Where do Polish babies come from? Maturation and sexuality in books for children

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Where do children get the knowledge about body and sexuality? What does facilitate their thinking and talking about corporeality? Who is responsible for the production of children’s bodies and sexualities? Where does this voice emerge from – socially and politically, and what sort of power does it have over children’s imaginations and actions? In order to pursue these questions, I turn my attention to children’s literature. While I am aware of the multiplicity of voices and influences in action, in this presentation I will focus on two resources that are available to Polish children today.

Firstly, I will examine the books concerning puberty, sex, and reproduction, dedicated to schoolchildren, published by commercial printing houses since 2010 in Poland. My second area of exploration will be textbooks used both in biology classes and in WDZ (Preparation for the Family Life)(After conservative turn in the Polish politics, the school core curriculum has been changed in order to be more in line with the Catholic ethics regarding sexuality. WDZ is a subject introduced into the elementary school for children grade 4 and 5 which stirs up a lot of discussions.)

I will analyze both the thematic and material aspects of these books, keeping in mind that: "the form, illustrations and design [of the books for children] can hide powerful messages, multiplicities and understandings that can become disseminated without the reader’s (or even the author’s) intention”(Tesar et al. 2016:231).

Bodies, including children’s ones, are unstable and incomplete, but in books they become finished forms with clear boundaries. In my presentation, I will focus on the ways in which lines are being drawn so as to create a representation of a young body as stable and finished. I will unravel hidden meanings as well as I will talk about messages exposed in the Polish books and textbooks for children, which I understand as powerful resources embedded in more complex political and ideological discourses. I will present an analysis of representations of children’s bodies and sexualities pushed forward in these texts, and I will talk about the kind of body-subjects brought forward by these various publications.

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