

St. John Fisher University

Fisher Digital Publications

Education Masters

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

12-2015

Impact of Children's Literature on Family Structures and Children's Perceptions of Family

Lindsey M. White

St. John Fisher University, lwhite726@yahoo.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/education_ETD_masters



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

White, Lindsey M., "Impact of Children's Literature on Family Structures and Children's Perceptions of Family" (2015). *Education Masters*. Paper 320.

Please note that the Recommended Citation provides general citation information and may not be appropriate for your discipline. To receive help in creating a citation based on your discipline, please visit <http://libguides.sjfc.edu/citations>.

This document is posted at https://fisherpub.sjf.edu/education_ETD_masters/320 and is brought to you for free and open access by Fisher Digital Publications at . For more information, please contact fisherpub@sjf.edu.

Impact of Children's Literature on Family Structures and Children's Perceptions of Family

Abstract

This study asks, what is the impact of children's literature on children's perceptions of family structures? Literature teaches young children a great deal about the world in which they live; therefore, literature plays a large role in children's perceptions of others. This study uses triangulation with three forms of qualitative data collected by children's drawings of families, interviews, questionnaires, and discussions. The study found that young children can understand differences of others. Teachers hold a great deal of responsibility for shaping the minds of the future and literature has a large impact on how children learn about others and perceive the world they live in.

Document Type

Thesis

Degree Name

MS in Literacy Education

Department

Education

First Supervisor

Joellen Maples

Subject Categories

Education

Impact of Children's Literature on Family Structures and
Children's Perceptions of Family

By

Lindsey White

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
M.S. Literacy Education

Supervised by

Dr. Joellen Maples

School of Arts and Sciences
St. John Fisher College

December 2015

Abstract

This study asks, what is the impact of children's literature on children's perceptions of family structures? Literature teaches young children a great deal about the world in which they live; therefore, literature plays a large role in children's perceptions of others. This study uses triangulation with three forms of qualitative data collected by children's drawings of families, interviews, questionnaires, and discussions. The study found that young children can understand differences of others. Teachers hold a great deal of responsibility for shaping the minds of the future and literature has a large impact on how children learn about others and perceive the world they live in.

Impact of Literature on Children's Perceptions of Family Structures

From the moment we are born, we begin to learn about the world: what is right, wrong, acceptable or disregarded. Children learn through experiences and play with peers and adults. Today, it is more popular than 20 years ago to see children coming from various home backgrounds and experiences prior to school. As children continue to play and learn throughout school, they explore worlds that are alike or unlike their own. Children come to school with preconceived notions about different topics. Many of these topics are not addressed in school and lead children to grow into adults who can be stereotypical and prejudiced, which can hinder the growth of society throughout future generations (Fitzpatrick & Kostina-Ritchey, 2013). Children's perceptions about family structures play into other perceptions about homosexuals, adoptions, single parents, or no parents. When children's home lives are being ignored in the classroom it sends a message that their situation is less than and is not important. If young children are feeling out of place in their classrooms it affects their learning of educational topics (Ferfolja & Robinson, 2004; Pohan & Bailey, 1998). Many teachers focus on creating 'classroom communities' and including all students; a lot of teachers even take into account students' racial, ethnic, religious, and language backgrounds, but overlook students' family structures. How a child is raised is a crucial part in helping a child feel included and part of the classroom, as well as believing in themselves (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2013).

Furthermore, the home lives that children have impact their learning in different ways and can have positive or negative influences on social interactions. Children are very insightful and understanding, having negative perceptions about other's or their own home dynamic can hinder their learning in the classroom or friendships with peers. McDermott and Varenne (1995) discuss the impacts on children if they do not fit the normal culture. The school environment

tends to follow the norms of society and frequently labels children as disabled if their culture is different. These cultural factors can overlap one another and hinder children within the educational system. The type of family structure a child has plays a vast role in how they are raised and can affect how they are taught in a school setting. Using literature that portrays non-traditional family roles can help children to be more open-minded about the ideals of people, families, and their lives. Children's literature that promotes diversity in an accepting and positive way helps promote social justice inside and outside the classroom. Additionally, the exposure to children of stereotypes in texts has the possibility to have a negative effect on children's open-mindedness as well as personal self-identification and esteems because it adds to the idea that people within certain groups become just another statistic. However, stereotypes and heteronormativity in literature can help children to have a better understanding to question and rethink societal norms to become more inclusive of all people (Kelly, 2012). As a result, it is important that teachers make themselves knowledgeable about diverse groups, in order to best teach all students. Since teachers often have their own stereotypes and prejudices that can play a part in how their students are being taught it is vital that they acknowledge their personal beliefs and seek guidance and assistance to best teach and help their young students.

In addition, Mattix and Crawford (2011) believe that books make a difference in driving out prejudices and creating a community. The more multicultural literature that is used in a classroom, the more likely it will be that children will grow up more well-rounded and understanding of people's differences, as well as aiding in the classroom community and allowing every child to feel safe and important. Young children are very impressionable and with little real world experiences, literature plays a large part in acquiring knowledge about many things. Books act as mirrors for young children to see into their own worlds and cultures and also

as windows to learn about others' worlds and cultures (Mattix & Crawford, 2011). Children are able to use literature as a tool for understanding their own lives, other's lives, and the world around them. Although, many young children have difficulty to put together the words to accurately explain many feelings and thoughts, they are able to respond to literature in a way that is very forthcoming, mature, and truthful (Fitzpatrick & Kostina-Ritchey, 2013). As children enter school, many still have very little life experiences and lack knowledge about the world they live in. Through literature, children can learn about this world and can work toward becoming accepting and well-rounded individuals as future members of society.

Therefore, it is important that teachers use literature that portrays diverse groups, but shows people in a non-stereotypical way so children respect and understand differences amongst people. As children learn and understand the different groups of people who are in the community and in the world, they will also learn how to be tolerable and an advocate for all people. While children are learning about others through print, they are also learning about themselves. When children read books that mirror their lives, they learn about who they are and how they fit into society. Picture books send messages to children, subtly or explicitly and children pick up and begin to understand these messages for what is acceptable or not. Children's literature has a strong influence on children's understandings of topics like the aging process, adoption, LGBT, and multiracial families (Crawford & Bhattacharya, 2014; Fitzpatrick & Kostina-Ritchey, 2013; Mattix & Crawford, 2011; Boutte, Hopkins, & Waklatsi, 2008). Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the literature children are exposed to is multicultural, accepting and not-stereotypical for children to become active citizens and create a more equal society.

This study aimed to determine how the use of multicultural literature could impact children's perceptions on family dynamics. Children use literacy to gain insight into different contents and the world in which we live in. School plays a large role in teaching children what is right and what is wrong in society. However, this idea of right and wrong is culture as a disability (McDermott & Varenne, 1995) and if you are not able to fit into the normal culture than you are lacking something and therefore disabled. Children are able to pick up on these clues at a very young age, if they are accepted into heteronormativity or not. The sociocultural theory suggests that children are very perceptive and understanding; they are able to learn quickly from their environments and what they are immersed in (Larson & Marsh, 2005). Children learn the difference between acceptable and not based on their surroundings and explicit and implicit reference to the dominant society. The literature also agreed where many authors said that children's literature influences their growth, formation of identities, and knowledge about diverse topics in either a positive or negative light (Crawford & Bhattacharya, 2014; Fitzpatrick & Kostina-Ritchey, 2013; Kelly, 2012; Chaudhri & Teale, 2013; Anderson & Hamilton, 2005; Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2013; Ziv, Smadja, & Aram, 2014; Lin & Bates, 2010; Boutte, Hopkins, & Waklatsi, 2008; McNair, 2012; Sun, 2014). Children are impacted by the literature whether they are able to gain positive ideas or negative ideas; there is no literature has any effect on a child, he or she is always able to take something away from what was read. This study found that kindergarteners were unable to express on paper their feelings or perceptions of different family dynamics. Most children at this young age stuck with using what they knew and not knowledge they gained from the literature. Children at this young of an age have trouble responding to vague questions and kindergarteners have a strong basis to use what they know. They are still learning about the world, letters, sounds, people, books, and more, so

they will continually revert back to what they know best—their lives—until their schemas are built up enough where they can rely on knowledge from stories, media, friends, and new experiences.

Theoretical Framework

Literacy is not simply described as just reading and writing. Literacy is many things, which we use on a daily basis in order to interact with one another and to interact with texts in print and digital. Lankshear and Knobel (2007), describe literacy as “socially recognized ways of generating, communicating, and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation in discourses” (p. 64). Literacy is one of the ways in which humans are social beings; we use literacy to generate words, body language, facial expressions, and speech, in order to communicate with one another. Literacy is also strategies that we use to understand different content either in text or in discourse. As children learn literacy skills and strategies, they learn what is acceptable and what is not. These are things that are taught in school and at home, but one cannot assume that acceptable practices in school are the same as the home. Children must understand the many diverse topics in society and be able to discuss them in the structure and security of a classroom and at home. Therefore, children must obtain the necessary literacy skills in order to have the also necessary discussions about the differences amongst people.

Children begin to obtain language and literacy skills at a very young age. Through many of their first experiences children learn to smile and react to certain words as infants. Emersion into literacy and language is a key way in which children acquire many of the vital skills and knowledge necessary for achievement throughout school. Children learn basic language and literacy concepts through conversations with adults and peers. They also gain knowledge about

literacy and language through listening to educational television programs and children's books being read out loud to them. As children grow older the skills they have learned as toddlers is built on and added to. These are the skills that transform a child into a knowledgeable adult who is part of an ever-evolving society.

Moreover, these language and literacy skills that children acquire will help bring them to be active members of their communities and society. Becoming an active member of society is an important aspect of literacy and language because it allows children to grow into adults that contribute to their communities and benefit society, and quite possibly the country; by being well informed and literate, people are able to give back to our world and continue society's upward path toward success. The more knowledgeable a person is, the better-informed decisions he or she can make. When children learn about diversity and differences among people in school and at home, it is essential that children learn these things in a positive light and in truth. In this way, children are able to advocate for people who are still viewed as less than in the mainstream culture because it is important that everyone feels safe and acknowledged.

In addition, culture can be defined as the organization of hopes and dreams of how the world should be, it is mutually constructed, interactional and is made up of many voices, which is dependent on the work a group does together (McDermott & Varenne, 1995). Furthermore, culture as disability is the belief that there is only one way to be part of a culture, which leads us to believe that those who are different from the normal culture are lacking something to be part of that and therefore are disabled (McDermott & Varenne, 1995). Therefore, culture as disability allows people to be accepted or disregarded in society and can have an impact on the lives of children who are not accepted in the mainstream culture at a young age. If the culture that surrounds a child is not heteronormative, then the child is somehow disabled in society

beginning in childhood and carrying on throughout adulthood. The lives that children grow up having aid in creating their identity as an adult. School is one of the major mainstream cultures in society; it disregards and disables those who do not fit into the proper image. McDermott and Varenne (1995) discuss how the lack of cultural differences being praised, upholds children from a minority cultural background to continue suffering through miscommunication and alienation and to give up on school. Culture as disability (McDermott & Varenne, 1995) discusses the knowledge that different cultures have; different cultures have different needs and knowledge for living with each other, it shows the cycle of the power that culture has to disable others throughout generations. There are many different cultures and varying ways in which a child's home environment can impact their education; their family structure being ignored in the classroom is one of them. A child's family is a part of their culture and culture is reinforced and learned through the ones around you. This learning of cultures directly reinforces the study at hand because students in the classroom need to learn that their culture is important. Children should not grow up to feel locked out of society and feel disabled, but many do. Although culture has the power to disable (McDermott & Varenne, 1995) it is vital that children learn how to use culture to advocate for others and create a more just community versus continuing the cycle of disability for people amongst certain cultures.

In addition, the sociocultural theory, which is defined as where the child is an active member of a constantly changing community of learners where knowledge is constructed by cultural systems and learning is both formal and informal (Larson & Marsh, 2005). The sociocultural theory reflects how children learn from their environments and learning requires engagement and emersion. This theory reinforces the current study because so much of a child's knowledge comes from their surroundings and the people and places in their environments.

Therefore, children learn at a young age what is the norm and the difference between right and wrong in society. As children go to school it is important to engage them in lessons and immerse them in literacy, language, and learning. However, children cannot engage in learning if they are not being accepted in their classroom or school community based on their differences. The forms of the education system do not typically affirm or build on children's cultures in order to aid in their success in school. Literacy education is socialized on each student's cultural identity, if the student cannot make the connection between the learning and his or her culture, he or she becomes less literate (Ferdman, 1990). A child's new learning needs to be able to be added to their previous knowledge; in this way language and literacy skills continue to build on each other. The sociocultural standpoint asserts that as children engage with language, they receive feedback from others, which helps children to determine rules and regulations of language (Kucer, 2014). This also applies to children discussing their cultures and families. If a child begins to discuss his or her two mothers, as an example, but the teacher makes a point at its inappropriateness, the child picks up on those clues and a sense of alienation occurs. The invalidation of a child's family structure in the classroom and through literature can have a lasting negative effect in the child's development of a positive self-concept (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2013). Therefore, the sociocultural theory becomes important in guiding this study because children's engagement in a community of learners and amongst the cultural constructs of society plays a crucial role in how the child is able to develop an identity and who he or she grows up to be. As peers and authority figures disregard children's beliefs, cultures, and environments, children grow to either believe those things about themselves or rebel against the negativity surrounding their self-concepts. The action that children take as adults is dependent on those who teach them and engage them in lifelong learning skills and knowledge.

The dependency of children on their early experiences shows the importance of children's affirmation of their cultures, homes and family lives in the classroom and by others.

Research Question

Research has shown that prior experiences and home environments play a huge role in academic success. The acknowledgement of those prior experiences and home lives in the classroom has revealed the sensitivity of children and their cultures, as well as their learning achievements based on such acknowledgement. In primary ages, picture books are very frequently used to aid in teaching of various topics and it is with these picture books that many teachers purposely or accidentally disregard many children's home cultures. Therefore, this action research project asks, how does children's literature impact children's perceptions on family structures?

Literature Review

Often times, multiple different experiences surround children and each could be telling them something different. The main two environments are home and school. The environments show a cultural disconnect, where school is the mainstream, dominant culture of, which people should follow and the home could be a different culture that is not viewed as equal in the dominant culture. McDermott and Varenne (1995) discuss a problem in one's assumptions that there is only one culture and if you are different then you are missing something or 'disabled'. There is a huge disengagement in the classroom when discussing other cultures outside of the norm. McDermott and Varenne (1995) discuss how the inequities between schools and cultures uphold children from a minority cultural background to continue suffering through miscommunication and alienation to give up on school. There are many different cultures and

varying ways in which a child's home environment can impact his/her education. Many of these cultural factors overlap and can further disable children in the education system. The type of family structure a child has plays a vast role in how he/she is raised and can affect how he/she is taught in a school setting. In addition, the way in which literature portrays family structures can also affect children's perceptions of what family means and teachers who disregard diverse literature or use multicultural literature but ignore or talk down upon the diversity in the books are continuing to perpetuate stereotypes and feelings of insecurity by children.

In the following literature review, three themes will be shown and studied. The first theme being examined is the heteronormative dominance in literature. The social norms in the dominant culture are transferred to the school setting and do not leave room for those who are not part of the norm, but there needs to be an inclusion of all cultures in the classroom and in society. The use of literature that does not go along with the norm can help further inclusion in the classroom and in the future, society as well. The second theme, is built on the first, and will discuss the use of multicultural literature in the classroom and with teachers. This theme will show many teachers' perceptions about multicultural literature and different ways it can be effectively used in the classroom. Lastly, the third theme looks at how children are impacted by the use or neglect of multicultural literature that portrays the different structures of families. Children need to be able to identify with characters in picture books in order to help them learn, which relays the importance of using multicultural literature in the classroom.

Heteronormative Dominance in Literature

The use of children's literature to show different family dynamics will allow children to grow up with broader ways of thinking, which can allow for multiple cultures and not just the

norm. Despain, Tunnell, Wilcox and Morrison (2015) show results from the U.S. Census in 1940 and 2010, which represented the change in Western society perceptions; in 1940 a person could list their family as *family* or *nonfamily*. In 2010 a person could list as “married living with spouse, married but separated, widowed, divorced, living together but not married, interracial couple, grandparents, other adults living at home” (p. 317). Despite these statistics that society is evolving to be more tolerant of less traditional families there are still many stereotypes and negative perceptions associated with people and families who are not part of the norm. Literature can be used as a tool to help discontinue negativity that goes along with diversity. Studies like the one by Kelly (2012) show that using picture books that establish multiple parent roles, like two moms or two dads, can help children to be more open to non-traditional families and have a more positive attitude towards non-traditional families. These ideas are important in creating social justice inside and outside the classroom. On the other hand, Chaudhri and Teale (2013) make statements that contexts from the books used in their study about multiracial characters perpetuate stereotypes. Many picture books can continue to portray the dominant norms, instead of minorities in a positive light. Chaudhri and Teale state, “interracial relationships described as failing because of “racial incompatibility” echo and sustain segregationist notions... racial or cultural differences were likely the reason that their biological parents were not together” (p. 365). The biracial characters in the stories from this study were shown to have a single parent or no biological parents. The results of this study led researchers to look at how race and class are intricately connected and how society perpetuates stereotypes (Chaudhri & Teale, 2013). Although, there are students who would be able to relate to these stereotypes, it is not beneficial for changing the way young students see themselves, their cultural groups and becoming something other than a stereotype or statistic. Adams, Walker and O’Connell (2011) discuss the

exposure of gender stereotyping in pre-school children's picture books, which is a crucial time for practicing identities and differentiating between genders. The stereotypes that young children are exposed to can affect their gender identities throughout their lives. The results of Adams, Walker and O'Connell's study did show increased cultural acceptability, in that fathers are showing to have a more caring and nurturing relationship with their children. Society is evolving to be more accepting of the changes that are occurring. Despain, Tunnell, Wilcox, and Morrison (2015) do agree that books are reflecting the changes of family structures and acceptance of the diversity. Society still has a very long way to evolve so that all people are comfortable in their life choices and pathways. Nonetheless, Kelly (2012) does believe that readers will have a better understanding to question and rethink societal norms to become more inclusive of all people with the use of literature, no matter its stereotypes or heteronormativity.

In addition, Anderson and Hamilton (2005) show the gender inequities in a home and as parents. They found, "Mothers made most of the contact with children, did most of the feeding, and expressed emotion more often than did fathers. No behavior we coded was exhibited by fathers significantly more often than by mothers" (p. 149). The stereotypes and societal norm of mothers being the caregiver and the father being the income are perpetuated in the stories that Anderson and Hamilton studied. Domestic chores remain to be marginalized in children's books as "women's work", as Adams, Walker and O'Connell (2011) found. Also, fathers are still under-represented in children's books and the perception of both parents plays an important role in children's growth in society. Mattix and Crawford (2011) disagree; they believe that books make a difference in driving out prejudices and creating communities. With the use of picture books in the classroom, discussions can be created surrounding stereotypes in books and building classrooms to counter prejudices students may have. But Anderson and Hamilton (2005) state,

“traditional portrayals generally reinforce gender stereotypes... [which] led to negative attitudes toward women among children” (p. 150). It is important, as a teacher to discuss with students the differences between historical roles of people versus our cultures today. On the other hand, it is not solely up to teachers to aid in discontinuing stereotypes. It is also the role of the parents; Endendijk et al. (2014) discuss how “parents reinforce gender-type behavior by their differential treatment of girls and boys” (p.142). The use of literature between parent and child can either reinforce gender stereotypes if parents elicit discussions about gender-type behaviors, or parents can discuss stereotypes with their children and create a change in society. Nevertheless, how parenting is portrayed in children's books has a correlated effect on how children develop attitudes and expectations about parents (Anderson & Hamilton, 2005). This portrayal from books can result in the continuation of stereotypes and the typical gender roles. Crawford and Bhattacharya (2014) also have the belief that modern literature has the potential to reinforce or interrupt stereotypical perspectives of aging as they looked at books involving the roles of grandparents. Therefore, it is essential to be mindful of the pictures books used in order to interrupt the traditional roles rather than reinforce them.

Furthermore, there are children who may never see their family structures acknowledged in the classroom because it is not the norm. Millions of children lack access to books that can represent them, their families or friends (Rowell, 2007). The majority of teachers are white and middle class, which is also the majority of the characters that are portrayed in the stories that children are read; the larger world is excluded to every child when this is the case (Tschida & Swenson Ticknor, 2014). If a child is white and middle class, they continue to only see their world in literature and nothing more, but if a child does not fit into this group they never see themselves in the classroom or in literature. Cloughessy and Waniganayake (2013) demonstrate

that children who have parents identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender (LGBT) are not recognized in the classroom because pedagogy is reflective of positive, heteronormative society, which LGBT does not fit into. Although, teachers may honor students' individual differences in the classroom it is equally important to honor student's familial differences in the classroom. A student's identity is largely part of his or her family upbringing and if students are to be acknowledged for who they are as part of their classroom community and family is a piece of that. Chaudhri and Teale (2013) also discuss something similar with their study on biracial families. They discussed how most mixed race characters in the picture books were shown as economically struggling, missing one or both parents, set in an urban area, and other characters in the story were white. Therefore, it is unlikely that multiracial American children are seeing themselves in these stories and again, not being acknowledged in the classroom. The focuses of these stories have been on the stereotypes of minority cultures or fitting of a heteronormative society. The misconceptions that surround many minority groups can also be a problem. Some teachers have beliefs that are untrue, which can impact student's learning and beliefs. Martino and Cumming-Potvin (2011) claim one teacher from their study believes that one chooses to be homosexual; this claim shows the heteronormative limits of heterosexuals' thinking about same-sex parenting. Beliefs like these serve to continue heteronormativity and mainstream society instead of advocating for diversity. Students' identities will not be affirmed or developed to their fullest extent based on the heteronormative stories that are used in many classrooms.

Children can be said to be like "sponges," the metaphor describing children as being able to soak everything up. This metaphor is true for literature, as well. The stereotypical and heteronormative literature that is used with most children presents society's overt and covert values that explains and justifies which behaviors and beliefs are appropriate (Boutte, Hopkins,

& Waklatsi, 2008). Children soak up this information, perpetuating the norms of society and further alienating those who do not fit into the norm for one reason or another. Furthering the problematic issues with heteronormative literature is the content, ideologies, and paradigms in required school curriculums remaining to be mainstream and Western (Boutte, Hopkins & Waklatsi, 2008). Heteronormativity is continually pushed in schools, due to the fact that administration and teachers are largely middle class and white (the norm). The school curriculum usually does not allow much room for outside literature or the time to incorporate it. The mainstream culture of schools reinforces stereotypes, biases, and prejudices either by force of habit and ignorance or by choice and discrimination. Sanders and Mathis (2012) agree that pedagogy is “not typically focused on how to incorporate techniques to help dispel prejudices and strengthen positive identities of gay and lesbian students” (p. 1). If teachers are not working to dismiss prejudices against any LGBT students, then it can be inferred that any student's parents whom identify as LGBT are not being acknowledged in the classroom either. The issue with ignoring LGBT in the classroom is that students come to assume that there is no literature on LGBT and therefore, the LGBT experiences are invisible or do not exist (Sanders & Mathis, 2012). This assumption of minority cultures' inexistence can be assumed to be true for many other diverse topics as well. Young children who have never seen or heard of a certain race or ethnicity may begin to believe negative stereotypes about people if everyone is not provided a voice in the classroom. This lack of voice continues to enable the heteronormative and mainstream culture of society. If diversity is not in the curriculum and it is ignored then children begin to feel like it does not exist; all there is the mainstream culture and if someone is not part of that then he or she no longer matters. With the ‘single story’ that much of literature represents (the white middle class), children create ideas of what this monocultural literature represents and

that is who is not included in literature and therefore society (Tschida & Swenson Ticknor, 2014). The cycle of heteronormativity is kept alive.

It is important to note that heteronormativity is subjective to power. Without power amongst the mainstream culture, there is no norm and no one is made to feel lesser or different. Phillips and Larson (2012) write, "It seems impossible to ignore how power constructs heteronormativity and how it disciplines through fear and the very tangible public stories of martyred teachers, harassed and leaving education" (p. 171). Society has built up such walls that climbing them to go to a side that is prejudiced and discriminated against has created fear in people and has caused teachers who feel powerless or teachers who act against the norm to lose their jobs. Teachers often have to choose between what a mainstream curriculum requires and what he or she feels is the right thing. In many cases, the use of multicultural literature reinforces negative perceptions about those outside the dominant culture, says Jerome and Sweeney (2014) about adoption in picture books. Heteronormativity is still carried on through some multicultural literature due to author's portrayals of minority groups. Although, books portray some diversity in the compositions of families, the kinship is usually patriarchal, heterosexual, middle class, and white (Jerome & Sweeney, 2014). Many multicultural books perpetuate the norm and do not dispel stereotypes like they say they do, making the use of multicultural literature inadequate. Phillips and Larson (2012) as well as Mattix and Crawford (2011) believe that children should have access to literature that reflects their lives, including various family structures. Many times it is the discussion that goes along with multicultural literature that can have the largest impact. Even though "books reinforce the norms of White upper-middle class families" (Jerome & Sweeney, 2014), it is vital to combat heteronormativity in classrooms in order to better society and affirm students' identities.

Multicultural Literature Use in the Classroom

Many teachers report feeling unprepared, uncomfortable, and uncertain when discussing topics of family dynamics, which include sexual orientation, race, and adoption (Goldberg, 2014; Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2013; Dedeoglu, Lamme & Ulusoy, 2012; Brinson, 2012). Even though it can be an area of discomfort for many, these topics still need to be addressed in the classroom. The attitudes that teachers have play a substantial role on how children develop their sense of self, wellbeing, and positive attitudes towards diverse peoples (Kelly, 2012). Therefore, it is essential for teachers to positively discuss these topics in class, so children can learn to understand themselves, the world, and others. Teachers sometimes feel reluctant and resistant to discussing LGBT families in their classroom, but this further shuts out people identifying as LGBT and their loved ones (Goldberg, 2014). Shutting out minority groups is not the way in which society reaches equality and viewing diversity as a positive thing instead of a negative thing. Topics that are ignored are sometimes worse than controversial topics that are discussed. It is more beneficial to have a conversation that a teacher may feel as awkward than to ignore the issues at hand and allow children to continue negative beliefs, perceptions, and prejudices because the teacher did not dispel misconceptions. Goldberg also describes how many teachers neglect family and racial diversity because children are too young and therefore, not including them in the classroom environment; she states, "One survey found that more than half of early childhood educators were aware of adopted children in their classrooms, but, among these, only 34% had made adjustments in their teaching practices" (p. 671). This study shows teachers' discomfort with topics that are not in our everyday lives and the societal norms, which the education system follows. Phillips and Larson (2012) found similar results in that teachers are often silent on diversity due to their fear of pushback from parents or administration. The

teachers who speak out are frequently the ones to lose their jobs, and many teachers now are not comfortable being put in that position. It is also important to note that Goldberg (2014) found that teachers seemed to infer that all of their students' academic or behavioral issues grew from the fact that they were adopted, abused, neglected, or exposed to drugs pre-adoption. This further illustrates many teachers' negative perceptions about diverse groups of people. A pedagogy that is based off of comfort is not desirable; discussing controversial issues calls for a level of discomfort, which then allows people to challenge their engrained beliefs (Hartman, 2006). Teachers should be able to grow as professionals and as people as they learn from their students. While learning about their students' experiences and beliefs, teachers can begin to increase their knowledge and skills for dealing with and approaching diverse topics. Being a teacher should require a neutral stance and open-mindedness towards all people, beliefs, and discussions.

In addition, Cloughessy and Waniganayake (2013) cite an instance where a teacher asked a child a question, but this question did not allow the child to answer in regards to her family dynamics. The teacher asked if a character looked like her father, but the child's parents are two women. The teacher did not stop to rephrase or think about the question; the teacher assumed the heteronormative identities and does not offer other possibilities. This instance shows how a teacher is uncomfortable with discussing LGBT and either implicitly or explicitly excluded non-heterosexual families (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2013). Excluding specific cultures, races, and sexual orientations from lessons and discussions tells students these groups are not important, which will promote the marginalization of minority groups. Additionally, in Goldberg's (2014) study several participants noted teachers' discomfort and lack of understanding with LGBT family structures. Being uncomfortable with those from a minority group is something that must be improved upon, so that students learn to be accepting and

comfortable with all groups. Learning new things calls upon one to step out of his or her comfort zone, doing so almost guarantees that something new will be learned. On the contrary, Mattix and Crawford (2011) believe that picture books can be used by teachers to explore how different families are created, help children develop an understanding of family (outside of the norm), the idea that no two families are alike, and help children find their place in school or in their family. Using picture books in the classroom that show multiple family structures and dynamics allows children to gain knowledge about other cultures and people, as well as being inclusive to those outside the societal norms.

Moreover, Dedeoglu, Lamme, and Ulusoy (2012) have thoughts that "Reading and responding to books about the cultures of diverse groups in a classroom setting may help develop an understanding and appreciation of how a particular cultural group lives among other groups" (p. 262). They also believe that including LGBT-related books in teacher-training institutions would serve as discussion starters about homophobia and sexuality. Allowing pre-service teachers the opportunity to use LGBT texts and knowledge in applying them is beneficial to teachers. Many teachers do not have attitudes and knowledge that is necessary to accommodate heterogeneity in classrooms and sometimes assume a cultural norm (Hammet & Bainbridge, 2009). So many teachers are not adequately prepared to educate in diverse classrooms. But, if trained teachers use LGBT picture books in their classrooms these stories can help students to understand the realities, enter worlds that are different or similar with theirs, help them find themselves, and help readers to see they are not alone in similar issues (Walling, 2003; Dedeoglu, Lamme, & Ulusoy, 2012). All of these factors aid in creating a classroom community, social justice, and more knowledgeable citizens for the future. The more teacher's awareness is deepened the more teachers will begin to understand the potential of multicultural literature in

advancing social understandings of children (Ziv, Smadja, & Aram, 2014). As teachers gain more knowledge about multicultural literature the better teachers will be to teaching toward social justice. It is important that teachers are flexible and understanding of complex topics that are frequently disregarded in the classroom (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011). If teachers can begin to put away their own beliefs and be open-minded toward educating all students, then children will be able to grow as people and all will benefit. Many teachers are far too comfortable where they stand in their curriculum with issues concerning diversity, this comfort may be a result of their own identity, their experiences (or lack of), their knowledge about diversity or personal positions and beliefs (Martino & Cumming-Potvin, 2011). Regardless of a teacher's reasoning to avoid diverse conversations and topics, it is crucial that teachers be able to step outside of their personal box in order to benefit their student's learning and growth. Other suggestions from studies for creating classroom communities and social justice include classroom discussions of diversity, including books on diversity, inclusive language, curricular inclusion of LGBT and adoption issues, increasing diversity of schools, and more school events that focus on creating a community (Goldberg, 2014).

In addition, toward creating classroom communities, the curricula that teachers design is of upmost importance. Boutte, Hopkins, and Waklatsi (2008) state, "Educators should consistently design high-quality and balanced curricula that involve the purposeful integration of multicultural literature. It should be acknowledged that making decisions about the content of the literature curriculum continues to be a complex and political process" (p. 955). It is well known that a teacher's job is not an easy one, but it is an important one. The use of multicultural literature should not only be frequent, but purposeful as well. The decisions of which books to use and how to incorporate them into lessons can be tricky; the growth of diversity in the United

States has been high and culture has become ever more complex with a blend of ethnicity, race, family structure, socioeconomic status, beliefs, and conventions (Hall, 2008). The stories that teachers choose should include a variety of culture aspects in order to reach all students. If one book cannot reach several aspects of a student's culture then there are plenty more books to use in conjunction with it. Also, a teacher must take into account how society is structured to push back against advocates for diversity and equality. Phillips and Larson (2012) do not disagree, but they do believe in positivity and teaching teachers to force critical openings for possibilities of inclusion and re-imagining different realities for teachers and families with the hopes that teachers will continue to speak up against the discourses of heteronormativity. Teachers should be designing their curriculum around their students and what their students are bringing to the table. It is important for teachers to shy away from using the literature that proves 'single stories' and allows children to have one idea or belief of what society is. Tschida and Swenson Ticknor (2014) state, "[Single stories] become the definitive way that we view a particular person, a group of people, or a set of circumstances, reducing that person or thing to a single perspective of what we think 'they' are" (p. 31). It is up to teachers to address the 'single story' through literature to prove to students the diversity amongst them in the world. Every child is different, but that does not mean each child cannot be addressed in the classroom. Every child should have the opportunity to be advocated for and have their identities reaffirmed by their teachers and peers. The use of multicultural literature is perfect for this task because there is a book that every child can view him or her self in, supporting students' differences and force back against heteronormativity.

Teachers can no longer assume that the children in their classrooms share aspects of their backgrounds, including race, ethnicity, language and family structures. A teacher's use of

multicultural literature is a springboard for improving the appreciation of diversity, amongst other things (Sun, 2014). The more frequently teachers use literature that serves as mirrors for children into their own worlds, the better attitudes, beliefs, and values children will have. It is not enough to incorporate culturally specific literature that reflects children and their families into daily reading routines (Brinson, 2012). Just simply reading multicultural literature to children and not have discussions about the stories, does not help improve children's thinking and learning about diverse topics. Conversations that teachers have with their students can be influential and meaningful. Sun (2014) believes that teachers should be teaching students critical literacy skills in order to read the world and to develop their own set of beliefs in order to study and consider different texts' social and cultural inferences. The stories that children read send messages, explicitly and implicitly, and it is vital for teachers to help students understand the different messages and allow students to learn to decipher them independently, creating critical thinkers and learners. When teachers are aware of inclusive literature and are able to use it in everyday lessons, they share different perspectives and knowledge, which broadens children's learning (Rowell, 2007). Literacy is a huge key into learning for children, not just about the world or reading and writing but about all concepts, including being a good person and having confidence in one's self.

A useful pedagogy is drawing and building from student's funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Funds of knowledge incorporates students' home lives and communities in the classroom by allowing teachers to go to their students homes, gain insight into their backgrounds and use it in the classroom to help students succeed. In this way teachers are able to determine what is important to students and ways to use it in the classroom so that each student has the opportunity to succeed. There are many things that teachers can learn from

their students' homes and families that can be immediately helpful in the classroom (Mantei & Kervin, 2014). Teachers may be able to learn why students act certain ways or use certain words when visiting their homes. The study by Hynes and Dunifon (2007) shows that children living in non-parental households for long periods of time are more likely to be economically disadvantaged and in need of services. Students acting out or being the 'class clown' may be clues into deeper, more intense issues that a teacher may only be able to find out by visiting the home. Using funds of knowledge creates bridges between teachers and parents, schools and communities, and supports children's learning in the classroom. Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) also propose funds of identity, which builds on funds of knowledge. Students need to be affirmed in the classroom and the use of funds of knowledge and funds of identity can help teachers achieve that goal. With funds of identity, not only are teachers recognizing using the knowledge of children's home lives and communities, but also are appreciating students' interests and skills as individual learners (Jovés, Siqués, & Esteban-Guitart, 2015). The use of children's prior knowledge, skills, and interests that are used in the home is beneficial to students' learning in the classroom. As students are able to consider their own lives in response to curriculum, the teacher is able to deepen their understandings with the knowledge of his or her student's funds of knowledge (Mantei & Kervin, 2014). Students gain more purposeful education and learning experiences when teachers are able to connect and apply their background knowledge. Therefore, with teachers' use of funds of knowledge and funds of identities, they are able to modify activities so that it makes sense for all students and so that teaching is consistent with student's experiences (Jovés, Siqués, & Esteban-Guitart, 2015). The education gained by students whose teachers use funds of knowledge with funds of identity is priceless. Teachers will be able to help students grow as people and academically when tapping into their background knowledge and

personal interests. These strategies also help students to feel important and included in the classroom. In addition, Brinson (2012) states that the use of culturally specific literature illuminates children's reflections of their own experiences. In order for teachers to know which multicultural books to use, it is vital for teachers to know their students' lives to provide children with those opportunities for mirroring in stories.

Another study finds that teachers' lack of background knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively teach children from socio-linguistically diverse backgrounds is due to limited cultural knowledge and exposure to issues of diversity (Lin & Bates, 2010). Although teachers' education could be blamed as part of this issue, it is also the way society has built walls around diversity; it is the topic in the classroom that shall not be named. Teachers try to find ways to tiptoe around the rules the curriculum has in place, but many stick to what they are told for many reasons. One reason being that is it the norm—pedagogy has not focused on finding ways to incorporate skills and strategies to help eliminate prejudices against minority groups (Sanders & Mathis, 2012). Instead, the education system has changed very little over the years and many teachers are still teaching as if there is no such thing as diversity. If curriculum is not including diversity then teachers have no reason to step outside of their comfort zones, gain new knowledge and skills in order to teach toward the differences and embrace them. It is known that when teachers have positive experiences with the student's parents and guardians, the students succeed. When teachers and parents work as a team toward bettering each child, it works. Lin and Bates (2010) write, "Home visits help teachers understand their students' backgrounds better... positive interactions can encourage a feeling of partnership" (p.180). As teachers begin to understand their students and their families, they can begin to incorporate that information into their teaching and the more knowledge they gain from these interactions, the more skills and

dispositions they will gain. Teachers should continue to explore opportunities that allow them to learn more about their students' lives to be able to bring those experiences into the classroom (Lin & Bates, 2010).

In addition, teachers will become more culturally and linguistically aware of themselves and their surroundings. The awareness and openness allows teachers to have more open and honest discussions with students about the multicultural literature that is being used in the classroom. If teachers fail to use dialogue in contrast with books, the information the children receive from the stories can influence children in negative ways and have a sense of dissatisfaction (Boutte, Hopkins, & Waklatsi, 2008). The information teachers provide students through a read aloud and through discussion can possibly be two vastly different things. It is important for teachers to be trustworthy and open with their students during discussions in order to combat stereotypes in texts. The texts that teachers choose are also very critical. It has been shown that student comprehension abilities are enhanced when their reading materials reflect their cultural experiences (McNair, 2013). For students to gain the most from multicultural literature, teachers need to be attentive to their student's backgrounds and home lives, find appropriate material to match and have open discussions to enhance the learning of all children.

Impacts of Multicultural Literature on Children

Many authors agree that children's literature influences their growth, formation of identities, and knowledge about diverse topics in either a positive or negative light (Crawford & Bhattacharya, 2014; Fitzpatrick & Kostina-Ritchey, 2013; Kelly, 2012; Chaudhri & Teale, 2013; Anderson & Hamilton, 2005; Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2013; Ziv, Smadja, & Aram, 2014; Lin & Bates, 2010; Boutte, Hopkins, & Waklatsi, 2008; McNair, 2012; Sun, 2014). One of the

biggest impacts of children's literature on young students is the way in which children gain information from the stories and about themselves and their cultures. Yazici Okuyan, Gedikoglu, and Karagul (2012) describe how showing different family structures in a realistic way by portraying both positive and negative attitudes makes it easier for children to imitate and identify themselves with the characters. Being able to realistically see his or herself in the characters is an important aspect of children's literature. Additionally, Fitzpatrick and Kostina-Ritchey (2013) state that children rely heavily on books as a source of knowledge more than adults because of their lack of experiences, but the information from stories also helps them understand themselves and others. They continue to explain how influential stories can be for children's present being and development into adults. Mattix and Crawford (2011) agree that children's use of storybooks act as mirrors that reflect their own experiences or as windows to understand differences, but in either case literature plays a lasting impact on children. It is also important to note that early childhood is an important time for the formation of basic social relationship skills; family instability during this period might effect children's social behavior and peer relationships (Cavanagh & Huston, 2008). Many children may already be going through transitional phases within their families that can negatively impact their growing social abilities, but this further implicates the use of stories for helping children blossom during early childhood. If family instability occurs during early childhood, the use of literature can have a positive effect on children's emotional and mental development.

In studies about literature and adopted children, Mattix and Crawford (2011), Jerome and Sweeney (2014) and Fitzpatrick and Kostina-Ritchey (2013) all found that although young children may not be able to discuss feelings about ethnicity or adoption, they could respond to books about it, which helps children to understand their own lives and the secure sense that

adopted children are not alone. It is vital that children are able to have an awareness of whom they are and that they are accepted in order to learn and become active members of society. Studies have shown that when LGBT identities were not affirmed or recognized, the results include higher rates of suicide, mental health, homelessness and school dropout rates (Ferfolja & Robinson, 2004; Pohan & Bailey, 1998), which can also be shown with students whose parents are LGBT (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2013). The scary, negative effects of ignoring LGBT identities in the classroom is an aspect teachers need to be more aware of in order to have a deep understanding of the implications that they have on children's lives. The invalidation of a child's family structure in the classroom and through literature can have a lasting negative effect in the child's development of a positive self-concept (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2013). Literature helps young children to develop identities and discover that they are not alone. The affirmation of identity or culture through a teacher or through literature can also help students to feel more welcomed and important. Jerome and Sweeney (2014) write that mixed messages from many stories about adoption can increase stereotypical perceptions and increase the chances that the adoptee misunderstands their own situation, resulting in issues with belonging and identity development.

In addition, it is also important that children's books are inclusive and not stereotypical. Crawford and Bhattacharya (2014) explain that picture books send messages about aging, the roles of grandparents, and what it means to be an older member of society. Growing old is inevitable, but it needs to be portrayed in a more positive and less stereotypical manner. There are many negative ideals about aging that society has built, but stories and media perpetuate. Many picture books that feature older characters reflect "grandparents and older adults as ill, disabled, dependent, and unable to solve problems on their own" (p. 132) and are rarely shown

as engaging in activities, which are perpetuating stereotypes of elderly as incapable (Crawford & Bhattacharya, 2014). Viewing the elderly in this way can negatively affect children's perceptions of elderly in their lives and what their life will be like when they grow old. If a child is being raised by his or her grandparents, these portrayals can have a negative impact on the way a child views his or her grandparents as well as other elderly throughout his or her life. Picture books have a strong influence on children's understandings of topics like the aging process, adoption, LGBT, and multiracial families (Crawford & Bhattacharya, 2014; Fitzpatrick & Kostina-Ritchey, 2013; Mattix & Crawford, 2011; Boutte, Hopkins, & Waklatsi, 2008). The strong influence that picture books do have needs to be taken advantage of so children are able to become better members of society. Boutte, Hopkins and Waklatsi (2008) state, "the power of literature in the lives of young children is awesome and far reaching" (p. 943). This line emphasizes the large demands of using literature that is appropriate and honest with children. Literature can teach children many things about society, how to behave, what to think, but it also teaches children about themselves, which impacts who they grow up to be. Research shows that with the use of picture books young children are able to understand differences and families from multiple and diverse perspectives (Kelly, 2012). Young children are not too young to discuss diversity with. Children are able to notice similarities and differences from very early on in life and it is important to take advantage of their young age and ignorance in order to teach children acceptance and support for all people.

Although Anderson and Hamilton (2005) found that picture books often show traditional portrayals of gender roles, reinforcing gender stereotypes and leading to negative attitudes toward women and children, Chaudhri and Teale (2013) and Kelly (2012) found that picture books serve as a tool for growth and a child's identity formation or sense of belonging. Finding

the right picture books that show diversity and positivity is a key aspect in using multicultural literature. However, many of the commonly read children's books have negative or absent representations of females, people of color, non-Christian and non-Western religions, and people of lower socioeconomic status, or people with disabilities (Boutte, Hopkins, & Waklatsi, 2008). If books are pivotal to children's socialization and development, then it is crucial that books being read to them are inclusive in a non-stereotypical manner. Chaudhri and Teale (2013) show how children's literature plays a key role in telling counter stories and adding to a child's diversity of experiences. Books can open many doors to different worlds that could be otherwise unknown; and to learn about diversity in a safe and secure place, as a classroom should be, only adds to the experiences of learning about one's self and others. Anderson and Hamilton (2005) also discuss the influence of literature on children; stories can affect a child's attitudes, behaviors, and self-concept, which are dependent on the characters in the books, as they become role models for the readers. The manner in which characters are portrayed in stories has a lasting impact on children's ideas and values, further emphasizing the importance of non-stereotypical stories so that children have proper role models in diverse texts.

Since the way in which characters are portrayed in stories affects the reader's self-concept and beliefs; Qiu, Schvaneveldt, and Sahin (2013) found that mothers were more likely to be emotional, as well as doing tasks like cooking, cleaning, and helping with homework where fathers were more likely to be employed, playing sports and part of recreational activities. These are both stereotypical gender roles, which are less frequent in these coming generations than were mainstream in the past. But if they are still present in children's books then children are learning these gender roles and could possibly be acting on them now or later in life as adults. However, Adams, Walker and O'Connell (2011) also found an imbalance in representations

between mothers and fathers. Fathers remain to be 'invisible' and uninvolved in many picture books where mothers are still shown frequently as the caregiver and nurturer as fathers are the providers. Endendijk, et al (2014) also found that the way adults use gender talk with children while reading gender stereotypical stories impacts their beliefs; the authors write, "strong implicit gender stereotypes might also have an influence on the unconscious gender talk toward children" (p. 145). The way adults talk with children about stories is also crucial. Preschool aged children are most susceptible to stereotypes and they are trying to develop a sense of reality (Adams, Walker, & O'Connell, 2011). Another issue with gender roles is the idea that a child may have two moms, two dads or a single parent where gender roles do not fall into place in the home. This can be confusing to a young child, but it can also show a sense of disapproving in his or her home life since his or her family structure does not fit into what is frequently in stories and thought of as the norm. Therefore, it is essential to talk with young children about gender stereotypes and to be neutral when reading. In these ways children will be socialized with diversity and be successful in modern society (Qiu, Schvaneveldt, & Sahin, 2013).

Furthermore, Qiu, Schvaneveldt and Sahin (2013) discuss the change of the American family, which includes increases in single parents, high levels of divorce and remarriage, more frequent same-sex marriage, adoption, and overall increased acceptance of these changes. The United States has transitioned over the years toward a more tolerant social climate when it comes to partnerships, raising children, and life choices. Despain, Tunnell, Wilcox, and Morrison (2015) agree that the Western society has become more tolerant to less traditional families. Children's families should be represented in literature if traditional roles are not continuing to be the most popular and there are many other family dynamics that are prevalent. However, Brinson (2012) believes that there is not an adequate supply of books that include multiculturalism and

addresses the separate family structures. Children's literature needs to be able to address children's personal experiences so children's identities can be affirmed and built upon, but also so children's self-esteem and beliefs are reinforced. The study by Despain, Tunnell, Wilcox, and Morrison (2015) further states, "what is read by children influences the development of their values and beliefs. Authors...provide powerful validation for what makes us the same and different" (p. 333). More than just validation, the books that children read offer ideologies for what is right, wrong, accepted or disregarded in their lives. The authors continue to discuss the importance for publishers to be sensitive and not settle for stereotypes or exaggerations that may lead children to believe their life is somehow 'wrong' or they should be someone different.

Literature's impact on children is further emphasized in the different stories that children choose to read independently, but also what children are able to gain from different stories. Weih (2014) suggests that children reading about other children, either alike or different, they are able to comprehend and gain an appreciation for the world around them with a more critical stance. Children choose to read stories that show parts of their personal lives and experiences, but also past encounters with stories that have an associated positive feeling. Children will have difficulty choosing literature to read on their own if they do not have proper exposure throughout their young lives to a variety of stories. Weih (2014) writes, "young children possess internal relationships with literature...[and] can be expressed within the social context of the classroom setting...it will bring joy." (p. 10). As children are read to and learn to read on their own, they create bonds with stories, characters, and authors that will foster a lifetime of reading. However, it is important that children are provided with the chances to create the connections to stories. Many minority groups are not afforded the likelihood of viewing themselves accurately in stories, which can have a negative impact on their views of reading and the world. McNair

(2013) discusses the importance of African American children's opportunities to view their cultural norms (not stereotypes) and perspectives in the books that are read to them and that they read. Children's literacy improvement is shown when children are read to and when they are able to connect to the stories. When early readers are read to they can begin to develop concepts and understandings about print and the world in which they live; enthusiasm toward reading and increased comprehension abilities were also significant findings in the study conducted by McNair . Creating lifelong readers and learners requires that children read texts that can reflect their cultural experiences, which includes their family dynamics.

In addition to helping children become lifelong readers, it is crucial that children have a positive self-concept. Sun (2014) discusses the stories for adopted children and its importance to see themselves and their experiences in the texts to boost pride, self-esteem, feel valued and respected, and to learn strategies about dealing with adoption. Children's beliefs about themselves can be affirmed in stories, which are crucial if children are dealing with immense problems in their lives, like being adopted, divorce, remarriage, or death of a parent. Brinson (2012) agrees that children's literature that is culturally specific can boost confidence in young readers' personal lives as well as in school. Even if children are reading stories that they cannot see themselves in, but they are able to see a friend in, it can be beneficial. Literature that expresses non-mainstream ideals can help children develop empathy, perspective skills, and knowledge to help prevent bullying as well as living pleasantly with diverse peoples throughout adulthood (Sun, 2014). There is so much for children to gain when reading multicultural literature. If a child cannot be mirrored in a text and gain self-affirmation then the text can act as a window and the child can learn to be open-minded about others' lives.

A child's home life also plays a large impact on who they are and grow to be, in addition to their academic growth. Lin and Bates (2010) write about the impact that children's home environment can have on their school performances. It is important that teachers and parents understand that impact in order to use literature that will help children grow. Hynes and Dunifon (2007) and Baxter, Weston and Qu (2011) both talk about the structure or quality of children's family lives and its influence on children's development. The lives that children bring into the classroom impacts the types of literature that they should be exposed to as well as the support amounted to them. Baxter, Weston and Qu (2011) found that children who experience parental divorce are more likely to experience emotional and behavioral problems. Therefore, children with those past or present experiences should be reading texts that can help guide them and support them, representing facts and honesty that children in different circumstances are not alone. Literature has the power to change students' thoughts, beliefs, and self-concepts; with the use of literature students who come from homes lives that can be detrimental to their development, they can overcome any issues along with creating a stronger sense of identity and positive attitudes.

Conclusion

Throughout the past it can be observed that children's literature is becoming more diverse. Many authors have been able to describe the lasting influences of children's literature on children's formation of identities. These influences can be either positive or negative. Much is dependent on the types of literature they are exposed to growing up and if their teachers throughout school are open-minded, supportive, and knowledgeable about multicultural literature's vast benefits to students. The influences of literature are also dependent on a teacher's awareness of his or her student's lives as well as the vast and varying amounts of

literature that are in the world today. Many texts show diversity amongst people and families as LGBT, multiracial, adoptive, grandparents, single parent, divorced, etc. It is important that children are surrounded by all multicultural texts because even if they cannot be mirrored in them, they can be used as a window for understanding others' lives (Mattix & Crawford, 2011).

This literature review has shown three different aspects to looking at multicultural literature from the point of view of diverse families. Studies have shown many of the negative perceptions of teachers and the literature itself. However, it is not contested that picture books help children to understand the world and themselves. Studies have shown the negative impact of literature on children when the books being read are prejudiced and stereotyped. Even more important is the impact on children if their family dynamic is neglected or marginalized in the classroom.

Ferfolja and Robinson (2004) and Pohan and Bailey (1998) have studies showing increased rates of suicide, mental health, homelessness and school dropout rates for children whose diversities are not recognized. It is essential that teachers in training learn how to use multicultural literature and discourses appropriately and effectively with their students in order to combat the heteronormative society, as well as benefit their students for future generations. Children in school should never feel alone, but studies are showing they do. It is a teacher's job to make children's multicultural literature available to all students so that children are able to learn about themselves, their family and others.

Method

Context

This study takes place in a primary school, kindergarten through second grade, in Upstate New York. The school has seven classrooms at each of the three grade levels, as well as two classrooms for pre-kindergarten. According to the New York State Report Card there are 334

students in the school and 50% of those are eligible for free or reduced lunch. With 206 students being White, 53 Hispanic and 49 African American, only 9% of the students have limited English proficiency (NYS Report Card). Students at the kindergarten and first grade level are mostly advanced or proficient in listening and speaking, but are spread amongst beginning, intermediate, advanced, and proficient for reading and writing. Students' annual attendance rates are steady at 95%. The school uses a balanced literacy approach and emphasizes critical thinking. There are programs in place that encourage reading at home, positive behaviors in school, and supports for social and emotional development.

The community is one of the largest suburbs of the county. The area has one high school, three intermediate or middle schools and two primary schools. The area is also very recognizable for families to reside. About 90% of the people residing in this community have lived here for more than a year, speaking to the stability of the town; 63% of the households are families and only 31% live alone (U.S. Census Bureau). Eighty seven percent of the population is White, 7.7% African American, 6.2% Hispanic or Latino, and the remainder are Asian, multiple races, or American Indian (U.S. Census Bureau). The median income for this area is about \$64,000 (U.S. Census Bureau).

The school classroom where the students take part has 22 kindergarten level students. None of the students have a disability. There are two students who receive Tier 3 Response to Intervention and three students who receive Tier 2 Response to Intervention. There are 12 girls and 10 boys in the classroom. Ten of the 22 students are Caucasian, six African American students, four Hispanic students and two biracial students. The teacher of the classroom is a 26 year old, Caucasian female. This is her first full-time teaching position and she is currently in Graduate school. There is also a volunteer who comes in everyday to assist the teacher with

everyday tasks. The volunteer is an elderly Hispanic woman, who is fluent in Spanish and English.

Participants

The study will use nine kindergarten students as well as parents who attend the primary school and live in the community described. There are four girls and five boys. There is a range of nonreaders to beginning readers. All of the students are in the same class and have been given pseudonyms for the purpose of this study.

The first student is a male, Ken, who is African American and five years old. Ken receives free or reduced lunch and does not receive any services. Ken comes from a family with a mother and father, as well as several brothers and sisters. Ken is a social child who is also a rule-follower. He often gets frustrated easily, but works hard when there is a task at hand.

The next student is Dominique, a female; she is Caucasian and five years old. Dominique receives free or reduced lunch and is provided with Tier 3 Response to Intervention. Dominique comes from a family with a mother and a father. Dominique is a dependent student but is also very social with other students and teachers.

Grady is a five-year-old African American male who does not receive free or reduced lunch or any services. His family consists of his mother, father, and brother. Grady is very talkative, but also a people pleaser. Grady is very smart and an active participant in class.

Mike is also a five-year-old male and Caucasian. Mike does not receive free or reduced lunch or any services. Mike's family is his mother, father, and brother as well. Mike is very quiet and shy for the majority of time. He is very smart, does all of his work, and follows the rules.

Next is Alex, a five-year-old Caucasian male. He does not receive free or reduced lunch or any services as well. Alex's family consists of his mother, father, and two brothers. Alex is also very quiet and smart. He chats with peers at his table sometimes, but mostly stays focus on the task at hand and does not usually participate in class discussions.

Elle is another participant, she is four years old and Caucasian. Elle receives free or reduced lunch, but does not receive any services. Elle's family contains her mother and father and older sister. Elle is very social and talkative. She loves to share stories during class discussions and is a hard worker.

Jasmine is a Hispanic female who is five years old, she also receives free or reduced lunch, but not any services. Jasmine's family has her mother, father, stepsister and twin sister. Jasmine is a very social girl. She tries very hard in school and will often participate in whole-group discussions and classroom activities.

Next is Ryan, a five-year-old male. Ryan is Caucasian and receives Tier 2 Response to Intervention, but does not receive free or reduced lunch. Ryan comes from a family with his mother, father, brother and sister. Ryan is shy and quiet when it comes to classroom activities, but is more outgoing and social when pertaining peers and friends.

Lastly, Barbie is a five-year-old Caucasian female. Barbie does not receive free or reduced lunch or any services. Barbie's family contains her mother and brother. Barbie is extremely talkative, social, and outgoing. She is a constant participator in classroom discussions as well as with her peers during recess and social times. She works hard in school, but also spends a lot of time talking with her neighbors.

In addition, there are three parents participating in the study. There is Mike's mother, Sheila, Kelly, and Jenny. Sheila and Jenny are also Caucasian and Kelly is Hispanic.

Researcher Stance

I am currently a graduate student at St. John Fisher College. I am working toward a Master's of Science in Literacy Education, and certification for teaching literacy to children from birth through grade six. I earned a Bachelor's of Science degree in Childhood and Special Education from St. John Fisher College. I also hold New York State teaching certifications for Childhood Education and Students with Disabilities, kindergarten through grade six. I also hold a Georgia State teaching certification in Inclusive Education for pre-kindergarten through grade five. As a researcher for this study, I acted as an active observer, taking part in children's learning; I actively taught reading strategies while simultaneously observing the outcomes of the study (Mills, 2014). Also, I conducted observations through my own one-on-one and small group instruction with each student. I also took an active role in informally interviewing children. I took the role of the teacher and actively engaged with the students and observed the outcomes (Mills, 2014). I also provided questionnaires to parents, which provided me with the opportunity to know how each participant feels on a more personal level. While I took an active role and asked students questions throughout the study, the questions were neutral and not leading in order to understand the students' own beliefs without pressure of being right or wrong.

Method

For this study I collected qualitative data in order to find out how children's perceptions on family structures are affected by children's literature. I aimed to observe students' original conceptions about differing family structures becoming more inclusive. In the first steps of the

research I want to understand children's home lives by using a questionnaire (Appendix A) sent to the parents and guardians. The questionnaire asked parents to describe their family structure (who is involved), how they talk to their children about family, and examples of media and literature that are used with their children that discuss family as well as, what they believe a family looks like. This questionnaire allowed observations about any preconceived notions that children may have about family structures. Students were then asked to draw a family and then explain to me what it was they drew and why they did. In this section of the research students met with me one-on-one to ensure privacy and authentic work. From this student work I gained knowledge about each one's individual ideas about what a family is and who is included in a family. I was also able to observe the connections between the parents' explanations of family and what they tell their children in accordance with what children believe for themselves at a young age. Each illustration and explanation will take about five to 10 minutes.

In the second stage of the research, students will participate in three separate read alouds with myself, as I act as the teacher. The read alouds took place in a whole-group instruction setting. The three stories that will be read are: *And Tango Makes Three* by Peter Parnell and Henry Cole, *Love is a Family* by Roma Downey, and *Tell Me Again About the Night I Was Born* by Jamie Lee Curtis and Laura Cornell. The first story, *And Tango Makes Three* is about two male penguins who create a non-traditional family together. *Love is a Family* is about a mother and daughter who are the only members of their family. And *Tell Me Again About the Night I Was Born* is a story about adoption. These books were chosen based on some of the family structures that present itself among the children in the classroom, as well as age level appropriateness and user ratings. While reading each story and afterwards, discussion questions (Appendix B) guided students to talk about families and what they are, their purpose, and who is

in them. Questions will consist of “Who was part of this family?” “Tell me what you think about this family” and “What is the point in having a family?” In the discussion processes, I was objective as I ask questions and respond to students’ answers. Each read aloud and discussion will take about 15 to 20 minutes. With the read alouds I was able to observe student’s opinions and beliefs on different types of families. It showed me if students are open-minded to the ideas of inclusive families and structures outside of ‘mom, dad, and child’.

In conclusion to my research, I asked students to again draw me a picture of a family and to explain what they drew and why. In this process of the study I was able to observe if any children’s perceptions were changed by the literature and what their final beliefs on family structures are. This conclusion to the study is again one-on-one and took no more than 10 minutes per student. The comparison of the first picture to the second also allowed for observations for any changes in beliefs or ideals that children may have or which students have a set image of family in their minds.

Quality and Credibility of the Research

Many times, during action research, the trustworthiness and validity is called into question. Guba (1981) believes that trustworthiness can be established by addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Mills, 2014).

Credibility is defined as the researcher’s ability to deal with any challenges that presents itself during the study (Mills, 2014). In order to ensure credibility, I immersed myself in the classroom and built a rapport with students. Over the course of several weeks, prior to data collection, I was part of the classroom on a weekly basis, as I got to know students, gained their trust, and acted as another teacher in the room. I was also persistent with observations, while also

collecting video and audio recordings of each observation. I was sure to collect field notes that are authentic and true. Data sources were also triangulated to ensure credibility and I debriefed with the classroom teacher for further insights as well as the opportunity for the interaction with another professionals who shared her insights on the situations and processes.

In addition, Mills (2014) defines transferability as, “the researcher’s belief that everything is context-bound” (p. 117). To guarantee that honest data is found, I collected data and descriptions that are detailed by using video and audio recordings, detailed note taking and student artifacts. The detailed data, notes and artifacts were able to show the ability of transfer in different contexts. Also, the discussions of data show how this study can be translated to other situations.

I also made certain to show dependability. Dependability refers to the stability of the data (Mills, 2014), which is shown through the triangulation of the methods to show strength in the data. A detailed report from start to finish, with support from recordings, field notes, and artifacts, also show dependability in accordance with the data. Others would be able to reproduce this study with similar findings based on the amount of detail with the methods and insight in how data was collected.

I promised confirmability, too, which is the neutrality or objectivity of the data that will be collected (Mills, 2014). In order to address confirmability, Guba (1981) offers researchers to practice triangulation and reflexivity. I practiced triangulation through the methods that are used in data collection with different sources that crosscheck the data. By reflexivity, Guba, means to intentionally reveal underlying biases that can cause a researcher to present the findings in a certain way. In order to combat reflexivity, I kept a journal where reflections are recorded on a

regular basis. With credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability ensured, the study will be trustworthy and valid.

Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of Participants

In this study all of the names of participants have been replaced with pseudonyms to guarantee privacy and the rights of the participants. In addition to ensuring participant privacy, any identifying marks are taken from any artifacts. Each participant under the age of 18 had a permission form signed by their parent or guardian. These permission forms were sent home with the children and were returned to school. Also, each adult participant signed a consent form, which made sure that each participant understood the study and the risks and benefits. Within the consent forms, an explanation of the study was provided along with my contact information in case of withdrawal or inquiry for the results. No assent forms were needed in this study, as participants are unable to read or write, but verbal assent was asked for.

Data Collection

In order to collect data with many and accurate results, I used the following sources: active observation, informal interviews, student artifacts, and questionnaires. Throughout data collection I took some notes on observations and responses from students. The notes reflect the data collected from active observations as well as informal interviews. The video and audio recordings provided me with an exact transcript of every interview and discussion. An iPad was used to video and audio record the sessions.

Another source of data collection were the informal interviews. There were two sets of informal interviews with each child, before and after the read alouds. Each child was instructed to draw a family and afterwards responded to interview questions that include, "Tell me about

what you drew” and “Why did you draw that?” The student artifacts consist of the student’s drawings of “family”. Informal interviews were each videotaped to ensure accuracy. The change or stability of children’s drawings will help to draw a conclusion about whether or not children’s literature plays a role on children’s perceptions of family.

Another source of data collection was the active observations during the read alouds that also contained discussion questions. During and after each story was read aloud I was an active participant and led discussions to gauge an understanding of children’s ideas. The discussion questions include, “What do you think about the family in this story?” “What is the purpose of a family?” and “Who can be part of a family?” The read alouds were audio recorded since I was not able to take notes during this time, the recordings provided accuracy in the transcripts.

Lastly, the questionnaire that was distributed to parents is another source of data collection and consisted of questions about their family structure, how they talk to their children about family, and what types of media and text they use with their child about family. This collection of data showed any preconceived notions from a child’s personal life and the background knowledge that children bring to the table in a classroom. Afterwards, each form of data was analyzed in order to determine children’s impact on family perceptions from children’s literature.

Data Analysis

After collecting three pieces of qualitative data, I looked to see where there were commonalities or differences amongst them. The qualitative data consisted of the student interviews, the discussions during the read alouds and the parent questionnaires. The data was first organized by form and typed out into transcripts to easily read and see across the data of

what was similar or different. From there I started to develop themes based on what was continually showing up. I focused my thought process for developing themes on how students determined what a family looks like as well as important attributes that a family has. I had hopes that coding the data this way would allow me to understand children's ideas of family and where their ideas come from and if any children have any negative perceptions of certain types of families.

Firstly, the student drawings and interviews were coded based on the commonalities and differences that they each showed. Frequently, students drew their own family, which was the major consensus with all of the drawings. This led to students' describing their own families with little regard to others' families. While coding this data I connected it to work done by Mattix and Crawford (2011).

Secondly, the discussions throughout the read alouds were coded and analyzed by the similarities or differences that appeared. The comments the students often made pertained to stories of their own experiences by making text-to-self connections. Students also agreed with lines from the stories. It was with the data from the parent questionnaires, where I was able to make connections between what students' believe and the way their parents talk with them about families. The data was triangulated, which helped in guiding the coding of the data, showing what children believe about families and why through the student work, interviews, discussions and questionnaires. The data collected here was confirmed by much of the previous research, such as, Phillips and Larson (2012), Boutte, Hopkins and Waklatsi (2008) and Kelly (2012).

Furthermore, children at this age level show to have very similar thought processes, which was shown in the data through the commonalities of student work, interviews, and discussions. Therefore the data developed the following themes: children use their background

knowledge to respond about families, a family is love, and people who can be included in a family.

Findings and Discussion

The findings from this study were drawn from data, which includes informal interviews, questionnaires, read alouds, and student work samples. The goal of this study was to discover if multicultural literature about family structures played a role in students' perceptions of family structures. Within the data collected there were themes that emerged amongst them. The first theme that data was coded into is that children use their background knowledge to respond about families. This theme developed based on the little reference children made to stories and that their drawings were consistently of their own families. Children also made many references to their personal experiences during the read alouds rather than acknowledging the stories' plots. The second theme is that a family is love, which was created due to the overwhelming feelings that children showed for their own families and parent's ideas of families when talking about them and also the major theme in all three stories. The third theme is about people who can be included in a family. This theme shows that although children drew their own families, there were children who drew other people and animals, parents responded with different people whom they include in their families, and this theme was also occurring in the stories that were read to the children.

Children Use Their Background Knowledge to Construct Ideas of Family

When gaining new experiences and new knowledge, children add them to their previous known facts. When children are very young most of what they use to create a response is their background knowledge. The interviews with children after they each drew a photo of a family, showed that most students drew their own family. When asked why they drew their family, the

answer was simple, "Because that's my daddy and me and my brother" (Mike (pseudonym), personal communication, 2015) or even simpler, "That's my family" (Barbie, Dominique & Ken (pseudonyms), personal communications, 2015). The children used what they knew in order to respond to my question. Therefore, children use personal experiences as a gauge of what they know or don't know. If they have yet to experience interactions with varying family structures, then this further creates their own family structure as the "only" one. However, the experiences children have with literature can impact their perceptions as well. Mattix and Crawford (2011) write, children are able to make connections between stories and use them as either mirrors to their own lives or windows into other's lives. Stories can either show children something they already know or they can show them something new, broadening their schemas and allowing children to have a greater understanding for others.

Furthermore, I asked them to draw a family and in turn all (except one) drew their immediate family within their home. Children drew their family because it is what they know and what they are exposed to and experiencing every day. At five years old, children are unlikely to draw the differences in family structures and other families they have encountered because it is most likely that they have not experienced other families thus far in their lives. As they grow older and spend more time at friends' houses, then they will develop a stronger schema for family differences and be able to more explicitly discuss families in the broader sense. The one initial drawing by Jasmine (pseudonym), in Figure 1, was an illustration of her and I, but shrugged her shoulders as if to say, "I don't know" when asked why she drew that (Personal communication, 2015).

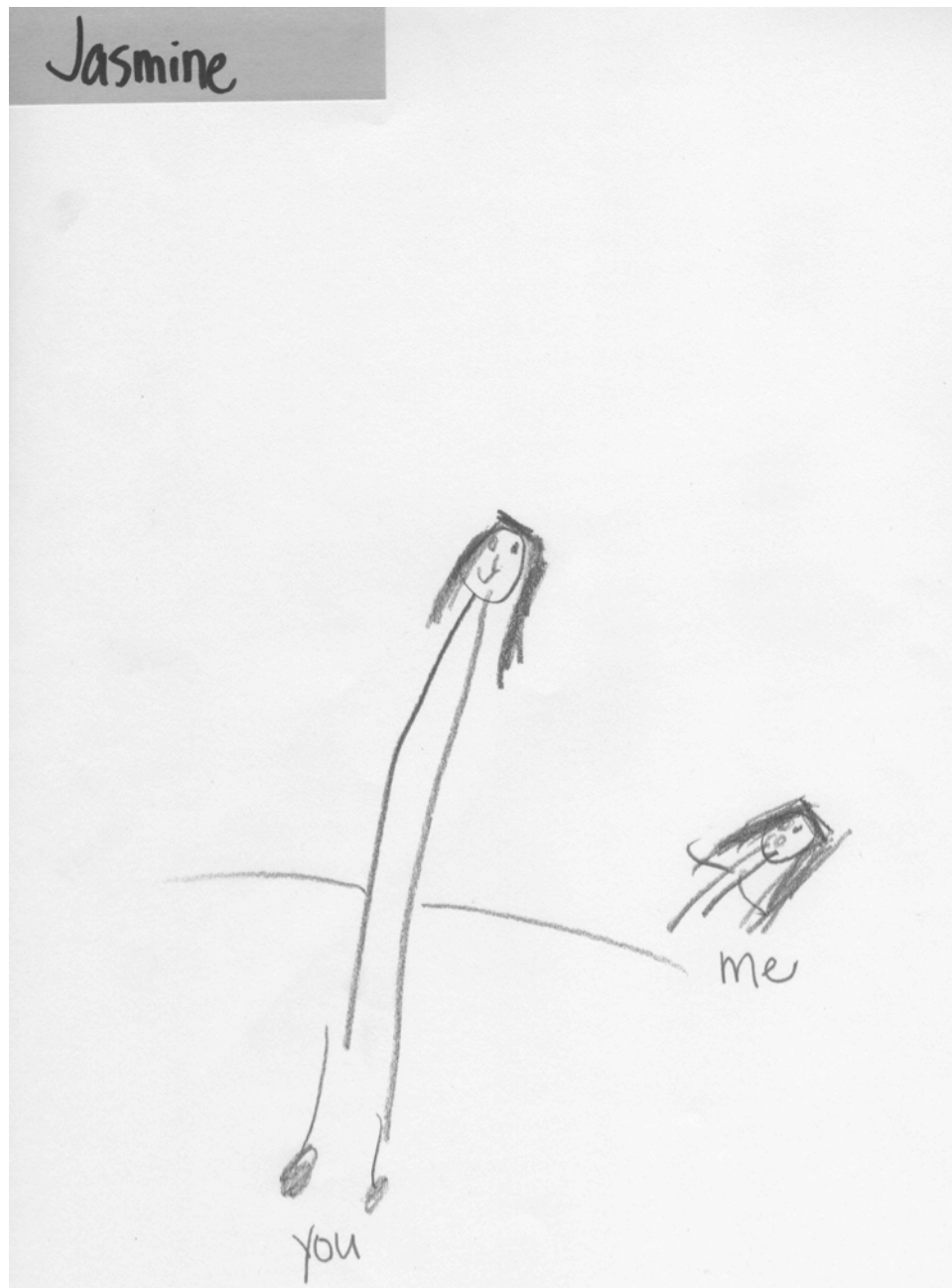


Figure 1. Illustration of a family by Jasmine of herself and her teacher (me).

This could represent the feeling of closeness between teachers and students. Many students and teachers develop relationships that are long lasting and loving. Jasmine may have related the feelings she feels toward her families and understood the similar feelings she has toward her teacher and thought of myself as a family member based on closeness and positive feelings. In

the initial drawings seven children drew a picture that included themselves with a parent or sibling and the remaining two, one drew a picture of her and I and the other was a picture of just a dad (Appendix C, Student Work Samples, 2015). Therefore, children are relating family to their specific knowledge of family, which is their own. In figure 2, where Grady drew just a picture of his dad, he is showing that his dad is his family.



Figure 2. Illustration of a family by Grady of his dad.

Grady's initial thoughts of family revolved around his dad. To him, his dad is most likely the central piece of their home and his strong sense of family comes from his father. Grady has most likely many personal experiences with his father, which led him to draw his father alone, as his father may be his best or only family member and a large role model. Qiu, Schvaneveldt, and Sahin (2013) found in literature that mothers were more likely to be emotional, as well as doing tasks like cooking, cleaning, and helping with homework where fathers were more likely to be employed, playing sports and part of recreational activities. These stereotypical gender roles could have an added affect on how children see their parent(s). In Grady's case, it could further perpetuate the stereotypes of men, especially if he sees his father as a huge role model and his father is stereotypical, adding stereotypes from literature and Grady is bound it maintain stereotypes for the male gender.

Furthermore, throughout the three read alouds, children made comments that reflected their personal lives rather than new information and learning. In the first read aloud, *And Tango Makes 3*, Barbie commented, "I watched a movie about penguins once" (personal communication, 2015). Although the story featured two penguins at the zoo, students made connections in relation to the setting and plot of the story rather than the theme or characters. The most explicit statements are the easiest for students at this age to connect to. Five year olds are still learning about implicit statements and understanding stories, therefore, most would not immediately make a connection to a story about penguins to their family. Mattix and Crawford (2011), Jerome and Sweeney (2014) and Fitzpatrick and Kostina-Ritchey (2013) all found that although young children may not be able to discuss feelings about family, they could respond to books about it, which helps children to understand their own lives. The literature allows children a gateway to information that helps them discuss topics that can be complicated or to understand

the meaning of behaviors and feelings. The children were able to connect explicitly to the story with penguins, but able to discuss the character's feelings afterwards with guidance. Over time, children will be able to gather more pertinent information to understand themselves and others through the use of literature. Other comments from students include, "One time I saw baby ducklings" (Ryan (pseudonym), personal communication, 2015) and "Me and my mom went to a pond before" (Grady (pseudonym), personal communication, 2015). Students see the pictures of the animals and the zoo from the story and make connections based off the explicit detail. Students are still gaining knowledge on how to make connections and active listening. Many students most likely miss out on the fact that the story is about a family until the end when it is an explicit detail as well. The children saw the illustrations of animals and made the connection instead of animals they have seen; their own experiences with similar animals. However, McNair (2013) finds that student comprehension abilities are enhanced when their reading materials reflect their cultural experiences. The more children are exposed to literature that they can mirror themselves in, the better they will be at comprehending them and the stepping-stones to reading can be formed. As children begin to understand more literature, they can be continually exposed to more diverse literature pieces that are windows to other cultures and the better chances they have at comprehending those stories and beliefs. In the following read aloud, *Tell Me Again About the Night I was Born*, Ken (pseudonym) comments, "I went on an airplane once when I moved" (personal communication, 2015). In the story the family traveled on an airplane to go pick up their adopted child, Ken saw the illustration of an airplane and made a connection. At this age children make the connection that stands out at them via illustrations or one or two words that were said. In this situation, Ken was able to make a great text-to-self connection based on a setting, but missed out on the connection with the characters. However, these

connections will develop with age and schooling. Rowell (2007) believes that when teachers are aware of inclusive literature and are able to use it in everyday lessons, they share different perspectives and knowledge, which broadens children's learning. Overtime and education, children will grow to be able to understand the stories that are read to them and the stories they will be able to read independently. Children will also gain knowledge of others and themselves as their teachers use multicultural literature.

In addition, Students also chose to comment with personal experiences in response to a question. For example, in response to the question, "Can anyone be part of a family?" Elle (pseudonym) responds, "When I was in the hospital with my dad I was so surprised. The doctor took the baby out of my mom's tummy" (personal communication, 2015). Although, I see the connection she was most likely making, it was based on her own personal experiences instead of adding to her comment about what was just learned. She did not completely answer the question, but she did draw on her own family when asked about family. This response shows that Elle believes the people in her family are the only response. Her experience is all she knows, so whoever is in her family are the people who can be part of a family. Mattix and Crawford (2011) believe that picture books can be used by teachers to explore how different families are created, help children develop an understanding of family (outside of the norm), and the idea that no two families are alike. With this idea, Elle would grow to understand that no two families are alike, but that it is accepted nonetheless.

Additionally, the third read aloud, *Love is a Family*, had much fewer comments with Grady asking, "Where is her dad?" and Dominique stating, "My cat is part of my family" (personal communications, 2015). Grady's question during the read aloud assumes that there must be a dad. His question is interpreting his own experiences with his family and assuming

that every family looks that way. By asking where the character's dad is, Grady is concluding that a father must be part of the family. Fitzpatrick and Kostina-Ritchey (2013) believe that children rely heavily on literature as a source of knowledge because of their lack of experiences in comparison to adults; the information children gain from stories allows them to understanding themselves and others. With Grady's assumption that there must be a dad because his previous experiences show there is always a dad, he is learning from the literature that there is not always a dad in the family. As with Dominique's statement that her cat is part of her family, which shows that she is in agreement with the story where animals can be included in our families. Dominique believes that her cat is identified as part of her family, which is similar to many people's thoughts pertaining to their pets. This statement was a great text-to-self connection where the text discussed pets as family members and she drew upon her own knowledge and life to make a connection and agree with the story. Fitzpatrick and Kostina-Ritchey (2013) state that children rely heavily on books as a source of knowledge more than adults because of their lack of experiences, but the information from stories also helps them understand themselves and others. With the use of literature, children are able to make vague or specific connections with the story while their knowledge about their own cultures and others' cultures is extended. At the end of the read aloud when asked the question, "Who can be part of a family?" all students took part in responding with either a mom, a dad, a brother, a sister, a baby, a dog, a cat, a kid, or a big sister. These responses from students shows the numerous different people who can make up a family and many students had agreements on the people and who they are called. Students agree and know that a family could have a mom or a dad, a sibling, a pet, etc. This response shows that students used their background knowledge and the people who make up their families in order to respond. Some students replied with an answer that was already given, but others

thought of the people in their family and assumed those were the ones that are part of a family. Kelly (2012) shows that using picture books that establish multiple parent roles, like two moms or two dads, can help children to be more open to non-traditional families and have a more positive attitude towards non-traditional families. Students would be able to go beyond thinking of their own family and think of other's families as well. Not only would students have knowledge of other families, but they would be capable of being positive towards those structures with the use of literature.

A Family Is Love

Through the questionnaires and discussions about the stories with the students, it was shown that parents and children believe a common theme within a family is the feeling of love. Throughout the stories where love was present, some students commented with an "ew" at these parts, which could show a level of immaturity and lack of comprehension about the story line. It is also possible that students do not experience this explicit affection of love in their homes and therefore, are not fully able to understand it and connect to it. Anderson and Hamilton (2005) discuss how parenting is portrayed in children's books has a correlated effect on how children develop attitudes and expectations about parents. Students will connect with how their parents behave versus how the parents in books behave, which can be an affirmation of a child's familial roles and ideals or it can cause stress on a child to see their family is different from those in stories. Millions of children lack access to books that can represent them, their families or friends (Rowell, 2007). However, other students made comments in those same sections about love that were more positive like, a declaration saying, "a couple!" or "a heart" in response to what families are or have. These responses could express that students are viewing themselves in the stories and have a level of understanding about the feelings that families share with one another.

Students who responded positively about the love the characters in the stories shared, were showing comprehension about the topic, as well as, an affirmation and agreement of the stories' plots and their personal experiences. Boutte, Hopkins, and Waklatsi (2008) discuss how literature presents societies overt and covert values, including the behaviors of family members in the home. One of these values would be the expression of love in either explicit or implicit manners where some children can connect to these actions from their personal lives and some cannot.

The feeling of love was also a common response on the questionnaires that were taken by three parents. Jenny and Kelly (pseudonyms) responded to the question, "What types of words do you use when talking to your child about family?" very similarly. Jenny's response included the words "love, care, sharing, together", which were common words used amongst the stories as well. Jenny's response shows that their family dynamic mirrors that of the stories in some ways. The words that Jenny uses to teach her child about family were words that were also used to represent family in the literature. Children should have access to literature that reflects their lives, including various family structures (Phillips & Larson, 2012; Mattix & Crawford, 2011), which was the case in this situation where the home life of Jenny and her child were matching with the stories that were read. Kelly's response to the same question was "family, love, togetherness, hugs, kisses, and home". This response is very similar to Jenny's as well as the choice of words from the stories. Kelly chose to include togetherness, hugs and kisses and home as words she uses to teach her child about family. These words are also included in the stories we read, leading her and her child to be mirrored in literature. Mattix and Crawford's (2011) study shows that children's use of storybooks act as mirrors that reflect their own experiences or as windows to understand differences. In the cases with Jenny and Kelly, their children are able to

use the texts as mirrors, which is shown as their children agreed at points in the stories that discussed love with comments affirming the points.

Additionally, the third parent, Sheila, responded with names of their family members, “Grammy Kathy, Grammy Sue, Papa Tom, Cousin Hazel, Aunt Brianna, Uncle Pete”, which was different but not an inaccurate response to the question. Sheila’s response indicates the members of their family whom she refers to when talking about family. When teaching her child about family, she discusses the actual people who they consider family. This response shows that Sheila encourages her child to think of many people as family, beyond their immediate household. It also teaches her child that people within a family are not just those who live with you. However, these ideas are conflicting with what her son Mike drew and discussed in his student work sample, in Figure 3, which shows himself, his dad and his brother. He did not include his mother or any extended family.

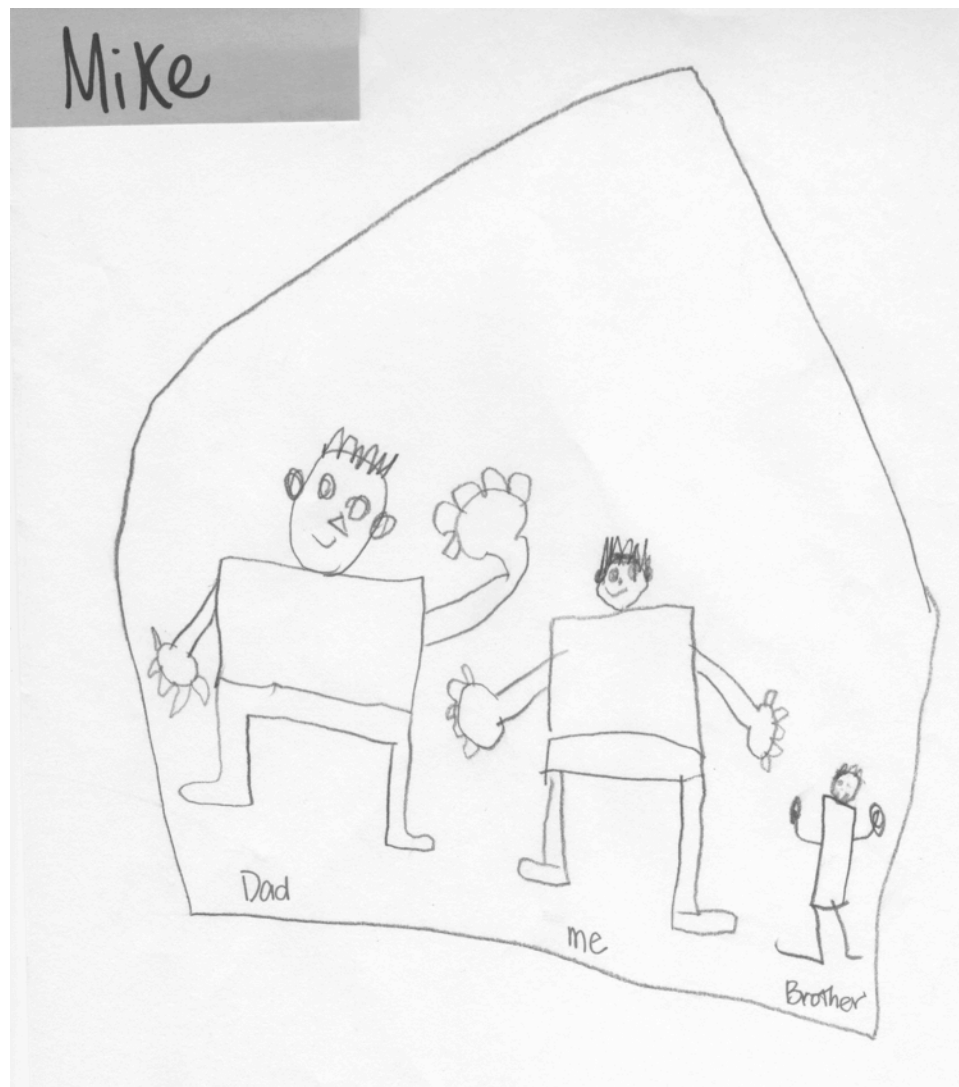


Figure 3. Illustration of a family by Mike of his dad, brother and himself.

Although, his mother is using many people to discuss their family, her son is not relaying that his family extends beyond their house. Mike was also a student who affirmed the feelings of love and happiness in a family during the discussions of the stories read with statements of agreement like, “yes” and “being a family” (personal communication, 2015) in response to love in families. Research shows that with the use of picture books young children are able to understand differences and families from multiple and diverse perspectives (Kelly, 2012). Even though his

mother may not use explicit words of love to describe their family, like the characters in the stories did, Mike still has an understanding that a family contains love.

Moreover, the last question of the questionnaire asks parents what they think a family looks like. Jenny and Kelly both agreed that family is a group of people who love and support each other or “togetherness”. With both parents showing similar responses to what a family looks like, it represents the beliefs their children should also have. The idea of family being people, who love and support each other and togetherness, shows in the responses children had to the stories. The stories were in agreement with Jenny and Kelly, where the words togetherness, love and support were all used. Children also showed their understanding that family can be people who are together and love each other. Ryan responded in a discussion that families are “people who live with you” (personal communication, 2015), in different words saying that family is being together under one roof. For Elle, this concept was conflicted by having more than one home with parents and family at different locations, she said, “my mommy and daddy don’t live in the same house” (personal communications, 2015). Comments were shared during the read alouds where some students pointed out that not all family members live together, countering the plots of the stories as well as the affirmations of other students. Grady pointed out, “but my grandparents don’t live with me and they family” (personal communications, 2015), as well as Barbie saying, “my brother lives in Florida” (personal communications, 2015). Chaudhri and Teale (2013) displayed how children’s literature plays a key role in telling counter stories and adding to a child’s diversity of experiences. Some students are able to connect and relate explicitly to the stories read with families sharing a home, love and support. But, other students were able to call attention to the idea that not all families live in one home together, however, still sharing the feelings of love and support.

In addition, Sheila described a family as anyone related or married, but also close friends are considered family. Sheila explicitly described what a family looks like, in terms of the people included. She is in agreement with a child, Ken who included extended family and friends as part of his drawing of a family, in Figure 4, whereas others disagreed, like her son Mike (Figure 1 above), who only included his immediate family in his home.

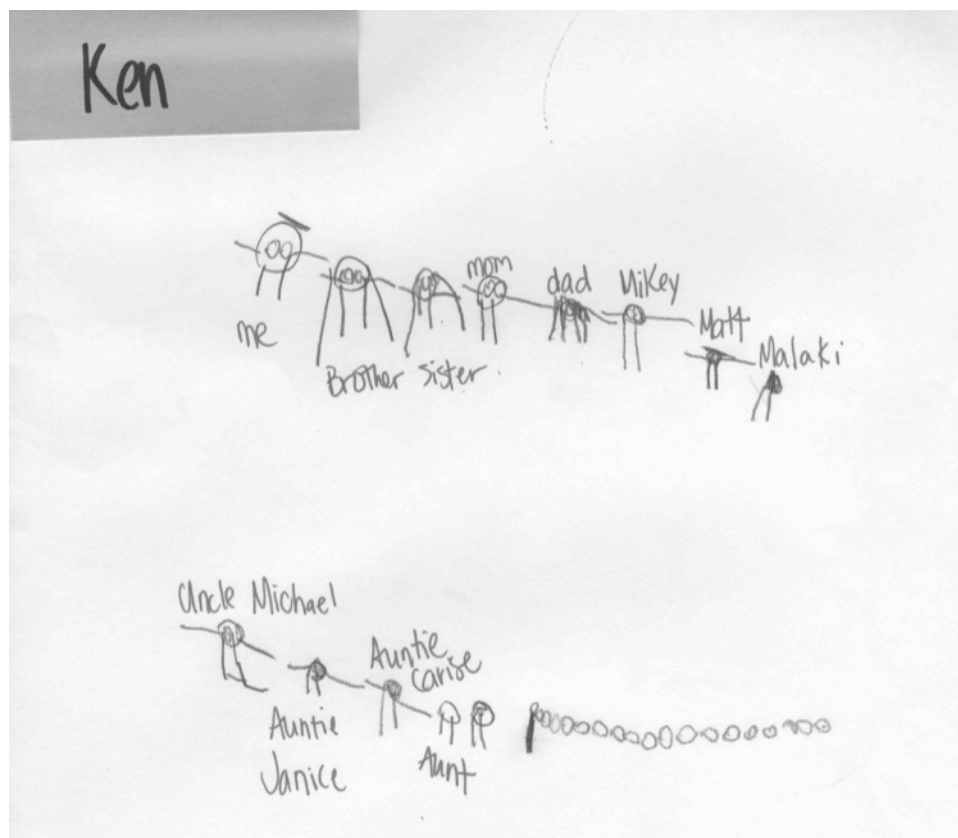


Figure 4. Illustration of a family by Ken of himself, his brother, sister, mom, dad, Mikey, Matt, Malaki, Uncle Michael, Auntie Janice, Auntie Carise, and other aunts, uncles, and cousins.

While Sheila describes a family as many different types of people whom they are close to, she also represents that close friends are considered family, most likely on the basis of closeness and feelings of love. The same can be said for other family members that are related or married into the family; they share the feelings of love for one another. This was a similar response from Ken when asked whom he drew in his illustration of a family. He included many people, some related

and some not, and while he could not verbally express in words that they are family because of love, it could be perceived that he drew friends and extended relatives on the basis of togetherness and feelings of love and happiness with those people. The incorporation of friends as family represents less traditional roles of family and is often not shown in literature. Despain, Tunnell, Wilcox, and Morrison (2015) agree that the Western society has become more tolerant to less traditional families. There are much literature about families who are not a mother, father, and child, but there are very few literature, which includes friends as family. This idea is an important aspect of children's learning to read, Brinson (2012) states that children's literature that is culturally specific can boost confidence in young readers. While Mike's mother Sheila believes that a family includes friends, Mike did not interpret this same feeling in his drawings, but Ken did.

Therefore, the data from this theme shows that a family is any people who feel love and happiness together. Being that they are children and their experiences are that a family must have a parent, their understanding of this concept is not fully developed because they are not fully aware of life's courses. Through the readings of the literature, children commented with understanding that "a heart" is what families share. This shows that children are interpreting the stories' themes that love is part of a family and either connecting that their families have it too or comprehending that it is the feelings people have for each other, which makes them family.

People Who Are Included as Part of a Family

This theme that was prevalent within the data, describes the different people whom students showed could be part of a family, as well as the literature and questionnaires (parents), which portray the different dynamics of families. The illustrations that students created before and after the read alouds mostly include members of their own family, but it also shows who

they each think of when it comes to family. Most children drew a combination of the typical family, mom, dad, brother, sister, and themselves and some of these drawings matched what parent's said in their questionnaires. Mike's illustrations were of his brother, dad and himself, and secondly of his mom, dad, brother and self. This matches the family structure of his home, minus the pets they have. The traditional family drawings show that children have ideas that that is what a family looks like. The children showed to believe their family is the correct family. Chaudhri and Teale (2013) discuss how children's literature plays a key role in telling counter stories and adding to a child's diversity of experiences when all they know is their own lives. So many children believed their own family was a "correct" family because that is all they know, but literature allows children to learn about others and how anyone can be included in a family. Ken drew many people; amongst them were his brother, his sister, his mom and dad, his "boys" Mikey, Matt, and Malaki, as well as his Uncle Michael and three aunts, seen in Figure 4 (above). This representation of Ken's family shows that his ideas go beyond that of a traditional family. Phillips and Larson (2012) as well as Mattix and Crawford (2011) believe that children should have access to literature that reflects their lives, including various family structures. In Ken's position with family that he described via illustration, it is not likely Ken would see himself in literature. Although he would see his immediate family, he would not see his friends, aunts and uncles portrayed in stories because it is non-traditional and not frequently portrayed in children's literature this way. Most books reinforce the norms of White upper-middle class families (Jerome & Sweeney, 2014). Ken's post drawing was very similar but with less people; the people in his second drawing included: his mom, brother, sister, baby, Auntie, Mikey, Malaki, and himself, shown in Figure 5.

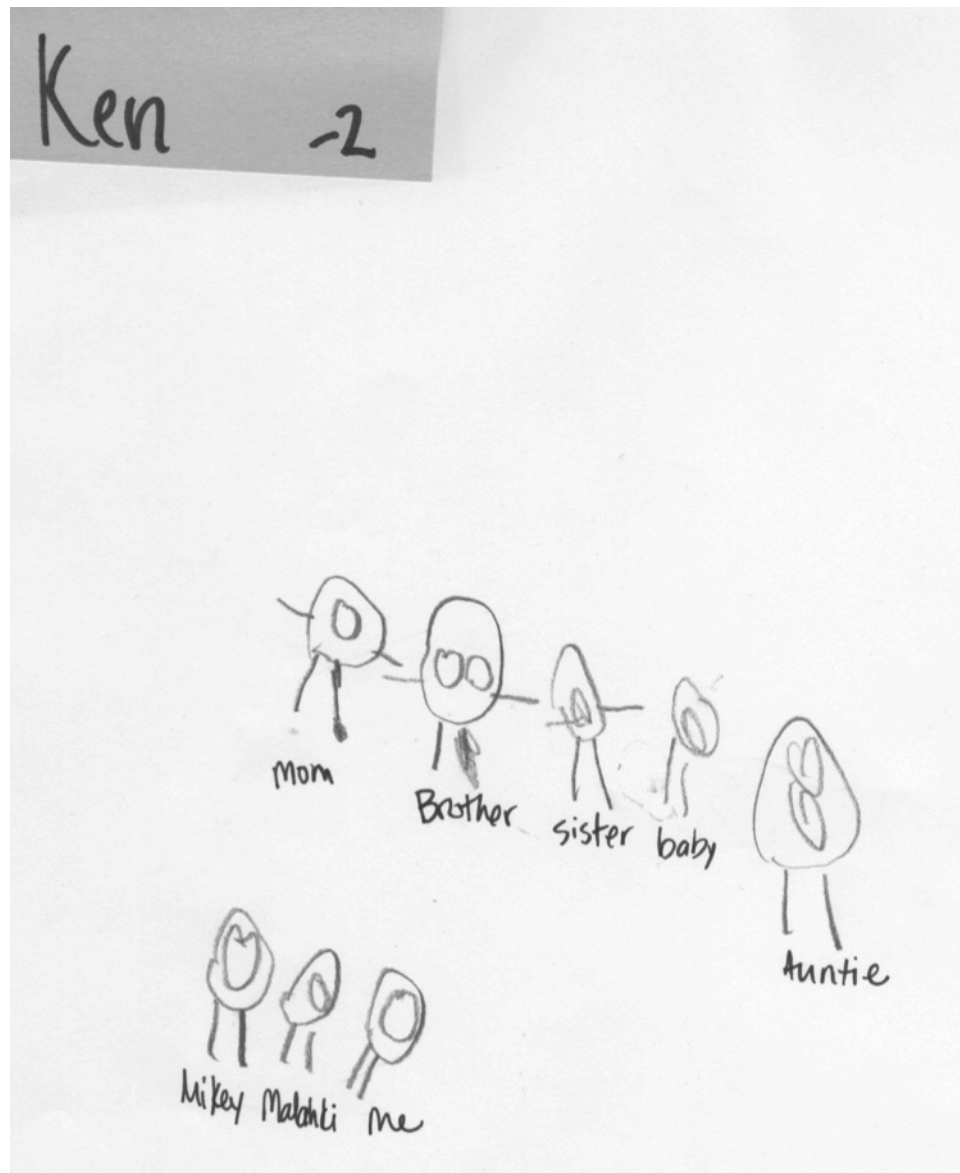


Figure 5. Illustration of a family by Ken (after read alouds) of his mom, brother, sister, baby, Auntie, Mikey, Malaki and himself.

Ken's drawing after the read alouds remains very similar to his previous drawing. This lack of change in illustrations shows his ideas about family are strong and stagnant. With this knowledge about Ken and his beliefs about family, funds of identity can be used by teachers in recognizing and using the knowledge of children's home lives and communities, but also appreciating students' interests and skills as individual learners (Jovés, Siqués, & Esteban-Guitart, 2015). It is

clear Ken has a strong sense of family, which is non-traditional. Mantei and Kervin (2014) believe that as students are able to consider their own lives in response to curriculum, the teacher is able to deepen their understandings with the knowledge of his or her student's funds of knowledge. Barbie also included in her first drawing her two brothers, her mom and dad, and their dog, shown in Figure 6. This illustration shows that Barbie interprets her family as rather traditional, but does include their pet dog, which is not uncommon for families, but surprising for a five year old.



Figure 6. Illustration of a family by Barbie of herself, her two brothers, her mom, dad and dog.

Barbie's drawing shows that she believes that the dog is part of their family and can be treated more as a person rather than an animal. Brinson (2012) believes that the use of culturally specific literature illuminates children's reflections of their own experiences. Using Barbie's ideas of family in the classroom can provide for better understanding of the curriculum. But, in order for teachers to know which multicultural books to use, it is vital for teachers to know their students' lives to provide children with those opportunities for mirroring in stories. The more knowledge that is known of student's ideas about their own families, the better teachers can continue to provide instruction that is relevant and relatable to the students.

There was also Jasmine's initial drawing, in Figure 1, which was a picture of her and me. There were also some pictures that were of just one person, either a mom or a dad. The pictures of singular people show that these children find their mom or dad to be more the center of the family. When these children think about family their thoughts immediately gravitate toward this person due to the large role they most likely play in the family. However, Jasmine's drawings were of her and I and then of just her mom. Her mother reports on the questionnaire that their family is blended, with a stepdaughter, mother, father, and a set of twins (Jasmine being one of them). Jasmine's drawings did not completely reflect her actual family. Knowing Jasmine's family structure and the illustrations she drew, her thoughts when drawing family could have been more about what was right in front of her at the time as well as the impact of the last story we read, which had a large mother role. The following three figures are from the post illustrations by Jasmine, Dominique and Barbie.



Figure 7. Illustration of a family by Jasmine (post read alouds) of her mother.

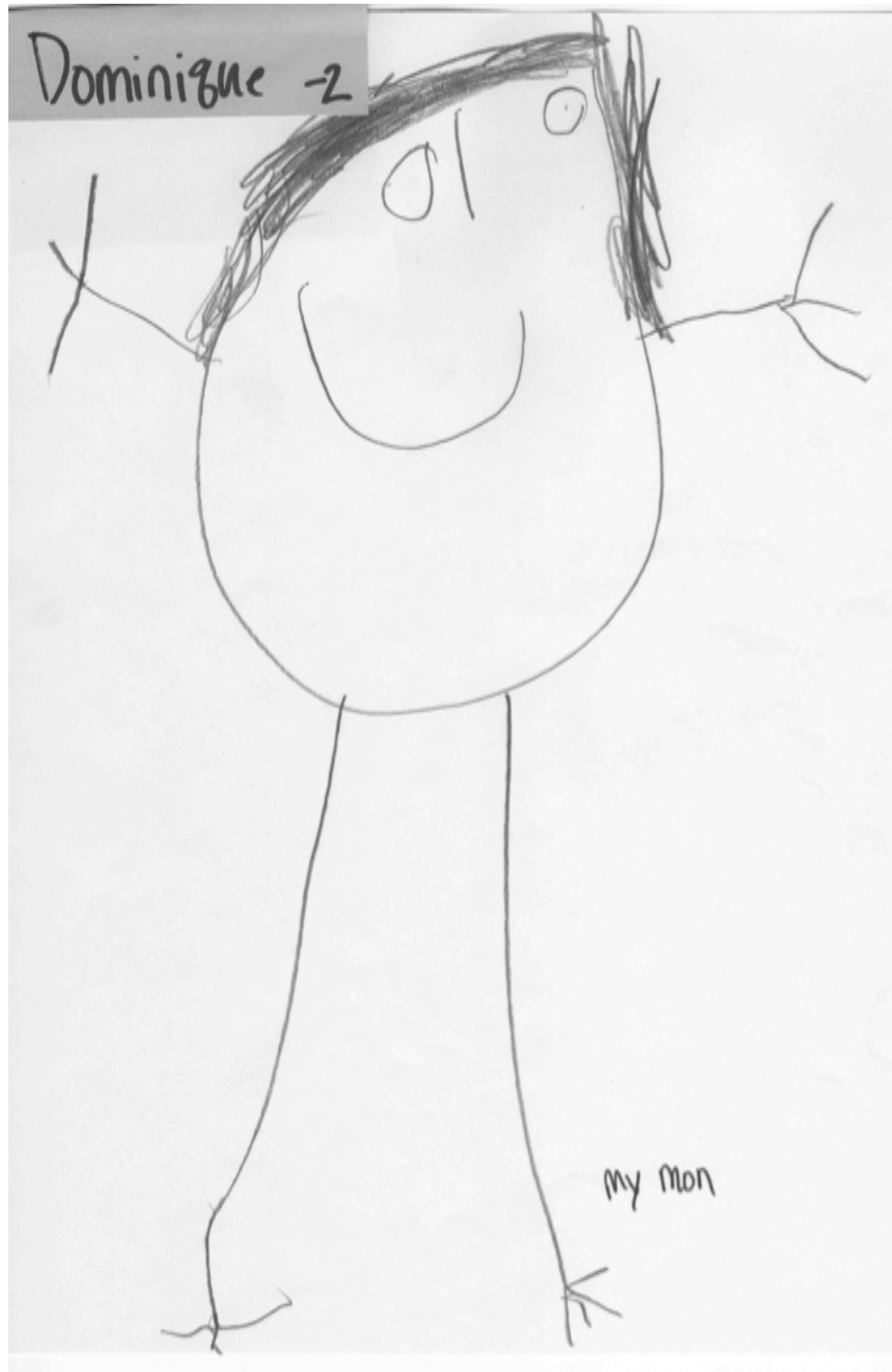


Figure 8. Illustration of a family by Dominique (post read alouds) of her mother.



Figure 9. Illustration of a family by Barbie (post read alouds) of her father.

It is interesting to see that these three students drew only person when describing a family, but often during the read aloud discussions, students responded that many people could be part of a family or continued to make references to experiences including a family member and themselves. One example, is when Elle commented during *And Tango Makes 3*, saying, “Me and my mom went to a pond before” (personal communications, 2015). This example shows that

when discussing families, her response includes thoughts of her and her mother together. Yazici Okuyan, Gedikoglu, and Karagul (2012) describe how showing different family structures in a realistic way by portraying both positive and negative attitudes makes it easier for children to imitate and identify themselves with the characters. In Elle's example, she was able to connect to the story in a realistic manner and identify with the plot of the story. The more children are exposed to literature that is varying, the more they will be able to identify themselves and understand others. Another example from the discussions that shows children's beliefs in who can be part of a family, which was not represented in some of their illustrations are comments from Barbie, Dominique, Grady, Ryan and Mike, responding to the question who can be included in a family, they said, "A mom" "a dad" "a dog" "a kid" "a cat" "a baby" "big sister" "a brother" (personal communications, 2015). These statements showed the different people who are typically thought of in a family. But some students did not represent these in their drawings. Dominique drew just her mother both times, but also has a dad and a cat. This could show their misunderstanding from the stories, where they do not fully comprehend the literature or the questions. It could also be due to children's thoughts of whom their family is when it comes down to immediate thoughts. Anderson and Hamilton (2005) discuss how parenting is portrayed in children's books and how it has a correlated effect on how children develop attitudes and expectations about parents. The way in which parents are shown in the stories they are exposed to will affect their ideas about how parents are supposed to behave. Children may not yet portray these thoughts, but that does not mean they are absent.

Implications and Conclusions

This study looked to determine if using multicultural literature would have any bearing on children's perceptions of family structures. Kindergarteners have vast knowledge of their

personal lives and little knowledge of the world. Teachers in the primary grades are partly responsible for shaping the young minds to help them in becoming adults who are responsible, caring, and accepting of others. The importance of this study shows that teachers need to be more attentive to student's family dynamics at a young age because of how those differences of personal experiences play out in the classroom. Children's families often come up in classroom discussions through the literature that is read and lesson topics. When children share these stories of their families it is important that their personal experiences are affirmed and not displayed as wrong. If the literature that a teacher reads is consistently about the stereotypes and the heteronormative culture in our society, then the children whose lives are different will not find comfort and knowledge in the daily lessons or the teacher. The study showed that children have the ability to understand differences and to respect them. At a young age children are able to add to their schemas without prejudices, which needs to be taken advantage of to help develop life long readers and tolerable adults.

In addition to children adding to their schemas, children most often use their own personal experiences in the classroom because that is what they have the most knowledge of. In kindergarten children are still determining how the world works and where they fit in amongst their family and society. Teachers need to adhere to children's personal experiences and use them to benefit the child rather than ignore them. Using the child's personal experiences in lessons allows children to make text-to-self connections and comprehend at a higher level. It also allows children to gain a better understanding of who they are, who their families are, and how society works. Literature that reflects students' lives helps to show children that there is not one right way to live and literature that shows students' something different allows them to learn and understand about different lives, cultures, and people. We know that every child who walks into

a classroom is different in one way or another from the next. So, why do we continue to use the same literature that reflects only a small portion of the children in the classroom? What happens to the students who are unable to connect to the literature their teacher reads them? Do they grow to hate reading and literature?

As a teacher myself and for other teachers it is important that the literature in the classroom displays a vast amount of differences amongst people, cultures, and races. Other studies have shown the impacts of using only literature with stereotypes and heteronormativity as well as contrasting studies that have used multicultural literature. Chaudhri and Teale (2013) make statements that contexts from the books used in their study about multiracial characters perpetuate stereotypes. The stereotypes that children are exposed to at a young age can greatly impact their formation of identities. Adams, Walker and O'Connell (2011) also discuss the exposure of gender stereotyping in pre-school children's picture books, which is a crucial time for practicing identities and differentiating between genders. If your classroom contains all Caucasian children that come from a high socioeconomic status, then using multicultural stories to teach them about the other people in the world that they are surely to encounter as adults. If your classroom is more diverse and has children who are African American, Hispanic, Asian, then multicultural literature should be used to show them that they have a voice, they are important and their cultures, races, and communities are not wrong. In the classroom, children's voices should be heard and they need to be taught that they can bring about change; it is not all about the heteronormative society.

This study aimed to determine how the use of multicultural literature could impact children's perceptions on family dynamics. Children use literacy to gain insight into different contents and the world in which we live in. School plays a large role in teaching children what is

right and what is wrong in society. However, this idea of right and wrong is culture as a disability (McDermott & Varenne, 1995) and if you are not able to fit into the normal culture than you are lacking something and therefore disabled. Children are able to pick up on these clues at a very young age, if they are accepted into heteronormativity or not. The sociocultural theory suggests that children are very perceptive and understanding; they are able to learn quickly from their environments and what they are immersed in (Larson & Marsh, 2005). Children learn the difference between acceptable and not based on their surroundings and explicit and implicit reference to the dominant society. The literature also agreed where many authors said that children's literature influences their growth, formation of identities, and knowledge about diverse topics in either a positive or negative light (Crawford & Bhattacharya, 2014; Fitzpatrick & Kostina-Ritchey, 2013; Kelly, 2012; Chaudhri & Teale, 2013; Anderson & Hamilton, 2005; Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2013; Ziv, Smadja, & Aram, 2014; Lin & Bates, 2010; Boutte, Hopkins, & Waklatsi, 2008; McNair, 2012; Sun, 2014). Children are impacted by the literature whether they are able to gain positive ideas or negative ideas; there is no literature has any effect on a child, he or she is always able to take something away from what was read. This study found that kindergarteners were unable to express on paper their feelings or perceptions of different family dynamics. Most children at this young age stuck with using what they knew and not knowledge they gained from the literature. Children at this young of an age have trouble responding to vague questions and kindergarteners have a strong basis to use what they know. They are still learning about the world, letters, sounds, people, books, and more, so they will continually revert back to what they know best—their lives—until their schemas are built up enough where they can rely on knowledge from stories, media, friends, and new experiences.

Thus, would the same results be achieved if older children were used? Would children in first or second grade still use their own personal lives to respond to questions or would they have more experiences and better knowledge to respond in a different way? The age of the children was one of the limitations of this study. Although, the results were interesting and the participants were hard working, they were young with little experiences with different types of family structures. It is possible that children who are a little bit older would have different responses because of their experiences. It was also a limitation that there were nine children who were able to participate and only three adults who completed a questionnaire. This lack of participation from parents and students provided very little information for the questionnaires and less desirable information for the study with the children. A third limitation would be the time allotted for the study. There was only about one hour, once a week for three weeks to complete this study. Since, it was done in such a short period of time, it would be more beneficial if it could be done almost as a unit plan, with activities to pair with each story and get children thinking more in depth about cultural differences rather than just a read aloud. Would children's ideas change about family if they were continually exposed throughout the school year to differences? Would children always turn to their own families when asked about different types of family?

In conclusion, literature in general has a vast impact on children regardless of its content. The use of multicultural literature that exposes children to different ideals, people, and cultures can only benefit them as they grow. Using literature to discuss the different kinds of family structures also plays into talking about race, socioeconomic statuses, and cultures, which are all vital topics for children to know about as they mature. Disregarding others' differences only shelters children and does not allow them to learn about others and become accepting of those

differences. Studies, including this one, have shown that children are capable of understanding the variances in lives of others at a very young age and by teaching them about differences they grow to be more tolerant and strive for social justice.

References

- Adams, M., Walker, C., & O'Connell, P., (2011). Invisible or involved fathers? A content analysis of representations of parenting in young children's picturebooks in the UK. *Sex Roles*, 65, 259-270.
- Anderson, D. A. & Hamilton, M., (2005). Gender roles stereotyping of parents in children's picture books: The Invisible father. *Sex Roles*, 52(3), 145-151.
- Baxter, J., Weston, R., & Qu, L., (2011). Family structure, co-parental relationship quality, post-separation paternal involvement and children's emotional wellbeing. *Journal of Family Studies*, 17(2), 86-109.
- Boutte, G. S., Hopkins, R., & Waklatsi, T., (2008). Perspectives, voices, and worldviews in frequently read children's books. *Early Education and Development*, 19(6), 941-962.
- Brinson, S. A., (2012). Knowledge of multicultural literature among early childhood educators. *Multicultural Education*, 19(2), 30-33.
- Cavanagh, S. E. & Huston, A. C., (2008). The Timing of family instability and children's social development. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70, 1258-1269.
- Chaudhri, A. & Teale, W. H. (2013). Stories of multiracial experiences in literature for children, ages 9-14. *Children's Literature in Education*, 44, 359-376.
- Cloughessy, K. & Waniganayake, M. (2013). Early childhood educators working with children who have lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender parents: What does the literature tell us? *Early Child Development and Care*, 184(8), 1267-1280.

Crawford, P. A. & Bhattacharya, S. (2012). Grand images: Exploring images of grandparents in picture books. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 28, 128-144.

Dedeoglu, H., Ulusoy, M. & Lamme, L. L. (2012). Turkish preservice teachers' perceptions of children's picture books reflecting LGBT-related issues. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 105, 256-263.

Despain, S. M., Tunnell, M. O., Wilcox, R., & Morrison, T. G., (2015). Investigating shifts in diverse family structures in Newberry Award and honor books utilizing U.S. census data, 1930-2010. *Literacy Research and Instruction*, 54, 316-340.

Endendijk, J. J., Groeneveld, M. G., van der Pol, L. D., van Berkel, S. R., Hallers-Haalboom, E. T., Mesman, J., & Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., (2014). Boys don't play with dolls: Mothers' and fathers' gender talk during picture book reading. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 14, 141-161.

Esteban-Guitart, M. & Moll, I. (2014). Funds of identity, lived experience and education. *Culture & Psychology*, 20, 70-81.

Ferdman, M. B.(1990). Literacy and cultural identity. *Harvard Educational Review* 60(2), 181-204.

Ferfolja, T., & Robinson, K. (2004). Why anti-homophobia education in teacher education? Perspectives from Australian teacher educators. *Teaching Education*, 15(1), 9–25.

Fitzpatrick, J. & Kostina-Ritchey, E. (2013). U.S. Families' adoption of Chinese daughters: A Narrative analysis of family themes in children's books. *Family Relations*, 62, 58-71.

- Goldberg, A. E. (2014). Lesbian, gay and heterosexual adoptive parents' experiences in preschool environments. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 29, 669-681.
- Hall, K. W. (2008). The importance of including culturally authentic literature. *Young Children*, 80-86.
- Hammett, R. & Bainbridge, J., (2009). Pre-service teachers explore cultural identity and ideology through picture books. *Literacy*, 43(3), 152-159.
- Hartman, P. (2006). Loud on the inside: Working-class girls, gender, and literacy. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 41(1), 82-117.
- Hynes, K. & Dunifon, R., (2007). Children in no-parent households: The continuity of arrangements and the composition of households. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29, 912-932.
- Jerome, K. & Sweeney, K. A., (2014). Birth parents' portrayals in children's adoption literature. *Journal of Family Issues*, 35(5), 677-704.
- Jovés, P., Siqués, C., & Esteban-Guitart, M., (2015). The incorporation of funds of knowledge and funds of identity of students and their families into educational practice. A case study from Catalonia, Spain. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 49, 68-77.
- Kelly, J. (2012). Two daddy tigers and a baby tiger: Promoting understandings about same gender parented families using picture books. *Early Years: An International Research Journal*, 32(3), 288-300.
- Kucer, S. B. (2014). *Dimensions of literacy: A conceptual base for teaching reading and writing in school settings* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

- Lankshear, C., & Knobel, M. (2007). Sampling "the New" in New Literacies. In M. Knobel & C. Lankshear (Eds.), *A New Literacies Sampler* (Vol. 29, pp. 1-24). New York: Peter Lang.
- Larson, J. & Marsh, J. (2005). *Making literacy real: Theories and practices for learning and teaching*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Lin, M. & Bates, A. B., (2010). Home visits: How do they affect teachers' beliefs about teaching and diversity? *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 38, 179-185.
- Mantei, J. & Kervin, L. (2014). Interpreting the images in a picture book: Students make connections to themselves, their lives and experiences. *English Teaching: Practice and Critique*, 13(2), 76-92.
- Martino, W. & Cumming-Potvin, W. (2011). "They didn't have out there gay parents—they just looked like normal regular parents": Investigating teachers' approaches to addressing same-sex parenting and non-normative sexuality in the elementary school classroom. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 41(4), 481-499.
- Mattix, A. A. & Crawford, P. A. (2011). Connecting the dots: Exploring themes in adoption picturebooks. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 39, 313-321.
- McDermott, R., Varenne, H. (1995). Culture "as" disability. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 26(3), 324-348.
- McNair, J. C. (2012). "I never knew there were so many books about us" Parents and children reading and responding to African American children's literature together. *Children's Literature in Education*, 44, 191-207.

Moll, I. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & González, N., (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching:

Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31, 132-141.

NYSED.gov. (2012). Retrieved from

<https://reportcards.nysed.gov/schools.php?year=2012&instid=800000034085>

Phillips, D. K. & Larson, M. L. (2012). Perservice teachers respond to And Tango Makes Three:

Deconstructing disciplinary power and the heteronormative in teacher education. *Gender and Education*, 24(2), 159-175.

Pohan, C., & Bailey, N. (1998). Including gays in multicultural education. *Education Digest*, 63

(5), 52–56.

Qiu, W., Schvaneveldt, P. L., & Sahin, V. (2013). Children's perceptions and definitions of

family in China, Ecuador, Turkey, and the United States. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 44(5), 641-660.

Rowell, E. H. (2007). Missing! Picture books reflecting gay and lesbian families. *Young*

Children, 24-30.

Sanders, A. M. & Mathis, J. B. (2012). Gay and lesbian literature in the classroom: Can gay

themes overcome heteronormativity? *Journal of Praxis in Multicultural Education*, 7(1), 1-15.

Sun, L. (2014). Critical content analysis of adoption texts: Representations of transracial Chinese

adoption within children's picture books. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Saint Louis University, Missouri.

Town of Irondequoit. (2015). Retrieved from <http://www.irondequoit.org/>

Tschida, C. M., Ryan, C. L., & Ticknor, A. S. (2014). Building on windows and mirrors:

Encouraging disruption of “single stories” through children’s literature. *Journal of Children’s Literature*, 40(1), 28-39.

Walling, D. R. (2003). Gay and lesbian themed novels for classroom reading. *Journal of Gay &*

Lesbian Issues in Education, 1(2), 97–108.

Weih, T. G. (2014). Revealing relationships: First graders share personal literature. *SAGE Open*,

1-13.

Yazici Okuyan, H., Gedikoglu, Y. G., & Karagul, S. (2012). Family concepts in works of

children’s literature. *Elementary Education Online*, 11(2), 395-407.

Ziv, M., Smadja, M. L., & Aram, D. (2015). Preschool teachers’ reference to theory of mind

topics in three storybook contexts: Reading, reconstruction and telling. *Teaching and*

Teacher Education, 45, 14-24.

Appendix A**Parent Questionnaire**

As part of a graduate research study, I ask for your help in collecting data about children's beliefs about family structures. Please **complete and return** the following questionnaire to your child's classroom. If you have any questions or concerns feel free to contact the researcher, Lindsey White, at lmw03672@sjfc.edu

Name: _____

Child's Name: _____

Describe your family structure:

What types of words do you use when talking to your child about family?

What types of books or television shows do you read or watch with your child about family?

What do you think a "family" looks like?

Appendix B

Discussion Questions:

Who was the family in the story?

Why did they make a family?

What makes that a family?

Can anyone be part of a family?

Can families be all different people?

What helps a family stay together?

What feelings do they have for each other?

Appendix C

Student Work (not shown in Figures 1-9)

