in-depth study of concepts within the Pedagogy of Popular and Advanced Education and the development of abilities for the group work.

The work was carried out in four groups, made up by 122 students, accounting for 66.7% of the population. Groups with a larger heterogeneity were selected from different municipalities of the province and first year of the primary specialty.

As in every strategy, stages and phases contributing to the success of the expected result are defined. This report is limited to one part of the research and only shows how educational influences are systematized during the second stage of the strategy.

The aim of this report is to explain how this material can be used in the pedagogic practice to promote reflection of primary level students on this issue.

In order to achieve this objective, the author believes that:

The goal of gender-oriented educational processes should be aimed at achieving equity, respect for intrinsic differences and equal rights and personal and social opportunities for men and women throughout life and in every performance context [5].

The author reinforces the idea that it is impossible to achieve equity, opportunities, rights and benefits of one gender without simultaneously transforming those of the other gender. Both genders should be present and active in this reconstruction process.

If we attempt to achieve equitable gender relations . . . it is necessary to examine the control and access of resources and benefits in every society . . . The latter being understood as the economic, social and psychological reward derived from the use of resources . . . meeting the basic needs, . . . possibility

to have properties, education and training, political power, prestige, status, opportunities to implement new projects or activities [6].

In order to achieve these goals, we must conduct this analysis since childhood, bearing in mind the age and development level of girls and boys. The primary education teacher spends most of his/her time in front of the students and in the class uses textbooks which “legitimize, thanks to the power of written words and images shown to those who want to learn, the model to be followed” (7).

In Cuba, the organization of the educational system provides all children with the same books throughout the national territory. These are valuable textbooks written by specialists, guided by humanistic principles, but with a concept which does not correspond to what a gender-approach education wants.

A series of steps are taken when analyzing documents:

- Reading Spanish-language textbooks in primary education, from first to sixth grades—including activities scheduled at the end—and observing illustrations.
- Analyzing textbooks, from both the graphic and illustrative viewpoint.
- Selecting those linked to the RGSD approach issue.
- Identifying textbooks containing sexist myths, beliefs, prejudices and stereotypes, as well as those used to positively reinforce the presence of women and other excluded groups in historical, cultural, scientific and political events.
- Classifying sexist stereotypes contained in textbooks.
- Linking textbooks with identified elements: sexist language and stereotypes, omissions, gender violence.

- Organizing information so as to classify textbooks in accordance with the classification made.
- Submitting suggestions bearing in mind the psychic development achieved by students.
- Preparing a complementary material to be used in Spanish-language classes.

This material consists of an introduction, required explanations for teachers, and suggestions on how to tackle this issue, glossary and annexes. The latter contains a compilation of several information materials: Cuban female firefighters, women in the Olympic Games, female sugar-cane cutters and outstanding women in different branches.

For the analysis, teacher should be prepared and master the knowledge demanded by current social transformations in sexuality, thus implying the knowledge of the updated language used in the RGSD approach. The advantage of this material lies in the fact that it does not need to resort to external literature to be included in the study program. This analysis can be based on reading textbooks used in primary education.

During the first primary education cycle, from first to fourth grades, cognitive processes (perception, attention, memory and thinking) are still far from abstraction, generalization, concentration and voluntariness compared with further grades. Therefore, teachers should examine these texts using questions associated with their daily life. Concrete examples can provide a better understanding.

In the first grade, the reading book contains many images because the child begins reading and writing, but some of them contain a lot of sexist stereotyped images that must be transformed at that age. The teacher should systematically show and repeat the new model so as to organize the perception process.

For example, the image on page 6 the boy represents the sun and the girl a white daisy. This division is not only made from the grammatical viewpoint: sun=masculine=male, daisy=female=girl. There might be a more subtle interpretation: the sun is a strong energy source and life depends on it (characteristics attributed to males); white daisies are fragile, pure, delicate and beautiful (characteristics attributed to females)). Of course, this analysis is not done with the student but can be oriented through role representation. I propose to work on this in the following manner.

The teacher asks: "Did you know that in theater men dress up as women and women dress up as men? For example, a woman dresses up and talks as Elpidio Valdés." The teacher makes an imitation and the conversation is more animated. A girl will represent the sun because they are strong and a boy will represent a white daisy. This will surely provoke laughs and comments. The teacher should explain that sensitivity pertains to both sexes and that it was just only a representation.

Further on, the book contains small texts written together with images. I suggest: Can boys comb dolls? The teacher says that fathers or grandfathers also comb their children and grandchildren. Then the names of the model sentence are inverted: "Noel combs Lilí. Puts on her diaper . . ." And continues the reading. During the recess, I suggest to perform role games in which household tasks are equally distributed.

On page 29, a sentence reads "Mother pampers me"; and on page 32 "I love dad." The knowledge received is reinforced by changing characters, namely, "Dad pampers me." This simple inversion reinforces the idea that fathers and mothers give affection in the same way.

In first and second grades, attention is more stable when performing external actions than mental actions. Therefore, it is important to alternate models and drawings in reading. For example, on page 110 of the "El tesoro del labrador" (The Farmer's Treasure), we read:

This reading provides a valuable teaching; I just want to share with you the idea that in our countryside there are hundreds of women who are agricultural workers. They do their job with dedication and love, though it is a hard work due to the conditions under which it is done. Women play an important role and many of them are national vanguards.

Then an illustration depicting agricultural women is shown. In this way, women are valued and their diligent work and capacity in agriculture are highlighted. I suggest drawing what was exposed.

In the third grade, a detailed plan demands not only a separation of units, but also the logical grouping of the material, that is, the subordination of its components and their comparison. It is convenient to record results from the grouping in a written plan and then its representation. Afterwards, the text content can be correctly reproduced. In this way, the reproduction methods—so important for the development of memory—can be formed.

For example, on page 219, “Los bomberos” (The Firefighters), only refers to male firefighters because of the existing stereotype that trades and professions depend on the person’s sex. Currently, in our country, firewomen are trained and sent to fire prevention tasks, though they are not in command posts. This decision is associated with the traditional social attributions to women’s roles.

An article on Cuban firewomen is then read and a synthesis is made. In this way, we can highlight the divisions of the material units and group them later on. The student is asked to reproduce it. Emphasis is made on the fact that women are also very courageous and capable of performing risky tasks.

In the second cycle, most students provide generalizations through their mental analysis and synthesis. The detailed explanations of the teacher and the illustrations are important to

master concepts, though it will be necessary to conduct a systematic repetition of their meaning in different contexts.

Using a language in accordance with age, the teacher explains that there is a trend, typical of patriarchal societies, to use masculine nouns, thus granting men a protagonist role and women an inferior, invisible and second-class role in written and oral language. This form of expression, present in most languages, hides and subtly promotes the traditional power relations since it acknowledges the supremacy of men over women and, consequently, women's discrimination.

For example, in the fifth-grade reading textbook, on page 140, "La maravilla de los paisajes submarinos" (The Wonders of Undersea Landscapes), this author calls the attention on the use of the masculine gender and the importance of using all the wealth provided by language to include and visualize women. As an example, I suggest Débora Andollo, who has recorded several immersion records.

The assimilation of moral standards and behavioral rules requires the teacher to have a well-developed system of methods and resources to monitor compliance. Encouragement is indispensable and violence is never advised.

In order to address this issue, the reading on page 209 of the fifth-grade textbook entitled "Las aceitunas" (The Olives) is recommended. Question to ask: "When the husband comes back from the field, what does he demand from his wife? How does he ask her? Is he respectful or insulting? Has he the right to insult her? Why?" On page 211, Águeda hits his daughter. Has he the right to hit her? Why did he hit her? Why are women, adolescents and girls the most subjected ones to humiliation and violence worldwide? It is adequate to explain why violence against women takes place, talk about this issue and know its consequences at personal and social level.

Text contents are supposed to educate on values, proclaim justice and equity and that is why reflection of these issues can contribute to strengthen them. For example, the second-grade textbook, in "Primero de mayo" (May Day), on page 206, comments:

Elsewhere, this happy gathering for Cubans becomes a day to claim for the rights of human beings. Did you know that in some countries when a man and a woman have the same job, the woman earns a lower salary? What do you think about this decision? Is it fair?

Here is another example. In the fifth-grade textbook, in "Los juegos olímpicos" (The Olympic Games), on page 30, after carrying out the textbook activities, ask students to observe the image and describe it. Several questions are asked: Is it a man or a woman carrying the Olympic flame? Why is it not a woman? Do you know when a woman participated for the first time in the Olympic Games? In which sports did they compete? Annexes to the material include a history of the Olympic Games and the presence of women.

It is necessary to state that the graphic representation usually found in textbooks on the family does not take into account the diversity that characterizes it, since what they portrait is the ideal family corresponding to the socio-cultural patterns far from the true reality. The student might not feel identified with the text, since it does not reflect his/her family or other families taken as reference.

Free expression, reflections and dialogue favor the development of a critical thinking which is necessary in the pedagogic practice of students. We must develop the perception acuity to visualize what lies in the subtext, what is not directly—but underhandedly—expressed. For example, the third-grade textbook, in "Observa, piensa y conversa" (Observe, Think and Talk), on page 225, warns: "Only masculine faces are drawn in this illustration. Can we draw female faces for these professions or trades?"

Women reproduce an androcentric ideology accepted as natural, invariable, adequate and exempted from any criticism. So much so that in analyzing the readings we can see that in those corresponding to the first cycle there are more texts written by women compared to men. However, from the fourth grade onward, the correlation significantly changes in favor of men. Many times, these women write texts on important men in history, art and science. We must ask: "And where is the woman's space? Who will write about them?"

TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF THE PRESENCE OF WOMEN AND MEN IN READING TEXTBOOKS.

School grades	Historical personalities		Artistic personalities		Scientific personalities	
	woman	man	woman	man	woman	man
First	1	5	1	1	-	-
Second	1	12	0	4	-	-
Third	2	12	-	-	0	1
Fourth	1	11	0	8	-	-
Fifth	5	11	0	1	1	1
Sixth	3	11	1	9	-	-

This material allows us to establish the interdisciplinary aspects. For example, in Civic Education they know about the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In fifth grade they work with the text "El poeta esclavo" (The Slave Poet) on page 40. It is important to explain what happened with slave girls: they were housemaids and, like Juan Francisco, denied the right to study.

The following table is a guide for the teaching staff. The table includes identified reading pages per grade to be able to deal with a RGSD approach sexual education. Some of them

can be found in different places since they are commented and debated on the basis of any of these elements.

TABLE 2. LIST OF PAGES WHERE SEXISM CAN BE EXAMINED IN LANGUAGE,
 VIOLENCE, STEREOTYPES AND SEXIST PREJUDICES

Sexist stereotypes	Reading textbooks by school grades					
	First Pages	Second Pages	Third Pages	Fourth Pages	Fifth Pages	Sixth Pages
Attributing girls and boys different characteristics, abilities, and attitudes	63, 66, 66, 71, 134, 182, 185	3, 19, 32, 127, 128, 173	3, 12, 15, 43, 46, 48, 73, 217	6, 13, 15, 232	39, 49, 63, 134, 151, 158, 202, 251	24
Trades and professions depend on the person's sex	6, 7, 73, 84, 85, 95, 141, 147	92, 138, 143, 193, 201, 219	3, 30, 73, 76, 150, 219, 225	1, 235	40, 163	10, 12, 60
Differentiation of learning, instruction and education by sexes	170	14	120	6, 66	40, 197	
Different games and toys for girls and boys	40, 45, 61, 63, 64, 66, 163	96, 98, 99, 101, 172, 175	176, 251	9		
Sexism in language		8, 10	1, 29, 34, 101	2, 4, 5, 65, 73, 215, 236,	21, 24, 100, 105, 124,	35, 49, 53, 83

				238, 266, 267	134, 150, 180, 185, 214	
Omissions	54, 82	110, 195, 198	7, 18, 29, 234	25, 74, 96, 169, 274, 280, 283	109, 140, 154	
Some discriminating elements in the social, family and legal organization	11, 82, 113, 185	206, 228	20	12, 20	30, 91, 94, 142, 169	
Gender violence					91, 209	

During the third year of pedagogic training, the workshop system is conducted so as to analyze institutional or non-institutional texts, with a RGSD approach. This includes children's literature, audiovisual means, films and children's songs besides the institutional reading and natural science books of Primary Education.

During that year, students receive the Spanish-Language Methodology, though not always texts selected by the teaching staff are those identified as conveyors of sexist stereotypes; hence, in workshops conducted at a different time, it should be explained how to deal with this issue based on the text analysis of these books. In Natural Sciences this is oriented as an independent work.

There are several ways when conceiving the methodology to be applied in a workshop. The one including the following moments should be adopted: initial moment, thematic presentation, elaboration and conclusion. A space should be created to apply this acquired learning; that is why during the academic year, when they begin their pre-professional

practice (concentrated), they apply these experiences and develop tasks with this purpose. Once this practice concludes, a systematization workshop is conducted where they express what they have achieved with students to strengthen this concept.

Their evaluations concerning this experience tend to be positive: students were motivated in class and were capable of incorporating elements derived from their personal history which enriched the debate (for example, many mothers and grandmothers are agricultural workers; their fathers are kind and "help" with household chores. They also refer to women who are outstanding in their towns and whom they know because they have visited the museums or because of the history classes.

The gender-oriented education implies mobilizing affections and feelings and transforming attitudes in a systematic way. If these suggestions are implemented with students since the first grade, in the last grades they will be capable of perceiving sexist and discriminating elements identified in the analysis.

The pedagogic training of primary level teachers should be guided to the creation of a reasoning thinking that could allow them to question, examine, transform and enrich their practice. There's talk of a mobilizing and self-regulating process raising awareness of their role as future teacher both at school and at home as well as in the social context. The development of criticism promotes the transformation of the educational system.

CONCLUSIONS

Cuba is carrying forward important transformations in the Educational System to train individuals capable of responding to the historical and social requirements. An important challenge is to educate people on the basis of gender equity and acceptance of diversity, as a significant element to achieve social justice, wellbeing, and peace.

The proposed complementary material constitutes one of the scientific findings of the

research and provides a guide to address primary education readings from this perspective. Sexual rights of individuals are emphasized. The workshop outcomes show changes in the feelings and thinking of all those involved in the process.

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