Creating Picture Books that Feature Children Parented by Same-Sex Partners

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by

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Introduction

"And I am who I am today because of them."   I stare at my hands, right

comforted by left. *Breathe. Look up.* Their eyes: some wet, a few stoic, most tender.

"I'm ready for questions and comments."

It takes a shaky kind of valor to unveil your own secrets in front of the mirror. It

takes a certain pluckiness to offer a glimpse through your window to your peers and

colleagues.   But the trepidation is never for naught. As Redmoon (1991) articulates,

"Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more

important than fear" (p. 41). Love and fear arise out of the same space in our hearts, and

I write from both. In this chapter, I will identify an absent narrative, examine educational

equity, illustrate my personal experience, and discuss what it all means to me beyond

simply being a poster child.

An Absent Narrative

When I was in elementary school, my parents divorced. While my father

begrudgingly went his own way, my mother ushered another adult into our lives.

Another mother.   In our small, Catholic community, this was sensational news and

spread furiously. While my story is not without woes, the true detriment lies in the

silence—the silence that I was forced to keep both inside and outside school walls, the

muteness of my teachers. I longed for a mirror to reveal a family that looked like mine, to validate and normalize our existence.

I cannot recall a single story or picture book in my elementary school experience that strayed from the family constellation of a mother, father and their children who were typically white and middle class. I hid parts of myself on assignments such as family trees and looked down, cheeks lit-up, when I heard classmates throw around the phrase, "That's so gay." Our sexual education class taught us about the biology of reproduction and defined family as a biologically male-gendered father, a biologically female-gendered mother, and sometimes their children, all of whom loved and supported one another. While I could relate to the latter half of the given definition, I lacked the validation that having divorced parents, much less one of whom was a lesbian, fall within this definition of family.

The high school I went to, while parochial, was progressive and used curriculum that challenged learners to examine and strengthen or reshape their beliefs. One interdisciplinary class in particular showed us windows into many other realities beyond our largely white, middle-class existence. We walked through poverty with Jonathan Kozol, talked about the cultural identity struggles presented by Julia Alvarez, and examined racism through the words of Maya Angelou and August Wilson. Service learning projects led us to women's shelters and low-income schools. This class, appropriately named "Spectrum," also provided a platform to safely open a window through which my peers could see a glimpse of a family unlike their own: my family, parented by a same-sex couple.

During my senior year we started a unit on gender and sexuality. When a few courageous Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgendered (LGBT) students decided to form a panel to share their personal stories, I asked to join. It was 1999 and my story was largely an untold one. I knew that my voice would only provide one perspective, so I asked my mother to join me. We told our story side-by-side for what would become the first of many times. In the years following, we would be invited to school districts, Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity (SEED) groups, administrative panels, and ultimately at the adoption of the inclusive Welcoming Schools initiative at the school district where we both teach. The goal of SEED is to create gender fair, multiculturally equitable, socioeconomically aware, and globally informed education while Welcoming Schools is an LGBT-inclusive approach to addressing family diversity, gender stereotyping and bullying and name-calling in elementary schools. While I no longer quite feel like a Who screaming "We are here!" (Seuss, 1954), I am still waiting to see my experience mirrored in educational curriculum. Due to the near-absence of my family's narrative within the current education system, my capstone will explore the following question: *How can an author create a picture book for children featuring families parented by same-sex partners that provides windows into and mirrors of the lives of those families?* This chapter will highlight the educational equity behind the picture book, my personal experience in the school system as a child of same-sex partners, and how I hope to grow my influence beyond simply being a poster child.

Educational Equity

   I am a teacher, but did not start out as such. My mom is a teacher and I had volunteered in her class many times throughout my secondary career and beyond, but it did not strike me as my calling. Ultimately, after investigating a few different paths, I graduated with an undergraduate degree in English with a focus on creative writing coupled with supportive coursework in journalism.

   During those years, I thrived on writing both poems and creative nonfiction, and found a home at my university newspaper, composing mostly feature stories. One of the pieces I wrote for a freshman composition class was entitled "My Two Moms." I told the story of not only my mom coming out to us, but also how I was affected, and how both children and adults reacted to and treated my family and me. My mother frequently shares this story at discussion panels when I am unable to attend. Often, readers encourage me to do more with my story, to reach out to a larger audience.

   Fresh out of undergraduate and employed as a newspaper reporter, I had the privilege of gathering information and telling others' stories, but I felt something missing. My decision to go back to school and earn my teaching license was an easy one. The possibilities of impacting young learners drew me in and I immediately began exploring ways to expand my influence beyond the academic curriculum. In 2010, I was hired at a school where the instructional coach had been working for a few years to gain approval to implement a program based off Style's (1988) article, "Curriculum as Window & Mirrors," and a neighboring district's work with the Welcoming Schools organization. In the article, Style explores the importance of a school curriculum that accurately reveals

and reflects both the multicultural world and the individual student. Style's goal is to create balanced education and promote conversations. In our building, the idea was to use children's picture books featuring underrepresented/absent groups as curriculum to help all students see themselves in the curriculum and foster empathy in and for others. At the end of my first year there, the project was finally granted approval by all required committees, and we, the site equity team, began selecting books.

Of all the topics we targeted during the first year of implementation, homosexuality proved to be the most controversial. Other books, stories about differences, race, and gender passed by most parents unnoticed. With purposeful transparency through newsletters and parent nights, we addressed many parents' concerns regarding the topic of homosexuality. We did this by sharing our goals of creating a welcoming environment for all families, reducing bullying, fostering a safe environment for learning, and ultimately increasing student achievement. While a few parents opted to have their children sit out of the lessons around the books *And Tango Makes Three* (Parnell & Richardson, 2005) and *King and King* (Haan & Nijland, 2002), most allowed their students to remain in class once they understood our goals and the purpose of the curriculum.

A Personal Experience

Growing up, I did not know of anyone who had a family that looked like mine, nor did I see it anywhere in print or the media. There were not television shows such as Modern Family or Marry Me, which feature same-sex parents. I knew there were homosexual couples, but not same-sex parents with four children. This absence of a

mirror and uncertainty of acceptance forced me into silence. Nobody ever asked about

my family's structure, so I inferred that it was a taboo topic. This silence drove me to

refer to my new mother as my "nanny," "godmother," or "just my mom's friend" who

was staying with us for a while. Instead of verbalizing my feelings, I wrote them down:

sadness, anger, confusion, and sometimes pride.

      School was a place where I felt normal, although there were times where I wanted

to scream at my teachers "Why don't you acknowledge my other mother?!?" As

aforementioned, the entire community knew. My other mother, I will call her "Donna,"

came to conferences and played on the adult softball team with my mom just as my dad

had done. She directed plays in which many of my peers participated. But not one word

was spoken. Her name, which I still call her to this day instead of "Mom," was

unspeakable. Neither teacher nor other staff member ever reached out to me and asked

how I was doing. I suppose since my grades were good, I had friends and seemed happy,

no one saw my need, or perhaps they were afraid of the discomfort of the conversation.

      The amount of bullying I faced was minimal and the acts more passive in nature

than aggressive. Unfortunately, I had no one, peer nor adult, to talk to when incidents did

occur. One time, I was at a friend's house and was in the kitchen taking aspirin for a

headache. A neighborhood boy who was there smirked and nettled, "Do you take those

so you don't end up like your mom?" It was the first time anyone had so directly

addressed my family situation and it would end up being the harshest comment anyone

would ever make to my face. I did not want to tell my mom because I wanted her to

continue to think I was strong, and did not want to add to her tribulation. I felt I could

not tell my friend's parents because then I would force them to acknowledge my family structure. I did not want to place that burden on them. To this day, events such as these live largely on paper and in my memory. Few have ever been shared.

Beyond a Poster Child

One of my first years of teaching, I was approached about mentoring a girl whose parents were LGBT, one of whom one was going through a gender transition on a public, national platform. The student's teacher asked me if I would talk to the girl just to let her know I was there for her, that she was not alone. I recognized the teacher was trying to provide her a mirror and I obliged by writing the girl (with whom I had never spoken) a note telling her about my family and offering an open door to her. While she never took me up on my offer, from then on she smiled at me in the hallway each time we passed. Looking back, I wish I had been armed with tools to give the teacher to address the situation and help make the girl feel comfortable and safe in her own classroom.

The scene that opens this chapter was the very first, and by far the hardest and scariest panel of which I have been part. While I know sharing my story helps to build understanding and empathy in others, participating in panels to represent a marginalized population only reaches so far; only spurs so much change. I always question what kind of and how much action is taken when my audience goes back to their classrooms. I have a story that needs to be told, a voice that begs to be unmuted. There are students in classrooms today who share stories that parallel mine. Driven by these stories, in the next chapter I will research the question: *How can an author create a picture book for children featuring families parented by same-sex partners that provides windows into*

and mirrors of the lives of those families? In the following chapters, I will present my research, lay out my storyboard, and narrate my story. I will close with reflection on the process and suggest action, as well as list implications for the future.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Overview

Still, anyone who writes a children's literature text book, anyone who prepares

future teachers, anyone who teaches elementary school must be aware that

schooling is about *all* of America's children; we must ensure that all children can

find themselves and their families in the books available to them. (Smolkin &

Young, 2011, p. 223)

In today's classrooms, the word "family" conjures up images beyond the

traditional unit of mom, dad, a few children, and perhaps a loyal furry friend. A family

constellation can be a grandmother raising her grandson, a single father with three

children, or two women with an adopted daughter.

Culturally responsive pedagogy has been trending since the early 1990s with

frameworks for educators that include criteria such as academic success, cultural

competence, sociopolitical consciousness, validation, community, and inclusivity (Kesler,

2011). Educators and schools have been consciously and purposefully seeking

curriculum and picture books that are representative and inclusive of all students.

However, researchers identify one group that is still largely underrepresented in schools'

curriculums and libraries: families with same-sex parents (Smolkin & Young, 2011;

Rowell, 2007; Epstein, 2012).

I know first-hand the effects that an absent narrative can have on a child, both inside and outside of school walls, because I have same-sex parents and am an educator myself. Since I was in high school, I have been driven to answer the question *How can an author create a picture book for children featuring families parented by same-sex partners that provides windows into and mirrors of the lives of those families?* In this chapter, I will review the current socio-political state of the United States, discuss the effects missing mirrors can have on marginalized populations, identify ways to end the silence, provide a curriculum proposal, define picture books, present developmental considerations, and lay out the craft of creating a picture book

The Current Socio-Political State

Thirty-seven states in the United States have legalized same-sex marriage since 2004, the majority following the Supreme Court's overturn of the Defense of Marriage Act in June of 2013, bringing same-sex couples and their families to the forefront of the media. According to the 2010 American Community Survey (Lofquist, 2011), there are children living in 115,000 out of an identified 594,000 same-sex households. While this census reports a total number of nearly two million children, other studies show as many as six to fourteen million children in the United States having a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender parent (Gates, 2013). "This means an increased presence of these families in the schools systems, requiring educations to be prepared to recognize, include and support them" (Rimalower & Caty, 2009, p. 18).

In the domain of this widely publicized arena, Smolkin and Young (2011) note that many teachers do not believe or are not aware that many students come from same-

sex households, even though most believe that they are required to provide safe and supportive learning conditions for students with Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgendered (LGBT) parents (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Only twenty-four percent of elementary teachers report that they have been active in reaching out to LGBT families in working to create such an environment by discussing their families with them or communicating incidents of bias with the parents (Kosciw & Diaz).

Same-sex parents and their children often face the decision of whether or not they will share their family structure with school personnel and other families (Rimalower & Caty, 2009).   They feel conflicted. They want to live their lives freely and openly, but there is an underlying fear that surrounds disclosing their families to their schools (Rimalower & Caty).   Some fear comes from the fact that teachers report believing that same-sex couples do not make good parents and that they are subjecting their children to undue prejudice from society (Smolkin & Young, 2011; Litovich & Langhout, 2004), although according to Koswis and Diaz (2008), only 7% of teachers are opposed to families with LGBT parents.

Disproving the belief that same-sex couples have a negative influence on their children, research has shown that children of same-sex parents show no significant differences when compared to children raised by heterosexuals in psychological stability, emotional well-being, and peer relationships (Litovich & Langhout, 2004). As identified by Litovich and Langhout, the lesser-seen challenges faced by children of same-sex parents are born out of heterosexism, which is the belief that heterosexuality is normal

and all other sexualities are abnormal. Litovich and Langhout (2004) go on to assert that heterosexism can present itself as one or more of the following:

- Homophobia, which is defined as the negative emotions directed towards same-sex couples or their families

- Stigmatization, where people cannot gain full social acceptance because their 'otherness' is negatively perceived

- Discrimination, which is behavior against same-sex parents or their families

In a 2004 study conducted by Litovich and Langhout, same-sex parents of students in kindergarten through 12th grade and their children in middle and high schools reported that they did not see heterosexism present and influential in their everyday lives. Contrarily, each family talked about multiple instances of homophobia, stigmatization, and discrimination in the same interview. Their reports support the finding that "heterosexism is greatly pervasive in society and evident in many aspects of living" (Litovich & Langhout, p. 430), including schools.

According to a study of K-12 children of same-sex families conducted by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), most students do not report victimization, but 40% say they have been verbally harassed by other students due to the makeup of their family (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008).   At the same time, 75% of elementary teachers state the issue has never come up in their class. GLSEN's report also reveals that 11% of participants say that teachers mistreat them and 15% report negative comments. Additionally, "more than a quarter (25%) of students in our study reported

feeling that they could not fully participate in school specifically because they had an LGBT parent, and 36% felt that school personnel did not acknowledge that they were from an LGBT family" (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008, p. xvi). I believe that teachers do not see heterosexism affecting students like myself because as Litovich and Langhout (2004) note, we are often well-adjusted. This does not mean that we can be ignored or glossed over. We strongly desire and deserve to be validated and affirmed.

<u>Missing Mirrors</u>

African American lesbian mother and author, Jacqueline Woodson, describes the reason she feels compelled to weave her personal experiences into her writing when she states:

> I know what it is like to be hated because of the skin you were born in, because of your gender or sexual preference. I know what it is like to be made to feel unworthy, disregarded, to have one's experiences devalued because they are not the dominant culture. (1998, p.37)

At the inception of culturally responsive pedagogy, Style (1988) laid out the need for inclusivity in curriculum in her article "Curriculum as Window & Mirror." In the article, she calls for a balanced curriculum that provides windows and mirrors into the multicultural world for all students. She elaborates, "If the student is understood as occupying a dwelling of self, education needs to enable the student to look through window frames in order to see the realities of others and into mirrors in order to see her/his own reality reflected" (para. 7).

Style argues against the analogy of the "melting pot" and challenges her readers to actualize and validate differences. Although Style is specifically calling for windows and mirrors of women and racial minority students, her work continues to inspire voices and visibility for many other cultural groups, including families with same-sex parents. McGarry (2013) asserts that LGBT-inclusive curriculum offers a mirror that validates the existence of LGBT people and their families while at the same time presents a window for others who might not have access and helps prepare them for the real-world interactions. Bias appears in many different forms in school curriculum, the most basic being complete exclusion of groups, such as LGBT people (McGarry). McGarry notes that many districts have policies in place to help reduce bias while evaluating curriculum, but that most do not include criteria regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or the language of heterosexism.

A 2008 study conducted by GLSEN supports the need for more windows into and mirrors of children with same-sex parents. The results show that less than a third of students and parents identified inclusion of LGBT people, history, or events in their schools' curriculum and report that their family structure was absent when family topics were discussed in class (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). According to Kosciw and Diaz, only 23% of teachers report incorporating these topics into the curriculum. The table below shows teacher-reported reasons why they do not or feel they cannot include curriculum featuring LGBT people in their classrooms (Kosciw & Diaz, p. 93).

Table 2.1. T*eachers' reasons for not using LGBT-inclusive curriculum (GLSEN, 2008)*

Feel they cannot teach beyond the mandated curriculum	17%
Feel unsure of how to talk about the topic	15%
Report they do not have time	14%
Fear that parents will be upset	13%
Fear administration would not support it	9%

While almost 90% of elementary students affirm they have learned about different types of families at school, only 18% say they have learned about LGBT families (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008).

Rowell's research highlights the need for more gay-friendly picture books in classrooms and libraries. "The lack of inclusive, gay-friendly picture books means some children cannot see their own lives or the full diversity of family life reflected in books" (2007, p. 24). Smolkin and Young (2011) concur, pointing out that literature reflecting these children's worlds are rarely found in schools. The omission of same-sex families and themes in children's books can have detrimental outcomes, because it silences their voices, which can make them feel devalued and unimportant (Smolkin & Young). Rimalower & Caty (2009) expand on this fact and state that being excluded from the definition of family takes away their sense of legitimacy, making it all the more important for children who live these experiences and realities to know they are not alone (O'Connor, 2010).

The potential positive outcomes of inclusion in children's books have the ability to reach more than just those who will see themselves reflected and validated. It also

provides windows for students not from that group. O'Connor (2010) stresses the importance of children's picture books addressing *all* realities and the acceptance it can build. "I think that for children who have never had such experiences, reading about them will, perhaps, make them more empathetic to those who face the harsh realities of life on a daily basis" (p. 469).

Ending the Silence

Parents and educators are not the only ones who struggle with how to foster discussions with children regarding different types of families. Children in families parented by same-sex partners are constantly confronted with the decision of if, how, when, and with whom to share their families (Rimalower & Caty, 2009). According to GLSEN (2008), approximately half of parents in K-12 settings disclose their family constellation to schools (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Even though many children raised by same-sex parents are comfortable with or proud of their families, bullying and perceived negativity or disapproval may lead them to use silence as a coping mechanism (Litovich & Langhout, 2004).

Research shows that young children of same-sex families desire to share their family constellation with peers until they reach school age. Once in school, they may begin to "encounter verbal or metacommunicative information suggesting such a revelation can bring unpleasant reactions from their peers and even teachers" (Litovich & Langhout, 2004, p. 424). In early school years, children are often still prideful of their families and feel the need to defend them. The results of Litovich and Langhout's study suggest that with education around the diversity of families, children with same-sex

parents might not feel the need to explain and defend their family to peers. As children grow older, they become more aware of disapproval and negativity toward their families, and become more likely to turn to silence to avoid the attached stigmatism (Litovich & Langhout, 2004). Heterosexism becomes more apparent as children grow.

Students report that homophobia, discrimination, and stigmatization are present in schools (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Seventeen percent of students in the GLSEN study reported hearing negative comments about their family or parents in school and only 38% said that staff members who overheard intervened (Kosciw & Diaz). However, teachers do support systemic changes in policies around bullying based on family characteristics combined with inclusive practices that would create a supportive environment (Kosciw & Diaz). Additionally, approximately two-thirds of teachers identify professional development around LGBT families as another facet to help them better meet the needs of students and their families (Kosciw & Diaz).

According to Kosciw and Diaz (2008), over half of elementary teachers believe other staff members in their school would support initiatives benefiting families with LGBT parents. This support is vital because parents and their children often seek out places where they can feel safe. According to the GLSEN study, 87% of students report that they had at least one supportive staff member and 67% of same-sex parents report that they knew at least a few supportive staff members (Kosciw & Diaz).

Kosciw and Diaz (2008) ask teachers how they handle bullying around LGBT families, and report that teachers are most likely to involve an administrator. Thirty-eight percent say they would conduct a class discussion about respecting people's differences.

Kosciw and Diaz's research (2008) shows that teachers at different levels would handle the situation differently, but that most K-4 teachers would be comfortable having a class discussion. However, concerns exist that discourse on sexuality other than heterosexual may be inappropriate for young children (Kelly, 2012). A LGBT-inclusive curriculum based on developmentally appropriate standards may provide the answer for educators.

A Curriculum Proposal

McGarry (2013) suggests that an LGBT-inclusive sexual education curriculum that provides mirrors and windows will broaden student learning and create a more positive learning environment. The characteristics of such a program might be rooted in the National Sexuality Education Standards: Core Content and Skills, K-12 (Future of Sex Education Initiative, 2012) which includes a standard that "presents lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender identities as possibilities as it addresses fundamental aspects of people's understanding of who they are" (McGarry, p. 29).

Table 2.2. The Future of Sex Education Initiative's Standards (2011)

National Sexuality Education Standards by Grade Level (K-2)			
	Core Concept	**Analyzing Influences**	**Interpersonal Communication**
Healthy Relationships	Identify different kinds of family structures		Demonstrate ways to show respect for different types of families
Identity	Describe differences and similarities in how boys and girls may be expected to act	Provide examples of how friends, family, media, society and culture influence ways in which boys and girls think they should act	

McGarry (2013) also presents the Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Kindergarten through 12th Grade (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, 2004) as a tool for curriculum development and an evaluation of concepts and topics, accuracy, messaging, age appropriateness, cultural responsiveness, teaching strategies, and parental involvement. Lessons in such a curriculum might facilitate the following:

- Topics surrounding stereotyping, harassment, identity, expression, and orientation

- The use of both inclusive and gender-neutral language by educators

- Acquisition of appropriate vocabulary by students surrounding LGBT people

- Implementation of effective interventions for when students or staff are not acting in a responsive manner

McGarry urges schools to grant all students access to this type of LGBT-inclusive sexual education curriculum, while making sure it is balanced with both LGBT people and events in history.

In a study of early childhood teachers using picture books featuring same-sex parents and families (Kelly, 2012), the results suggest that children are able to understand diversity in families and that using inclusive resources in early learning can be used to introduce different family structures. Rimalower and Caty (2009) further validate this point by stating that early discussions about heterosexism help children develop the tools they will need to have conversations with peers and to help correct possible misinformation, even in uncomfortable conversations. Psychologist Bruno Bettelheim

recommends a particular tool, children's literature, to help children make sense of the world. Stories help children with issues that may be scary or confusing or address hard questions and can enlighten them to the diversity of humanity (Paccione-Dyszlewski, 2010).

<u>Picture Book Defined</u>

There are a myriad of descriptors and thoughts on the term 'picture book,' which can also be spelled 'picturebook' or 'picture-book.' Stephens (1989) asserts, "picturebooks are arguably a child's most important experience of texts" (p. 106). Sipe (2012) defines them as whole, as the unity between the sign systems of words and images that create a dynamic relationship for the reader. Sipe labels the interdependent relationship between illustration and text *synergy* to highlight the importance of the interaction between the two systems. Similarly, Lewis (2001) names the process of reading the two systems simultaneously *interanimation*. Wolfenbarger and Sipe (2007) note that in picture books, text and illustrations must work together.

Readers create stories based on combined messages of what they see and hear. Through metaphors, theoretical constructs, typologies, and phenomenological approaches, scholars discuss ways that the systems of words and illustrations interact. For the purpose of this capstone, only typologies will be addressed. Nikolajeva and Scott (2000) present typologies as points along a continuum:

Symmetrical   Complementary   Expanding   Counterpointing   Contradicting

Figure 2.1. *Nikolajeva and Scott's continuum of picture book typologies (2000)*

In a symmetrical approach, the systems, both written and illustrated, reflect each other and can be described as redundant (Sipe, 2012). The two systems provide information and fill in each other's gaps in complementary picture books. Similarly, expanding or enhancing picture books feature one system that extends the meaning of the other. The fourth point, counterpointing picture books, features words and illustrations that have different messages. At the end of the continuum, contradicting picture books present opposite messages between the two systems.

Sipe states that counterpointing picture books are "especially stimulating because they elicit many possible interpretations and involve the reader's imagination" (2012, p. 18). Nikolajeva and Scott (2000) grow this fourth point with subtypes. Included in this expansion are: address, style, genre, juxtaposition, perspective, characterization, metafictive nature, and space and time. Ultimately, the typologies of picture books are limitless (Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007), and teachers should note the different ways typologies can stretch children's imaginations and interpretations when selecting literature.

Goldstone (2001) presents the idea that cultures surrounding children are reflected in picture books, and that what has changed post-World War II is the organization of picture books and their linguistic code. Many picture books today are centered around topics that may be seen as forbidden (Martinez & Harmon, 2011). Such books are named "postmodern" due to their elements of uncertainty, playfulness, cynicism, creativity, and juxtaposition. They possess the ability to help students better understand the world around them (Goldstone).

Non-postmodern picture books usually feature traditional story elements, including characters, setting, problem, and solution (Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007; Goldstone, 2001). Spitz (1996) believes that picture books have the capacity to "expand a child's inner world by means of images and words that affix themselves to the walls of what I have elsewhere called 'a museum of the mind'" (p.190). Wolfenbarger and Sipe argue that postmodern picture books, ones designed to work against a linear, traditional story structure, possess the possibility of evoking authentic and extensive responses while developing children's comprehension of other 21st-century texts.

In postmodern picture books, the reader is given the opportunity to co-create with the author and illustrator in a nonlinear format. In addition to nonlinearity, Goldstone (2001) identifies three additional possible characteristics of postmodern picture books: self-referential text, sarcasm, and an anti-authoritative view. In texts that feature nonlinearity, the reader must navigate through the text in what may not seem like a logical sequential pattern, story parts may be absent or appear in a non-traditional place, and more than one storyline may be present.

In contrast to traditional stories, which create their own reality, self-referential texts portray the story itself being created through the characters, the narrator, or the physical pages. The sarcastic feature is not meant to be negative, but instead playful (Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007), which Goldstone notes is already a natural characteristic of picture books. Goldstone describes this postmodern tone as "mocking" as opposed to the "gentle humor" of traditional picture books as readers may encounter jokes, puns, and irony.

The final type of text presented by Nikolajeva and Scott (2000) is antiauthoritarian. In this type of picture book, the readers bring their own emotions and experiences to the story while co-creating the narrative by providing missing elements and blending different narrative strands together (Wolfenbarger & Sipe, 2007). Picture books require complex composition while at the same time need to be considerate of their target audience.

<u>Developmental Considerations</u>

I believe that the themes presented in good children's works of fiction are always the same no matter what the age: the need for love, the importance of close attachments, the fear of abandonment and separation, the need for self-acceptance, to name a few. It is just the packaging, the presentation in terms of language and tone, that changes from age to age. (Rocklin, 2001, p.3)

Cohen (1998) lists children's emotional, social, and cognitive development as areas to be cognizant of when writing children's literature. Below is a summary of Cohen's findings based on the grades of students.

Table 2.3. *Cohen's developmentally appropriate features of picture books (1998)*

Kindergarten and First Graders	Cannot think abstractly
	Start to understand logical relationships
	Time has real meaning
Second and Third Graders	Reality-based
	See beyond personal experience
	Develop a sense of mortality
	Need to feel a sense of belonging
	Sense of fairness can address social issues

O'Connor (2010) reviews five story elements when determining if books are developmentally appropriate for the target age group: dialogue, character, family relationships, economic class, and endings. Concerning dialogue, writers need to write the way children speak. Characters should be realistic, flaws and all. "Just as people in real life are not perfect, families in real life are not perfect" (p. 468). Economic situations should not be ignored, but the focus should be on how characters overcome obstacles, make relationships, or learn about tolerance. Based on O'Connor's work, the argument can be made that endings should have a sense of hope, but end the way they would in the real world.

A 2012 study (Martinez & Harmon) examines the interplay of pictures and text in 200 picture books and how the literary elements are developed for younger readers, preschool to age eight, and older readers, ages ten through middle school. In their research, Martinez and Harmon analyze the development of plot, characters, setting, and mood and categorize them into three groups based on the factor driving each element: (1) predominantly pictures, (2) parallel picture/text, and (3) predominantly text.

The results of Martinez and Harmon's study (2012) found that illustrations are significant in the development of plot in primary books, or books for younger readers. In only 23.3% of the books is the plot development primarily or only through text, although the type of relationship between text and illustrations for the majority of books varies greatly (Martinez & Harmon). In many of the books, some key plot elements are developed by illustrations, and in very few books are the all the elements of problem, events, and solution only presented through illustrations. Conversely, in books for older

readers, illustrations are important to plot development in only 10% of the books in the study. Eighty percent exhibit text-driven plot.

Martinez and Harmon (2012) note that for younger readers, illustrations are more present in the development of characters than they are for plot. In 63.2% of the sampled books, characters are developed mainly, only, or interdependently through pictures. Only 19.9% of books for older readers have books that fall into the same categories. Martinez and Harmon further investigate how text-illustrations develop characters' traits, interests, emotions, and relationships. In books for younger readers, illustrations are dominant forces in developing character traits, emotions, and interests in approximately one-third of books, but lack major evidence about character relationships (Martinez & Harmon). Books for older readers exhibit characters developed primarily though text, although the illustrations are crucial in conveying insight into characters' relationships.

Setting is also presented differently in books for younger readers. It is not always present, and when it is, the illustrations provide the majority of the information to the reader (Martinez & Harmon, 2012). Martinez and Harmon further deconstruct setting into time and place, and report that while time is not pertinent in books for younger readers, place is significant and is developed almost solely though illustrations. For older readers, both time and place are integral to the story and are largely portrayed through illustrations.

Illustrations have a strong influence on mood in books for both younger and older readers (Martinez & Harmon, 2012). Martinez and Harmon describe the mood in many primary books as upbeat, positive, humorous, peaceful, or serene while books for older

readers as more serious, darker, tense, and melancholy. The mood can also develop through visual elements such as the simplicity/complexity of lines or the vibrancy/muteness of colors (Martinez & Harmon, 2012). While I am not an illustrator, I recognize the importance of the development of pictures and how they interact with the narrative. They need to be developed side-by-side in order to allow the reader to interpret the story.

<u>On Crafting Picture Books</u>

Picture books require conciseness and simplicity (Iverson, 2002). Because picture books are brief and often read aloud, characters must be developed quickly and craftily (Iverson; Quattlebaum, 2009). Iverson claims that most picture books are between 1,000 and 1,500 words, while Martinez and Harmon's study of 200 picture books (2011) shows that the average number of words for younger readers, preschool to age 8, ranges from 28 to 1,325 with an average of 470.8. The research also presents an average lexile score of 426.2 and shows minimal use of tier 3, or discipline-specific words. Because of these restraints, language quality must be high.

Iverson (2002) and Quattlebam (2009) encourage authors to use a variety of literary techniques, including concise words, writing in active voice, strong verbs and adverbs, figurative language such as similes and metaphors, dialogue, imagery, and displays of body language and gestures. Quattlebaum also stresses the importance of paying careful attention to every word and mark of punctuation: "It's not just what you say but how you say it—and how it sounds—that's the key to delight children" (2009, p.

30). The rhythm of the story can help convey the tone and can be achieved through the use of rhymes, alliteration, onomatopoeia, repetition (Quattlebaum, 2009).

The craft of writing picture books, especially multicultural ones, requires more than just purposefully constructed sentences. According to writer Brown (2008), a sense of global community helps all readers be able to relate to and frame the story. Brown also recommends rich, sensory language, a sparse style supported by illustrations, and recurring themes or repetition to help understand the traditions and cultures of others. Zolotow (1998) notes that picture books should be written from a child's point of view. "That is the direct line to childhood…the off-center way the world looks to children, to whom the world is new and who are trying to make sense out of everything adults take for granted" (Zolotow, p. 185). Babbit (1993) also stresses the importance of point of view and notes that adult authors are not the same people and knew different things when they were children.

Stories should be written with feelings from childhood, from a time when the need to be comforted and understood is still present (Zolotow, 1998).   Babbit (1993), Brown (2008), and Zolotow all discuss feelings and emotions as a muse. "Those things we knew are still there inside our heads, layered over, maybe, but ready to show themselves if we're willing to dig for them…will bring to a story the honesty it needs to make it worth the reading" (Babbit, p. 69). Zolotow encourages the writer to relive the childhood emotion but to write it with some adult perspective to give it more of an explanation. True and earnest feelings can sculpt three-dimensional characters and relay gravity (Brown, 2008; Babbit, 1993).

Writing stories that deal with perceived controversial material can be delicate, but there are strategies to address it. Brown (2008) believes that using fantasy is one way to write while providing a connection to and commentaries on our past, present, and future realities. Brown (2008) claims that inclusive writing has no boundaries and possesses the possibility of building connections between diverse peoples. Brown also notes the importance of remaining neutral on controversial issues, and instead focusing on worldly themes. In her own work, Butterflies on Carmen Street/Mariposas en la Calle Carmen (Piñata Books, 2007), she avoids portraying issues around immigration in a negative light, and instead highlights love for culture, migrations, and the cycle of life.

Authors need to consider authenticity, accuracy, and cultural respect as other aspects of multicultural writing. O'Connor (2010) tries to "strike a balance between carefree, uncensored, authentic, realistic writing and age-appropriate writing" (p. 465) and writes how children in the South talk and is not afraid to include what others perceive as harsh realities in her stories. Brown (2008) discusses how to make cultural writing real: She honors the uniqueness of characters and topics and while acknowledging common ground, but do not universalize differences.

Brown (2008) incorporates global topics such as love, but blends personal life experiences of growing up in a Latino community, being bicultural, and a love of and talent in art to ground the authenticity. Smolkin and Young (2011) suggest that adherence to authenticity, accuracy and cultural respect is achieved when authors are members of the community about which they write; this is particularly important for authors of LGBT books. I want my book to be a window into and a mirror of children

who grew up with lives like mine, but also to have an accessible global theme. I hope to tap into my childhood emotion to create living characters and scenes.

Conclusion

The current climate of the United States, with gay marriage becoming legal in many states, brings children parented by same-sex parents into the light. I grew up in a time when my nuclear family was not recognized by anyone in my elementary career, and it made it hard for me and my family to truly feel accepted as part of the school community. Schools and educators are being asked to create safe environments for students and families of LGBT families (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Litovich and Langhout, (2004) state that they need to work with families to address acts of heterosexism, which includes discrimination, stigmatization, and homophobia.

Current research highlights the need for picture books that feature same-sex parents to help teachers make their classrooms more inclusive and safe. Only one-fourth of elementary teachers report using curriculum that addresses children parented by same-sex parents (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). I grew up not having any mirrors into my own family configuration and currently see a lack of picture books that tell a story like mine. Early work by Style (1988) argues for mirrors in the curriculum to validate differences and also to help build the empathy of others.

Children of same-sex parents often turn to silence when their family constellation is not validated or acknowledged (Litovich & Langhout, 2004). I turned to this coping mechanism myself when my mothers first moved in together, both with my extended family and in school. In my elementary career, I never heard a single adult validate my

family, nor did I see any representation in mainstream media. This lack of acknowledgment is changing. According the GLSEN study conduction in 2008, 87% of students report having at least one teacher who is supportive of their family, and Kosciw and Diaz's research (2008) shows that teachers support systemic changes in policies around bullying based on family characteristics.

Schools and educators can create a safe environment for children with same-sex parents by facilitating discussion around heterosexism (Rimalower & Caty, 2009) and using picture books featuring same-sex parents and families (Kelly, 2012) to help children understand diversity in families. McGarry (2013) suggests that schools adopt a sexual education curriculum that is rooted in standards to help guide schools through developing a LGBT-inclusive curriculum.

As I began thinking about my experience growing up in a family with same-sex parents as a picture book, I realized I needed to understand the process beyond the narrative. In order to create an actual children's book, the author must consider the different types of text-illustration interplay (Sipe, 2012), and dynamics between text and words. Goldstone (2001) notes that books written today can exhibit postmodern elements such as uncertainty, playfulness, cynicism, creativity, and juxtaposition to reflect the world around them.

The developmental level and appropriateness of a picture book can be evaluated by looking at dialogue, character, family relationships, economic class, and endings (O'Connor, 2010) as well as the relationship between text and illustration (Martinez & Harmon, 2012). According to Martinez and Harmon's study, picture books for younger

readers often rely more on text than illustrations to convey the development of plot, characters, setting, and mood. I will keep these factors in mind while also keeping the picture book postmodern.

As an educator, I know that picture books are short and require conciseness (Iverson, 2002). Character and plot development, along with focus on language and rhythm, all need to be present in around 14 scenes. I am writing for an underrepresented group, and I acknowledge that I must be authentic while simultaneously fostering respect from my readers (O'Connor, 2010). This capstone aims to answer the question: *How can an author create a picture book for children featuring families parented by same-sex partners that provides windows into and mirrors of the lives of those families?* My proposal for the book, including descriptions of characters, plot, and possible scenes is presented in the following chapter. Additionally, the research from this chapter is applied and noted.

CHAPTER THREE

Story Proposal

<u>Overview</u>

Founded in passion and grown by research, the facets that encompass the heart of

this capstone journey are my personal experience growing up in a same-sex family, my

time as a writer, and my current career as an educator. This capstone aims to answer the

question: *How can an author create a picture book for children featuring families*

parented by same-sex partners that provides windows into and mirrors of the lives of

those families?

The purpose of this chapter is to link the research reviewed in Chapter Two to the

creation of a publishable children's book that reflects the lives of children in families

parented by same-sex partners. The writing techniques and developmental considerations

reviewed in the previous chapter will aid in the creation of possible scenes presented in

this chapter. Rationale for certain scenes and personal experiences that relate will be

delegated by italics. Characters will be identified and some possible concepts and

monologues for some of the scenes will be delineated. While not every scene will be

outlined in detail, central ideas for most page spreads will be presented. This will create

a counterpointing picture book which Sipe (2012) claims promotes many different lenses

and engages the reader's imagination. This chapter will identify the criteria for

multicultural children's literature, develop the theme and plot of the story, and describe possible illustrations.

<u>Criteria for Multicultural Literature</u>

Although picture books are accessible to children of all ages and can be used appropriately across many grade-level classrooms, this book will target students in grades 2-5. Cohen (1998) notes that students younger than this cannot yet think abstractly and are just starting to understand logical relationships. They may not be able to access some the inferential work that it is present in this book, especially within the text-illustration interplay in the development of plot, characters, setting, and mood (Martinez & Harmon, 2012). From second grade on, students start to see beyond their personal experiences, develop a sense of mortality, and gain a sense of fairness and can address social issues (Cohen). Having these lenses will aid the students in decoding messages that lie beneath the surface and give them a deeper meaning of the story. To assure adherence to developmental appropriateness, I am developing a continuum to evaluate my book at the end of Chapter Four. In addition to text-illustration interplay, I must also be aware of key elements multicultural children's literature.

Based on the work of Agosto (2002), I have selected criteria that I believe is vital to multicultural children's literature. Included will be:

- Accuracy: historically correct, cultural aspects portrayed accurately

- Respect: avoid stereotypes, character portrayed as equals, avoid negative or condescending tones

- Expertise: qualified experience as part of the cultural groups or extensive research of/experience with

- Purpose: does the cultural aspect add to the theme?

- Quality: natural dialogue and character interactions, plot, illustrations

These criteria will be offered as a checklist along with the text-interplay continuum at the end of Chapter Four for the purpose of evaluating the developmental appropriateness and multicultural aspects of the book.

<u>Developing the Theme and Plot</u>

The theme of my story will not be the narrative of how my mother and her now-spouse, who I shall call Donna, came out to my brothers and me. It will not be a tale of discrimination or bullying. It will not be one single event, nor will it have a traditional beginning, middle, and end. It will include the postmodern elements of uncertainly, playfulness, creativity, and juxtaposition (Goldstone, 2001). It will not be based on actual events, but on feelings from events as recommended by children's author Monika Brown (2008).

My story will provide windows, or snapshots, inside the walls of a same-sex parent household where there are two mothers, one of whom has two biological children. It will encourage the reader to reexamine their definition of family. Each snapshot will feature a different lens of how outsiders see same-sex families and the language they and the narrator use to describe the "other mother." The illustrations will be like photographs with the portrayal of Donna drawn in cartoon-fashion to demonstrate the juxtaposition of outsiders' perceptions.

In the opening moments, the narrator's voice will be established (Zolotow, 1998). The first page will introduce the reader to the narrator, who is one of the children. The narrator will begin by saying, "*She* was my new mother." The reader will see a picture of the children and their biological mother gathered at the front window of their house with the new mother at the door with a suitcase, her back to the reader. The text will not reveal that the mothers are lesbians, and the pictures will only offer clues throughout the story until the final scene.

Each following scene will begin the same way, using the same sentence stem. Brown (2008) discusses the purpose of this technique when she states "I look for a way to draw young readers in—through repetition, refrain, and, in some cases, an inspired action" (p. 318). One page will have a sentence that describes how outsiders revered the "other mother" and how both they and the children referred to her. The refrain will start "*She* was [insert name/role]." *In the beginning of our new family, people referred to Donna as many things, but never as what she really was: my mother's partner and my new parent. My grandparents called her the "Big, Bad Wolf." My father called her "the hang-up person." I told my friends she was our nanny. Others called her nothing at all. In the book, I will not use the exact names and titles given to her by others, but will create other names with similar connotations.*

Playing off of the refrain "She was…", the working title of the book is She. Pronouns such as "she" generalize and take the place of a noun, just like all of the names given to the "other mother" take the place of her true identity. *Taking away Donna's proper name made her seem inhuman. I suppose by not acknowledging her as a person*

with her own identity made it easier for people to be cruel and allowed them to dismiss the legitimacy of our family. After my mom and Donna first came out as a couple, I noticed that people who knew Donna before they found out she was my mother's partner were now not afraid to use her name, thereby validating her persona and existence it the human world.

On Illustrations

Rocklin (2010) states that using fantasy in children's books can help them deal with and talk about issues that might otherwise be difficult. The illustrations will include a hint of fantasy to reflect the shift in how people perceived Donna. For example, one scene will depict the character in the scene "She was the Wicked Witch." In the illustration, the reader will see the family sitting around the dinner table, happily enjoying a meal, with the "other mother" dressed up as a menacing witch. The goal will be to have the witch juxtapose the normalcy of the scene, to reflect outsiders' perceptions.

On the opposing page to the scene, a more detailed account of the nickname and narrative will be given. Here it will be important that the child's voice comes out as it will in the opening scene. Other scenes at the beginning of the book will present the "other mother" as a hypnotist and as a ghost at parent-teacher conferences. As the scenes ensue, the "other mother" will gradually become less masked, less caricatured, and more human. One scene will portray her as the "nanny." She will be dressed in an apron as she carries freshly baked cookies to the narrator and friends who are downstairs watching a movie.

Another scene will depict her as the community basketball coach, surrounded by friends of the children. Before Donna moved in, my friends and classmates knew her as the director of many plays we had been in together. Many of them were unaware of her role in our lives at the time. She was well liked and respected. The father character will also make a few appearances in the story. In one scene where the "other mother" is dropping the kids off for the weekend, "she" will be "the focus of my father's fury," incorporating alliteration to aid in the rhythm (Quattlebaum, 2009).

The final scene will feature a family picture with all faces visible and no cartoon artwork. The story will end with continued repetition and final transformation of the refrain: "They are our mothers and they love us very much."

Conclusion

According to Pattison (2013), a children's picture book should be about 28-30 pages or 14-15 spread/scenes. In this chapter, I have outlined eight working scenes. Other possible scenes include the "other mother" portrayed as a thief, a roommate, an Italian aunt from New York, a "hang-up" person who always hangs up when the dad answers the phone, a snake charmer, or an illness.

As outlined above, the evolution of the pictures and the voice of the child narrator will be central to the development of the story. The narrations opposite the illustrations will serve as an outlet for the narrator to discuss the names and their effects. The next chapter will feature the book in its entirety, including descriptions of the illustrations. The final chapter will be a culminating reflection of this journey and the question of this capstone: *How can an author create a picture book for children featuring families*

parented by same-sex partners that provides windows into and mirrors of the lives of

those families?

CHAPTER FOUR

Storyboard

<u>Overview</u>

The previous chapters have focused on the need for the type of picture book that I am creating as well as research around the process of creating one. In this chapter, I will present the actual text as it will be presented to a publishing company as well as a description of the illustrations. Following the book, I will present final reflections on the craft of writing a picture book, reflections on my feelings throughout the process, provide a synopsis of the story along with the next steps, then evaluate the picture book with a tool I have created. A side bar will present my thoughts throughout the journey and how my research played into the creation of my picture book as I answer the question: *How can an author create a picture book for children featuring families parented by same-sex partners that provides windows into and mirrors of the lives of those families?*

<u>Cover</u>

Title: *SHE*

Illustration: Narrator and Donna happily walking their dog.

Scene 1: Page 1

Page right text: When I was nine years old and my brother seven, a new parent

moved into our lives. Her name was Donna. She had been our piano teacher for

years, but now *SHE* was going to be our new mother. But it wasn't all butterflies

and rainbows, especially since everyone I knew seemed to have their own not-so-

nice opinion about Donna…

Page right illustration: Street view of Donna in at the front door, suitcase in

hand, embracing the mother. Narrator and younger brother peering out window.

People in street looking walking/biking by looking at the two mothers.

Today I laid out the beginning of my

scenes with the refrains. The

research I conducted on picture

books in my literature review chapter

has really changed how I originally

thought my book might look and

sound. I want to get the flow of my

story first, even though it is not told

in traditional plot-form. I want the

first scenes to show how outsiders

perceived her. The middle scenes

will represent how people close to

me saw her, and the final scenes will

be the most humanistic.

Scene Two: Pages 2 and 3

Page left text: Some of our neighbors thought *SHE* was the Wicked Witch.

Page left illustration: View from inside neighbor's window, notebook on sill and binoculars in hand, spying on our backyard. It is night, and Donna is out starting the bonfire. A light casts a show that looks like a witch's hat on her head, and creates a big nose with bump. Kids and dog are running out the door with marshmallows, chocolate, and graham crackers.

Page right text: Sarah and Maria are my best friends on the block. Sarah lives down the street and Maria just has to hop the fence and she's in my backyard. We do everything together, even though we don't go to the same school. My mom says we are "thick as thieves," although we've never even taken so much as a rose from the community garden! After Donna moved in, they stopped showing up at my door as much. When I invited Maria over for a bonfire, my straight-A friend

I am realizing that I want to get away from the "cartoony" idea in portraying Donna. I think that instead I will find ways to use the illustrations to create the perception of some of the characters. The "witch" can be portrayed by having her out at a bonfire and having some kind of shadow create a "witches hat." In the pool scene, she can be diving under the water, maybe with her hair making her appear like a sea creature.

replied, "I'm grounded. My parents just saw my report card." Sarah was too

honest to make up lies, but she started blurting out, "Let's go to my house" before

I could even open my mouth. I was starting to figure out that it wasn't me, but

Donna that was making them act strangely. It wasn't fair. It made me start

wishing that *SHE* was really a Dan or Don. Then one day I overheard my mom

talking to Donna after I got home from school. *"It's like they think you're going*

to cast a spell on their kids, turn them into snake stew with your wizardly ways,"

my mom laughed. But it wasn't her usual gentle tinkle and I saw Donna reach for

a tissue.

Scene Three: Pages 3 and 4

Page left text: I heard a rumor that *SHE* was contagious.

Page right illustration: Narrator face down in bed crying, Mother at bedroom door with broken skateboard, Donna with her arm around her.

Page right text: Like some kind of deadly disease. A few months after she moved in, my neighbor Will was teaching me how to skateboard in his driveway. "It's kick and push, then just coast," he demonstrated for me. I practiced a few. Kick, then push. Kick, then push. If only I could coast for a little longer! After one final mighty kick, push, I felt my inhaler fall out of my pocket and stumbled off my board. When I turned around, Will was had his arm extended. There was a snarly smirk on his face. "Is this so you don't end up like her?" SCRUUUNCHH! I turned just in time to see the back tires of a van grind my board into the asphalt. I spun and started to totter home, willing my face to be brave.

How much affection should I show between the moms? I want it to be evident they are a couple, but it not to be the focus of the narrative. I am thinking that there can be a touch of it in the hypnotist scene so that the "contagious" scene makes sense to the reader.

"Hey, your board!" his words chased me, but I didn't stop. I reached my front door, smeared on a smile for my mom and Donna, and went straight to the safety of my bedroom before I let my face to break. The tears came like wax dribbling down a burning candle, my face hot and sticky. As the tears slowed, my anger and sadness turned to defeat. His words had won.

Scene Four: Pages 4 and 5

Page left text: To some people in my family, *SHE* was a dreadful sea creature.

Page left illustration: Brother and cousin playing in the pool. Mom and aunt seen talking in the house through the kitchen window. Speech bubble from aunt "Can't you see you're throwing them to the sharks?" Narrator sitting on chair on deck, image of Donna as a sea creature cooking children in a boiling cauldron in thought bubble.

Page right text: I remember the first time my cousin came over after Donna moved in. We had just gotten a pool and it was a perfect day to swim. I was lugging a stack of beach towels to the backyard and saw my brother was showing off his newest accessory. "You got your ear pierced? That's so gay!" my cousin burst out. Shocked, I dropped my tower of towels. I looked to my mom, but all I saw was her back speeding into the kitchen, my aunt trailing behind. Splish! Splash! My cousin jumped into the pool, followed by our dog, Sadie. Sploosh!

I am stuck on my final scene, the sea creature. I keep reading the scenes before and after it, but am falling short. Is it necessary? Should I change it all together? I do know that I need it to involve my grandparents because later their eventual acceptance is shown in the dinner scene. I want to get this to my fellow teachers who have agreed to share their Welcoming Schools and Olweus lens to give me feedback.

Water sloshed over the pool, soaking the towels. I made a face at them, but they

were having too much fun to notice my displeasure. I slung the towels over the

deck railing to dry and plopped down. Why didn't my aunt say anything? Why

was my mom so silent? It wasn't my job to say something…was it?

 Scene Five: Pages 6 and 7

Page left text: *SHE* was also the focus of my father's fury.

Page left illustration: View from inside the front door of father's house, Donna dropping the kids off in the driveway, kids running up, narrator noticing "red rage" hovering by father's shoulder. Brother runs in happily, narrator hesitantly waves goodbye to Donna while keeping an eye on her father's stern face.

Page right text: And I was caught in the middle of it. It was easy to tell when my dad was mad. I could see Red Rage Roy, this little ball of fire, hovering above his shoulder every time he saw *HER*, heard *HER* name, or even thought about *HER*. It made me sad. I felt really bad for him. I wanted to hug him, to comfort him. But I couldn't. Instead I just made extra sure that I never uttered her name, never talked about our trip to the water park, never smiled at her when she dropped us off or picked us up. I didn't want him to think that he had been replaced.

I am finding it necessary to create transitions between the different types of scenes even though there is not a traditional plot present. The end of this scene will lead into some more serious, difficult scenes for the narrator. There will need to be another transition in the middle scenes when the resentment fades away, but is replaced by the silence or lack of acknowledgement of Donna.   There will be another bridge of the invisibility to the narrator's true acceptance of Donna.

Scene Six: Pages 8 and 9

Page left text: Sometimes I had to pretend *SHE* was the wrong number.

Page left illustration: Central scene narrator checking phone (which shows an incoming call from Donna) with adult scenes above her looking cross and with Ruby, Rusty, Raspberry, and Rose (different shades of red) hovering around them. Speech bubbles of them asking, "Who keeps calling you?" "Aren't you going to answer it?" "What does she want?" and "Doesn't she know she's NOT your mother?" Narrator responding with "I think it's a wrong number…"

Page right text: I began to see that Roy, that little fireball I told you about, had cousins. None burned quite as bright as Roy, but I would still see them. Rusty followed my grandfather over to work on our fence one day, and Raspberry showed up unannounced at my aunt's house. Rose and Ruby were a not as fiery as the others, and only showed up from time to time at friend's houses. All of them made me uncomfortable. When they came around, it was like I was eating

As I write the monologue for the middle scenes that deal with how people close to me saw Donna, I am finding there is resentment present. Not resentment towards my mom, but resentment towards my situation. Or maybe there is resentment towards everyone involved, towards those who put me in the middle. I think it's ok for those feelings to come through in these scenes because it is authentic and is a post-modern characteristic.

cotton. I wanted to extinguish each and every one of them, to tell them they were

wrong about her, but I couldn't. I was afraid of playing with fire. So just like

when I was with Roy and my father, I pretended Donna didn't exist.

<u>Scene Seven: Pages 10 and 11</u>

Page left text: Other times I devised little white lies.

Page left illustration: Narrator picturing Donna in different "costumes" such as…

Page right text: After Will confronted me about *HER*, I knew I needed a plan, something to say that could disguise Donna's identity. I knew my neighbors saw her come home from work every day and watched her play catch with us on the weekends, so pretending she didn't exist wouldn't work with them. I thought about it for a long time and finally decided that when kids asked, I would tell them that she was helping us remodel our house. Our handywoman. It would work because it was partially true, more of a white lie. She was really good at fixing things and loved to paint and do other things to make our house more beautiful. Luckily, no one ever asked. Which is a good thing, because you can smell my lies from a mile away!

My lens today is text-illustration interplay. I am finding that there is some text that is better supported by the illustration and so I am eliminating some and turning other parts into dialogue or other supporting text features. I noticed minimal dialogue and I know it's necessary to make some of the secondary characters more tangible.

Scene Eight: Pages 12 and 13

Page left text: I told kids at school that *SHE* was our Nanny.

Page left illustration: Donna is serving cookies and milk to the narrator and her friends who are watching a movie in their sleeping bags. Picture of Donna and mother on end table, one friend looking at it.

Page right text: Roy kept me from talking to my family about *HER*. I wished I could hide *HER* from my neighbors. I figured that I definitely couldn't tell my school friends that *SHE* was my other mother. So I told them my mom had hired her as our nanny to help out since my mom worked during the day and took classes at night. And guess what? They believed it! At least I told myself they did…

Today I worked on creating the monologue. It is interesting as I write how I am shifting my ideas about the illustration, especially the viewpoint. I am also cognizant of the word-illustration interplay and really trying to develop scenes that are parallel, but also add something to the text.

Scene Nine: Pages 14 and 15

Page left text: Most of the time, it was as if *SHE* was invisible.

Page left illustration: Central scene features the narrator sitting on back deck, watching her neighbors eat dinner through their sliding glass door.

Page right text: Now I know I said I felt like couldn't mention her name. But that doesn't mean I didn't want to. I wanted (more than I wanted to be the first female to play for FC Barcelona, the *best* soccer team ever) for someone to mention her., to ask anything! Everyone knew she existed, but it was like she was a ghost. Every Monday I waited for a teacher to ask, "What did you do with your momS this weekend?" I practiced how I would reply when my friend's mom would finally say, "I saw your momS at the gym this week. Donna told me you just got back from visiting her family in New York. How was it?" But more than scoring all the goals in the world, I wanted to be able to tell my grandmother how Donna taught me to hold my breath underwater for a whole minute. I wished for this with all my might.

After my last session, I found it hard to get started again. Blame long days at work or not wanting to face those feelings again, or both. Today I find that I have more generalized ideas about places for transitions and the illustrations and less about the monologue. I have an inner struggle with how real to keep the scenes and am slightly concerned about hurting people's feelings, especially my families'. I have to remember to stay brave. Not only do I have to face my own feelings, other people need to acknowledge them.

Scene Ten: Pages 16 and 17

Page left text: The truth is, Donna is my favorite football fan.

Page left illustration: Neighborhood pick-up game (soccer, that is). Characters from story present. The spying neighbor from scene two watches from a distance (perhaps leaning against fence).

Page right text: *SHE* is a true fanatic, just like me. Well, maybe she isn't *quite* my favorite, since she does cheer for the wrong team, just like my brother. Watching games with her is the best. Every time her team scores, she gets up and does this crazy cheer that looks like a leprechaun trying to tap dance. But the best part is when my team scores. She pretends to be mad, but then secretly high fives me behind her back.

I have been thinking more about how I want perspective to be addressed in the book, and I think I want the final third of the book to be from the narrator's perspective and very personal. I think it will help bring to bring the focus to the actual relationship between the narrator and Donna and how Donna really was a parent to her. One scene that will be added is the two of them watching football together, cheering for opposing teams, another featuring her as an "antique toy collector."

Scene Eleven: Pages 18 and 19

Page left text: Donna makes the best "smack-aroni" on the block.

Page left illustration: Family (including grandparents) at dinner, narrator licking her plate clean. Brother with red sauce mustache, showing la voce del corpo and saying, "Delizioso."   Italian flag present (apron).

Page right text: No, not those cheesy noodles that come in a box. This stuff is the real deal. The kind people from *Sicilia* make, served fresh with The Sauce. I suppose you ordinary people call it pasta or spaghetti. No matter what name you give it, smack-atoni is plate-licking good!   Everyone who tries it likes it so much, we have decided to make it a weekly tradition. Saucy Sunday is my favorite meal of the week!

I am realizing that in the final scenes I want to use the illustrations to show people's eventual acceptance of Donna as a human being, if not as a family and community member. I will not include it in the monologue, but let the text-illustration interplay do the work. In the dinner scene, the grandparents will be present at the dinner table. The soccer scene will include some people from neighborhood scenes, and the toy scene will include some of the narrator's friends.

Scene Twelve: Pages 20 and 21

Page left text: Donna's favorite hobby was collecting antique toys.

Page left illustration: Narrator showing her father how the transformer toy works. Father smiling.

Page right text: And you won't believe this… She actually let us play with them! Old video games with GIANT controllers, helicopters that we fly over our roof, action figures from her childhood, it was like our own personal toy store right in our basement! My favorite was a ruby red car that transformed into a huge robot. Things aren't always what they seem, you know. Like the story where the frog gets transformed into a prince by a kiss. Or my personal favorite green outcast, the ogre Shrek. By the end of the story, everyone knows that he's not so scary. The princess even falls in love with him!

I am taking the advice found in my research chapter and am going back to when I was a child, when I was experiencing everything. I definitely felt the hurt of others' actions and words, but I also felt strong and proud of who our family was.

Scene Thirteen: Pages 22 and 23

Page left text: I am pretty sure I am Donna's favorite, but don't tell my brother!

Page left illustration: Narrator presenting broken Pinocchio toy from her backpack to Donna, head down.   Donna with disappointed look on her face.

Page right text: Except for when I took one of her rarest toys to show-and-tell without telling her. Or when I forgot to let the dog in before I went to bed. Or the time I was practicing knee pops with my soccer ball in the kitchen. I can always tell when she's not mad at me anymore when she asks if I want to practice my striker skills on her or makes me my favorite Triple S Pizza: spicy sausage with spinach.

I am aiming for a lexile of around 426 and a word count of about 80 per page. A major decision I have not thought about is whether or not to include siblings in the story. I am leaning towards one being present in the pictures, but having their role be tertiary. As far as pacing goes, it seems natural for the first scenes to be medium-length, the serious ones in the middle to be a little longer because they do contain so much emotion, and the final scenes to be a bit quicker since they are lighter in content.

Scene Fourteen: Page 24

Page left text: *SHE* is my mother's wife. And our mother. She fits right in, like a puzzle piece that has been hiding under the couch cushions for months that we didn't even know was missing. They love each other and us very much.

Page left illustration: Mothers and children at their wedding ceremony.

I have also been musing over the ending. I want it to be simple, yet powerful. I also want to keep the refrain. I also want to include the fact that the two mothers love each other AND their daughter, which is Welcoming Schools' definition of a family.

Final Reflections on the Craft of Writing a Picture Book

Because of my experience with creative writing, newspaper journalism, and my current career as a teacher, I thought I knew all there was to know about writing a picture book. I can write with vivid verbs, dialogue, similes, and emotion in my sleep. I was not, however, aware of the complexity of text-illustration interplay, or the idea of a postmodern picture book. I knew that lexile was important, but I did not know what was appropriate for a book that was likely going to be read aloud in classrooms. I have carried around the idea for this story in my head for a long time. I felt the things I learned in Chapter Two breathed life into my story and pushed me to use techniques that added dimension to my characters and made my plot more cohesive. I definitely grew as a writer while creating the story, but my craft was not the only thing that was transformed.

Final Reflections on Personal Feelings

At the beginning of this journey, I thought I could and should keep my feelings and personal experiences out of my book. I did not want to hurt anyone and was perhaps a bit afraid of my own feelings that might resurface. After an attempt with this method left me stuck on many scenes, I took the exact opposite approach and made those scenes incredibly intimate and personal. That day the scenes just poured out of my fingertips, and I felt brushes of melancholy, such as in scene four, but also encountered a familiar felicity in the final scenes.

Scene Four is representative of how transformative this process was. My original idea for the scene was to show how much my grandparents rejected our family, to illustrate the hurt and discomfort they caused to not only my moms, but to my brothers

and me as well. I found it incredibly hard to illustrate any of the scenes as they actually happened because they were all incredibly harsh. It was also difficult to portray my grandparents in such a way, knowing how much they have come around. I decided to show their disapproval in Scene Six by identifying them as one of the people whose rage forced me to not talk about her, as well as Scene Nine, where I iterated my desire for their acceptance of her. In Scene Eleven, I chose to have them present at the dinner table to show their eventual support of and love for Donna as a member of our family. Currently, Scene Four is based on something my grandmother said to my brother, but she is nowhere to be found in the scene and has been replaced by a cousin character.

The emotional journey of writing this story was therapeutic for me. Even as an adult, I do not often talk about the more unpleasant events that my family constellation brought upon me. I do not like to blame or point fingers at anyone, and finding ways to keep my emotions authentically represented without bashing those close to me was tricky, but in the end very rewarding. I can only hope that when they do read this story that they read it with empathy and do not feel they themselves have been tarnished.

Story Synopsis and Next Steps

SHE is the story of a young girl whose life changes the day her mother's girlfriend moves in with her. While the girl loves and accepts her new mother, she quickly realizes that not everyone else does and turns to silence as a coping mechanism. Since family members, teachers, and friends either become angry when her name is mentioned or simply pretend like she does not exist, the girl learns to hide her true relationship with her and avoids talking about her. Towards the end of the story, the girl

expresses her true feelings about her new mother, and revels in the joy of having others accept her as part of their family.

 After my submission of this capstone, I plan to start contacting publishing companies. I have already been in contact with two authors who have given me insight on the process of becoming a published author, including the difference between finding a publishing house and self-publishing. Additionally, I have researched a few publication companies that specialize in picture books that address Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender issues. I recognize that the book in its current form will go through many edits, although I do feel confident that it is ready to be submitted to publishers for consideration.

Evaluation of Picture Book

 In Chapter Three, I discussed the development of a tool to evaluate multicultural picture books. I present the created tool (Appendix A) and then went on to use the tool to self-evaluate my picture book (Appendix B). I found there to be two main areas to evaluate: text-illustration interplay (Martinez & Harmon, 2012) and multicultural aspects (Agosto, 2012).

 Before I filled out the continuum for text-illustration interplay, I hoped that all criteria, plot, characters, setting, and mood, would end up in the middle of the preschool-age eight and age ten-middle school descriptors. My target audience is students in second through fifth grade, or ages seven to eleven. Per my own self-reflection, I found that my characters and plot were appropriately developed through plot and text, as it my story is not too heavily reliant on either. As of right now, my setting is developed almost

exclusively through the pictures, which lands on the preschool-age eight end of the spectrum. Parallel development through both illustrations and text would make it more interesting to slightly older readers. Currently, the mood of my story is developed in a parallel manner, but this is likely to change when I start working with an illustrator. I would like to add more through the pictures so that it is not so reliant on the text.

In terms of the multicultural aspects, I met most of the criteria. I have expertise on LGBT culture as a member of the group, and represented the culture accurately and without stereotypes or negativity. I strongly believe that the addition of the cultural group added to the theme of the story, making it specifically about acceptance of families parented by same-sex parents. Multicultural books should be up held to the same quality standards as other picture books (Agosto, 2012), and I believe that I have a good start on that and know that working with an editors, publishers, and illustrators in the future will only make my book stronger.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I applied all of the research from Chapter Two to answer the question: *How can an author create a picture book for children featuring families parented by same-sex partners that provides windows into and mirrors of the lives of those families?* This picture book is a work in progress. Ultimately, I hope to find a publishing company willing to work with me on this project or find a way to self-publish. The next and final chapter will illustrate the literature review's effect on this process, as well as identify limitations and offer thoughts for future research and picture book design.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

"Picture books are highly sophisticated objects, worthy of study and research by readers and viewers of all ages" (Sipe, 2012). This capstone journey has taught me more about creating a picture book than my bachelor's degree in English and my brief career in newspaper journalism ever could have. The literature I reviewed on the craft itself was riveting and not only showed me the multiple lenses that are used to create picture books, but how those same lenses will help me be a more effective teacher with my own students. Researching the absent narrative of families parented by same-sex couples affirmed my own experiences and validated my reason for embarking on this journey.

Propelled by my own family constellation and my career as an educator in a diverse school, I worked to answer the question: *How can an author create a picture book for children featuring families parented by same-sex partners that provides windows into and mirrors of the lives of those families?* This chapter will review the connections of the literature review towards the crafting of my picture book, limitations I encountered, thoughts on the future of children's literature, and finally implications for myself, students, and classrooms.

Return to the Literature Review

The literature review chapter affirmed some of what I knew about the craft of writing a story, but it was also a major catalyst that caused me to approach the concept of

my picture book in a completely different way. From both my undergraduate and teaching career, I was aware that voice, rhythm, theme, readability, literary devices, word choice, and character development were all critical in the development of a picture book. What I was not aware of was any of the theory behind different structures. The two main theories that had the biggest effects on my craft were post-modernism and text-illustration interplay.

The idea of a post-modern narrative helped me frame the story I wanted to tell. I knew a traditional plot would not fit the way the scenes pieced together, so I took on the post-modern feature of nonlinearity, and took liberties with the traditional story parts as mentioned by Goldstone (2001). One early reader of my story, mentioned that I should include lighter, happier scenes. While I did not want my book to be completely dark, I knew that was not a reflection of the reality that not only I, but other children parented by same-sex couples have faced. The cynical aspect of post-modern picture books along with the need to reflect reality of the world children experience gave me a license to stay true to my story. I did, however, employ pacing and the "sandwich" technique of bookending the darker scenes with lighter ones. It is not a fairytale ending. It is truthful and open, leaving room for readers to continue the story and make predictions for themselves.

Although I learned a lot in the literature review, it was not fully comprehensive. One thing that I had to work through on my own was how to put a postmodern picture book together. There was plenty of information on what one was, but no advice on ways to create one. I found the process I created to be an effective one. To begin with, I wrote

the refrain of each scene on a piece of paper and laid them out. Because they were not related in any way at that time, it was difficult to put them into an order. I quickly realized that I needed to use a mood and plot to move the reader through the scenes in a meaningful manner.

At first, my thought was to have the cartoony, outlandish views of the mother come first, and then have the more realistic scenes come last. That helped to an extent, but I ultimately abandoned the idea of using cartooned versions of the mother. I went against the recommendation of Brown (2008) and Rocklin (2010) to use fantasy to help children connect to and have discussion about the book. Instead I reread Smolkin and Young (2011) who argue that a postmodern picture book on its own is enough to elicit organic responses from children. Additionally, O'Conner (2010) and Wolfenbarger and Sipe (2010) stress the importance of keeping characters real and authentic.

In the end, I did develop a mood and plot that created a cohesive story. The plot moves through three different experiences for the narrator: how other perceived the mother, how her family reacted, and how the narrator saw her relationship with the mother, including the eventual acceptance by the other characters. The mood and pacing also help drive the story. The first few scenes read at a fairly average pace and contain serious scenes with a hint of humor and sarcasm. The middle scenes are the slowest and are quite dark, but move into the final third of scenes that are light, move quickly, and leave the reader feeling that the narrator loves her family and does not care what others think.

I wanted readers to have part in the story creation, to make them engage with the text and force them to make inferences about the characters. Through my research, I quickly realized what an important part the illustrations would play in how readers interpret my story. The synergy (Sipe, 2012), or interanimation (Lewis, 2001), of text and illustrations needed to involve my reader, to make them create meaning. It seemed fitting for an expanding/enhancing typology to be applied, as one system can be used to extend the meaning presented by the other. I am not an artist, and decided to scribe out my scenes instead of employ an illustrator at this point. It was interesting to watch my ideas behind the illustrations change as I added, tweaked, or removed text.

Limitations

Not being an illustrator was just one hurdle that I faced. Telling my story honestly yet without bias, keeping childhood feelings authentic yet separate from actual experiences and people, as well as lack of extensive research on children raised in same-sex families were all obstacles I faced. I continue to reflect on these aspects and adjust my story accordingly.

I come from a family of visual artists, and my cousin had originally agreed to work on some sketches for me, but his busy professional life ultimately got in the way. I also implored both my brother and uncle, who in turn offered places for me to look further, including craigslist and local colleges. It was just after this that I started talking to the two authors I know, and realized that I should decide whether to self-publish or find a publishing house before I pursued an illustrator, as the two processes look different. While this capstone lacks the illustrations, I hope that the descriptions of the scenes help

the reader envision what the final product will look like and enable them to make the intended inferences.

"We are aware that our personal backgrounds as authors cause us to champion or to spurn particular points of view. If we are from diverse cultural backgrounds, we want to make sure the voices of our people are heard" (Smolkin & Young, 2011). Within my literature review and during the creative process of writing the picture book, I found myself trying to steer clear of bias. I had to be careful of word choice in presenting the data on how teachers perceive and respond to children with same-sex parents. In the picture book, I wanted to shed a light on my family constellation without being seen as persuasive. At the same time, I hoped to shed light on some common misconceptions. My goal was to create cultural respect for families parented by same-sex couples in a way that was authentic and accurate (Smolkin & Young, 2011).

Babbitt (1993) notes that it is not the stories that try to teach, but rather the stories that share remembered feelings that resound with children. I think I struggled in the beginning of the creative process with being too distant from my experiences and feelings. As a result the scenes and characters felt disengaged, and even the narrator's monologue felt forced. To combat this, I had a moment where I shifted to the opposite extreme, and changed some of the more distant scenes to being exact replications of events in my life. Ultimately, neither of those strategies worked for me. In the end, I reread some articles from my literature review to help me refocus and deliver my story in a meaningful way. Babbitt's (1993) advice on character offered the guidance I was looking for: She advised to view characters "not only from the outside, but also from the inside as they see

themselves. And the only way to do that is to try as hard as we can to remember what it was like, what we were like" (Babbit, 1993, p. 284).

The final aspect that was difficult to overcome appeared early in the literature review process. I was able to find more than enough research on Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgendered (LGBT) children and people, but very little on children parented by same-sex parents, especially in the school setting. I found a few references early on, but they were usually a small part of a larger picture and offered little insight into what I was looking for. Ultimately, the GLSEN report was where the majority of my research on children parented by same-sex families and their experience in the education system came from. I would have liked to have found similar studies by other researches, but in the end was happy with what I garnered. It proved to be the grounding for a lot of the chapter, as well as was an affirmation for a need to picture books such as mine.

The Future of Children's Literature

In addition to more research around children parented by same-sex parents and their families in the education system, there is more that needs to be accomplished within children's literature that features such families. Many argue that same-sex marriage should be specifically addressed, the correct vocabulary such as gay or lesbian should be used, and a more diverse range of parents should be represented. Epstein (2012) highlights the fact that literature that features non-heterosexual characters has only recently appeared on bookshelves and that there is only a small body of research around how same-sex parenting is presented in children's literature.

Political, legal, and cultural contexts often heavily influence what is reflected in children's literature (Epstein, 2012). Thirty-seven states in the United States have legalized same-sex marriage since 2004, and children's literature is beginning to mirror that fact, although mostly indirectly. Most LGBT picture books rely on euphemisms of roommate, boyfriend/girlfriend, and partner (Epstein). When the term husband or wife is used, Esptein notes that it is not actually in the context of the couple marrying. The message is more about acceptance than about the actual act of marriage (Epstein). Accurate lexicon is important in both children's literature and in classrooms: It influences the response of listeners and readers (Smolkin & Young, 2011). For this reason, Epstein argues that authors should venture outside the most commonly found constellation of white, middle-class, lesbian couples and incorporate more gay, transgendered, and bisexual parents/spouses.

In regard to my book, I fell into all of these categories discussed above. I skirted around the term wife, my theme was acceptance, and it features white, lesbian, middle-class parents. I know how important the marriage piece is. In my own life, my moms had a commitment ceremony years before marriage was legal in Minnesota and even after the fact, I heard them use the word *partner* when referring to one another more often than *wife*. Now that they are legally married, I hear the words *wife* and *spouse* from them and others much more frequently. I will go back to my narrative and add something about marriage, but do not think I will change the white, middle class, lesbian identities of the mothers. This was my reality, and I want to remain true to it. I would not feel credible portraying something I do not have experience with and am not part of.

<u>Implications</u>

        I know firsthand what it is like not to be able to talk about something because of a missing mirror. I also know what it is like to watch television shows that feature families parented by same-sex couples and think to myself, "That's not even close to my reality." What I did not experience growing up is what I hope to give students and children like myself: a sense of normalcy, acceptance, and a voice. This book has the power to provide mirrors for those children, as well as a window for students not of the group (Style, 1988). It may lead to discussions around different types of families or cultural groups may foster empathy and respect from other students (Rimalower & Caty, 2009). It may have the power to make schools and classrooms more inclusive and welcoming to same-sex parents.

        As a teacher, this process has increased my knowledge of the framework of picture books. My newfound insights will provide a new lens not only when I select books, but also when I read them to students. I can envision myself asking students to examine texts in new ways and challenge them to ask why an author made a particular choice. I will also apply my learnings to professional responsibilities. Currently, we work with Welcoming Schools as well as implement our own Windows & Mirrors-based curriculum. I will continue to be an advocate for the work we do around making all types of families feel like they are part of our community.

        Recently my work on our site's equity team had me selecting picture books to represent different cultural groups. There were comments made such as, "That seems more K-2," and, "That seems just like a nice story. It doesn't really teach anything about

the culture." I wish I had my evaluation tool (Appendix A) at that time to help decipher what was developmentally appropriate and what was quality multicultural literature. In my future role as equity liaison, I will plan some staff development around selecting children's literature. Additionally, I will work with my co-teachers to make sure that we provide both windows and mirrors to the students we teach.

Conclusion

"And I am who I am today because of them." I stare at my hands, right comforted by left. *Breathe. Look up.*" No matter how many times I speak about my childhood, it never changes. Baring your soul, breathing life into words that have only existed in your mind is nothing short of frightening and empowering at the same time. I have never wanted to be a poster child. The only reality I represent is my own. However, I hope that my book can reach a large number of students and families who have been silent and seemingly invisible for far too long. As with the panels I participate on, I desire nothing more from this book than to reach one person, to open one mind.

When I began this journey, I developed the question *How can an author create a picture book for children featuring families parented by same-sex partners that provides windows into and mirrors of the lives of those families?* As I set out to answer it, I learned a great deal regarding the creation of picture books as well as found data reflecting the implications of absent narratives, specifically of families led by same-sex parents and he effects it can have on children. The process was not without hurdles, and I anticipate there will be much more when I find and begin working with a publisher. I hope that my experience writing this picture book will help others through this process so

that other windows and mirrors can be presented for children from a diverse range of
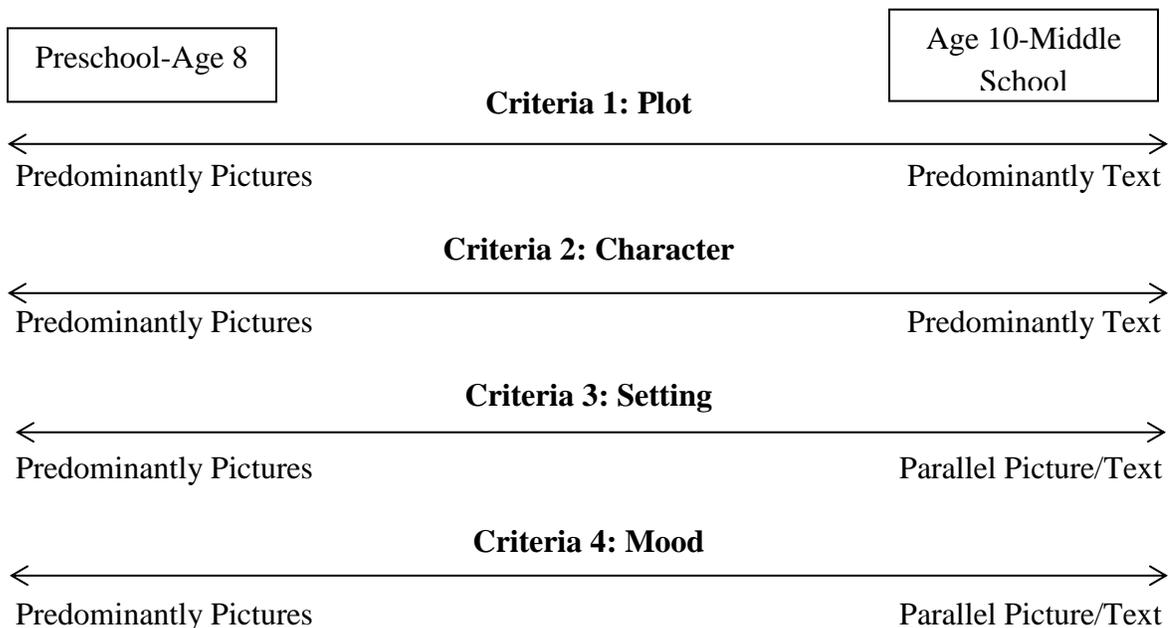
family constellations.

APPENDIX A

9 Criteria for Evaluating of Multicultural Picture Books

9 Criteria for Evaluating of Multicultural Picture Books

Book Title:_____   Author:_____

Focus Area #1: Text-illustration interplay (Martinez & Harmon, 2012) and how they

develop the story elements for different ages of readers.

| Preschool-Age 8 | | Age 10-Middle School |

Criteria 1: Plot

$\longleftarrow$ ———————————————————————— $\longrightarrow$

Predominantly Pictures   Predominantly Text

Criteria 2: Character

$\longleftarrow$ ———————————————————————— $\longrightarrow$

Predominantly Pictures   Predominantly Text

Criteria 3: Setting

$\longleftarrow$ ———————————————————————— $\longrightarrow$

Predominantly Pictures   Parallel Picture/Text

Criteria 4: Mood

$\longleftarrow$ ———————————————————————— $\longrightarrow$

Predominantly Pictures   Parallel Picture/Text

Focus Area #2: Multicultural aspects (Agosto, 2002)

Criteria 5: Accuracy. Does the story accurately reflect the culture and historical events?

Criteria 6: Respect. Does the author avoid stereotypes and negative tones?

Criteria 7: Expertise. Is the author a member of the cultural group or have authentic

experience with the group?

Criteria 8: Purpose. Does the addition of culture add to the theme of the book?

Criteria 9: Quality. Are the character and dialogue authentic? Are the plot and

illustrations of high merit

APPENDIX B

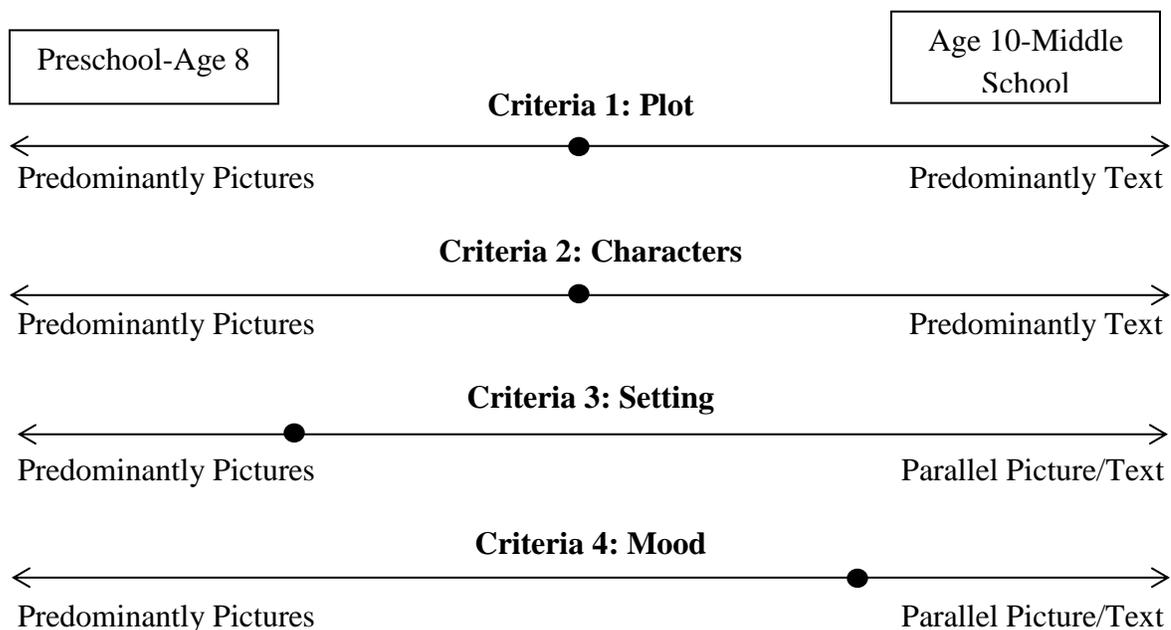9 Criteria for Evaluating of Multicultural Picture Books

Self-evaluation of *SHE*

9 Criteria for Evaluating of Multicultural Picture Books

Book Title: _SHE_   Author: Kira Fischler

Focus Area #1: Text-illustration interplay (Martinez & Harmon, 2012) and how they

develop the story elements for different ages of readers.

Preschool-Age 8		Age 10-Middle School

Criteria 1: Plot

←————————————————●————————————————→

Predominantly Pictures   Predominantly Text

Criteria 2: Characters

←————————————————●————————————————→

Predominantly Pictures   Predominantly Text

Criteria 3: Setting

←——————————●————————————————————→

Predominantly Pictures   Parallel Picture/Text

Criteria 4: Mood

←————————————————————————●————————→

Predominantly Pictures   Parallel Picture/Text

Focus Area #2: Multicultural aspects (Agosto, 2002)

Criteria 5: Accuracy. Does the story accurately reflect the culture and historical events?

Yes, the forced silence is a common occurrence for many children of LGBT families.

Criteria 6: Respect. Does the author avoid stereotypes and negative tones? Yes, I

avoided portraying the mothers as "butch," nor is there condescending tones.

Criteria 7: Expertise. Is the author a member of the cultural group or have authentic

experience with the group? Yes, I am a member of the group.

Criteria 8: Purpose. Does the addition of culture add to the theme of the book? I believe it adds to the general theme of acceptance since it focuses specifically on families parented by same-sex couples.

Criteria 9: Quality. Are the character and dialogue authentic? Are the plot and illustrations of high merit? Are the plot and illustrations of high merit? Yes, authenticity is present. The plot is still a work in progress, and the illustrations will be developed further when I decide how I would like to pursue publishing.

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