The Positive Effects of Picture Books Providing Acceptance of Diversity in Social Studies and Increased Literacy in Early Childhood Education

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The Positive Effects of Picture Books Providing Acceptance of Diversity in Social Studies and Increased Literacy in Early Childhood Education

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Part One: The Topic

Abstract

Early childhood education prepares young children for schooling from the moment they are born. Infants, toddlers and preschoolers take in new concepts and ideas every single day. They absorb information in their growing minds inside and outside of the classroom. Parents are a child’s first teacher and set the stage for their schooling years.

While spending time in the classroom, children benefit from academic achievement as well as socialization and interactions with peers and adults. Children learn how to communicate and spend time with others as well as gain knowledge and experience through academics. The early childhood classroom is a positive and beneficial place for young learners.

Children learn from a variety of subject areas in early childhood education. A huge piece to the curriculum that enhances student learning, motivation, engagement and understanding are picture books. Children of all ages can enjoy and listen to picture books and as they expand in the classroom, children can even read and create picture books on their own.

Picture books can be used to begin a new topic, revisit old topics, connect with other books, engage with higher level thinking and questioning, talk about difficult topics, and introduce emergent readers and writers to literacy as well as the reading and writing process. Picture books benefit each subject area and are a necessity in the early childhood classroom. Every classroom and library should be stocked with a large variety of picture books to benefit not only the subject areas, but also the diverse students in today’s classes.
Introduction

Over the past few decades, Early childhood education has dramatically changed and has become a starting point for future success throughout a child’s school career (Bryde & Hough, 1996). Children have access to a variety of early childhood programs through preschool, nursery school, Pre-Kindergarten, educational day care centers, and half or full day formal schooling (Bryde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009; Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012). Many working parents today do not have options and resort to day care programs, which is also a good choice (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012). Children learn to develop the skills needed in school and throughout their lives by interacting with peers and educators, and also by gaining knowledge and academic achievement at an early age (Schofield & Widger, 2012; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009). These crucial skills can only be accomplished when given the proper time spent in an educational program (Bryde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009).

Early childhood education has become increasingly important for students of all ages and has countless benefits for the diverse students in today’s classrooms (Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009). Infants and toddlers are even capable of reaching new goals and engaging in positive interactions while attending day care or nursery school programs (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012). Educators believe that key classroom experiences such as types of interactions, the learning environment, and types of learning opportunities will promote a successful and educational experience for young children (Daughterty, Howes, Karoly, Lara-Cinisomo, & Siddle-Fuligni, 2009). It is also beneficial for teachers to facilitate and guide students in the right direction rather than interrupt their learning process (Schofield & Widger, 2012). Both educators and students have a critical job in the early childhood classroom; educators must teach, inspire
and motivate while students must learn, grow and gain knowledge (Schofield & Widger, 2012). The learning process starts early on, so it is valuable for young children to participate in an early childhood program (Bryde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009).

Vignette

Parent: What would you like to do today, Maya?

Child: I want to make another picture book!

Parent: That was a lot of fun wasn’t it?

Child: Yes! I love making picture books and then I can show it to my friends and read it all by myself. And I can write about anything I want!

Parent: You are learning to be a writer!

Child: Yes, but I already AM a writer!

Parent: You are right Maya! You ARE a writer!

The previous vignette was a conversation between me and my 3 year old daughter. My daughter was just learning to create her own picture books and share it with her family and friends. She became so interested and engaged in picture book making that it was no longer school work for her, but it was her preferred activity of choice. She was already motivated and believed in herself as a writer even though she was only beginning to learn about the emergent writing process. Picture books play a huge role in education. Even books with no words at all are beneficial to students. They are able to make their own interpretations, hypothesize, infer, and
connect to the themes of the story. Picture books can also be used throughout the curriculum in any subject area to motivate and enhance student learning.

The purpose of this thesis is to review and summarize what research shows relating to picture books in an early childhood setting. The research articles involved children ranging in ages from birth through grade 2. They discussed the importance of early childhood education, the participating of preschool or day care settings and the benefits of picture books to promote student learning and growth throughout the curriculum. This paper will evaluate research on picture books throughout literacy and social studies. It will also discuss the importance of early childhood education as a foundation to future schooling through academic achievement, positive interactions and socialization in the classroom, and also the effects of time spent in early childhood programs leading to higher achievement outcomes. This paper will also show what I have learned and experienced in an early childhood setting by including examples of actual student work when picture books are implemented into the curriculum. Lastly, this paper will provide an example of new and improved early childhood lessons with the all of the strategies, techniques and best practices learned from the research articles and my own teaching experiences.

This thesis will also explore the importance of diverse and alternative families and how picture books help children of all ages to learn and understand new or unfamiliar concepts. There are many alternative families with children in schools today. Adults and children must be educated about all types of families so everyone can feel accepted and important. The typical American family does not always consist of a mother and a father. Children may be raised by single parents, grandparents, foster care, adopted parents, two mothers, two fathers, etc. Ignoring alternative families just because they are different can be damaging to children that are part of
them. This thesis will research the teachers’ role in educating children about alternative families and to understand that being different is acceptable. Finally, I will explain why picture books play such a huge role in learning about diverse and alternative families. My goal as a teacher is to provide education, knowledge and understanding so all students will have tolerance and acceptance for others while in school and throughout their future.
Part Two: Importance of Early Childhood Education

Chapter 1: Academic Achievement

The biggest question for early childhood programs was narrowed down to student readiness (Byrde & Hough, 1996). Kindergarten programs initially started out for a half day to accommodate to the young age and readiness levels of the children, but studies have shown that a full day spent in school provides greater academic achievement results (Byrde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009). A couple of studies in particular took a closer look at half day versus full day programs to learn about the benefits and/or negative effects of attending an all-day educational program on academic achievement (Byrde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009). Some beliefs from parents of students in half day programs related to engagement levels as well as readiness to participate in a full day program (Byrde & Hough, 1996). Overall, most parents and educators felt that a full day program was best for students (Byrde & Hough, 1996). Half day classes were beneficial as well, but did not offer the adequate amount of time for students to fully blossom as they would in a full day program (Bryde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009).

Another study of similar nature also found that English language learners highly benefit from full day Kindergarten programs (Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009). Academic tests given in the study from the beginning and end of the school year show greater growth of students in a full day program versus a half day (Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009). When children are in school, there is a greater chance for them to learn and experiment as well as become successful individuals in the future (Bryde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009).
It has been indicated that early childhood students have a better understanding of mathematical concepts such as number sense when children are involved in an educational program prior to formal schooling (Howell & Kemp, 2010; Hung & Wang, 2010). Children can learn number sense in a classroom, a day care center, or at home in their everyday lives (Howell & Kemp, 2010). Number sense is critical to mathematics and can apply to all ages as well as different areas of mathematics (Howell & Kemp 2010; Hung & Wang, 2010). Young students must begin learning number sense skills as early as preschool to predict their achievement later on in their schooling (Hung & Wang, 2010).

Educational games can provide a positive, interactive and social learning experience for students that may or may not be struggling with number sense (Hung & Wang, 2010). Games allow children to learn new skills, practice concepts that have already been taught and also provide an excellent opportunity for peer tutoring (Hung & Wang, 2010). One study took a deeper look at educational games related to number sense and found that early childhood students’ academic achievement was higher when the concept was taught through a game (Hung & Wang, 2010). The teacher researcher in the study was able to observe student growth, peer tutoring and scaffolding as well as social-emotional education for the students in the experimental group (Hung & Wang, 2010). Students were highly motivated to learn mathematic skills and outperformed the contrast group in academic achievement (Hung & Wang, 2010). Basic number sense comprehension starting in preschool sets the stage for student’s schooling in the future (Howell & Kemp, 2010; Hung & Wang, 2010).

Student growth in academic achievement is remarkable from the beginning to the end of the school year (Byrde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009; Howell & Kemp, 2010; Hung & Wang, 2010). When children are in an educational program, studies have
shown that their performance levels increase (Byrde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009; Howell & Kemp, 2010; Hung & Wang, 2010). Early childhood students learn basic skills needed, build on prior knowledge and learn new concepts every day (Byrde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009; Howell & Kemp, 2010; Hung & Wang, 2010). It is crucial for children to learn these skills at an early age and develop positive routines while they are very young (Bryde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009; Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012; Hung & Wang, 2010).

One routine that is highly beneficial to young learners is the thinking process (Salmon, 2008). Thinking is used during learning activities in and out of the classroom and can come in many forms (Salmon, 2008). It is important for young children to develop routines related to the culture of thinking for success later on in their lives (Salmon, 2008). When educators create thinking routines in the classroom, then children will be able to engage in their interests and prior experiences and can build upon them (Salmon, 2008). Routines are crucial in any classroom and creating a thinking routine early on will provide students with a greater chance to succeed in school (Salmon, 2008; Schofield & Widger, 2012).

A useful action research study took place to learn about a variety of thinking routines for young children and also to explore the children’s minds as they participated in the routine (Salmon, 2008). It was also beneficial to investigate how to make the children’s thinking visible through illustrations and stories, so the teachers involved in the study used specific routines to connect new ideas to prior knowledge and also used questioning and inquiry to engage the students in the thinking process (Salmon, 2008). The action research found that when children are aware of their thinking, they become better observers, have positive attitudes towards thinking and learning and have a better understanding of the world (Salmon, 2008). Children
must be involved in their own learning with a teacher as a facilitator to guide them (Schofield & Widger, 2012).

Students that attend an educational program will have greater academic achievement (Byrde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009; Howell & Kemp, 2010; Hung & Wang, 2010). Full day and half day programs are beneficial to early childhood students and provide a structured environment for positive learning experiences (Byrde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009). Students develop appropriate routines and learn new skills in a variety of subject areas to prepare them for formal schooling (Salmon, 2008; Howell & Kemp, 2010; Hung & Wang, 2010). Academic achievement is a huge piece of early childhood education and is proven to increase when children attend educational programs (Byrde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009; Howell & Kemp, 2010; Hung & Wang, 2010).
Chapter 2: Socialization & Interactions

When children attend an educational program, they learn academics but they will also learn how to interact and socialize with their peers as well as other adults they come into contact with (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012; Schofield & Widger, 2012; Daughterty, Howes, Karoly, Lara-Cinisomo, & Sidle-Fuligni, 2009; Cole, Dale, Jenkins & Mills, 1991). It is important for a student and educator to develop a positive relationship throughout the school year (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012). Some children are with their day care providers from morning until night and it is highly important to create a good relationship between the child and teacher of the program (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012). Good relationships in a day care setting would eventually lead to more positive experiences in school (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012). These relationships set the stage for what lies ahead for young children (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012). When children are in an environment that promotes closeness between the child and teacher, then they will feel comfortable and ready to learn (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012).

One study took place to learn about interactions and socialization between young children and educators and the effect the relationship had on learning. Parents and day care providers from a variety of day care centers were given interviews to understand their perspectives on relationships between child and educator (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012). Parents felt that safety was most important because the children were so young (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012). Providers felt that time was crucial in order to develop and maintain a good relationship (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012). Both parents and providers mentioned the importance of relationship quality with the children (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012).
This study also relates to other research in socialization in early childhood education. Educators and children have interactions each day in the classroom, but it is important to understand when and if an interaction should take place (Schofield & Widger, 2012). Early childhood educators must have training, knowledge, and even experience in teaching young children and also must understand when to interact or when to let the child take over (Schofield & Widger, 2012). A child’s mind is filled with curiosity and exploration which can be built from a good educator, but also let down from a poor educator (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012; Schofield & Widger, 2012).

A study took place to learn about teacher and student interactions or interruptions (Schofield & Widger, 2012). Early childhood philosophical approaches believed that children learn through discovery, exploration, as well as uninterrupted play (Schofield & Widger, 2012). Young children must be actively involved in their own learning with a teacher as the facilitator to guide them in the right direction (Schofield & Widger, 2012). Current early childhood educators were interviewed on their perceptions of when and if teachers should initiate an interaction with the children (Schofield & Widger, 2012). Social interactions between a child and an educator are very important, but young children must also become independent learners (Schofield & Widger, 2012). Knowing whether and when to interact with students is vital in early childhood education (Schofield & Widger, 2012). Interactions as well as positive relationships with children are extremely important to develop a comfortable classroom as well as a healthy learning experience for everyone (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012). Educators are meant to guide and assist young children and promote independent discovery throughout their lives (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012; Schofield & Widger, 2012).
In order to promote positive relationships and interactions, educators must provide key classroom experiences (Daughterty, Howes, Karoly, Lara-Cinisomo, & Sidle-Fuligni, 2009). Early childhood educators each have different teaching methods and beliefs about preparing students for school (Daughterty, Howes, Karoly, Lara-Cinisomo, & Sidle-Fuligni, 2009). Preschool and Kindergarten are crucial years for young children and the experience should be a positive one (Daughterty, Howes, Karoly, Lara-Cinisomo, & Sidle-Fuligni, 2009). Research has determined that training of teachers, experience of teachers, teacher-child interaction, children’s learning environment, and types of learning opportunities are all dependent upon the positive relationships and education students will receive (Daughterty, Howes, Karoly, Lara-Cinisomo, & Sidle-Fuligni, 2009). Every child deserves a positive experience to prepare them for their future (Daughterty, Howes, Karoly, Lara-Cinisomo, & Sidle-Fuligni, 2009).

Socialization is also highly beneficial for early childhood students with disabilities (Cole, Dale, Jenkins & Mills, 1991). Students with special needs or disabilities can either be integrated with general education students or segregated in a special education class (Cole, Dale, Jenkins & Mills, 1991). Depending on the disability, some students do well in an inclusion class but some may truly benefit from the extra one on one support provided in a special education classroom (Cole, Dale, Jenkins & Mills, 1991). Educators and parents have felt that an inclusive setting was highly beneficial to students as long as students were placed correctly (Berthelsen, Carrington, Dunbar, Hand, Meldrum, Nicholson, Walker, & Whiteford, 2012). Research has shown that students with disabilities were able to gain more successful experiences in the inclusive classrooms as well as higher academic achievement and also positive social interactions (Cole, Dale, Jenkins & Mills, 1991). Students with disabilities not only learn
academics from their peers, but also important socialization skills that they would not have access to in a segregated environment (Cole, Dale, Jenkins & Mills, 1991).

Socialization in schools is crucial for young children (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012; Schofield & Widger, 2012; Daughterty, Howes, Karoly, Lara-Cinisomo, & Sidle-Fuligni, 2009; Cole, Dale, Jenkins & Mills, 1991). Students learn how to interact with peers as well as educators, which are essential skills needed in their everyday lives (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012; Schofield & Widger, 2012; Daughterty, Howes, Karoly, Lara-Cinisomo, & Sidle-Fuligni, 2009; Cole, Dale, Jenkins & Mills, 1991). Positive relationships allow children to become more comfortable which in turn makes learning easier (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012). It is also necessary for educators to understand when an interaction should take place and to not interrupt a child’s independent learning process as well (Schofield & Widger, 2012).

Finally, socialization is important for general education students, but also students with special needs (Cole, Dale, Jenkins & Mills, 1991). Early childhood socialization sets the stage for all learners and prepares children for a successful school experience in general education, special education, and inclusive classrooms. (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012; Schofield & Widger, 2012; Daughterty, Howes, Karoly, Lara-Cinisomo, & Sidle-Fuligni, 2009; Cole, Dale, Jenkins & Mills, 1991).
Chapter 3: Time

The amount of time that students spend in school influences academic achievement as well as socialization and interactions learned in the classroom (Byrde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009). If students are absent from school or attend school for half of the day, their achievement levels may be effected (Bryde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009). In full day educational programs, students are provided with more time to interact with their peers, are able to engage in individual or group activities, and are provided with more educational instruction (Byrde & Hough, 1996). It is vital for young children to be part of an educational program and spend an adequate amount of time involved in learning (Byrde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009).

Studies have shown that students in half day programs are more likely to miss class as opposed to children in a full day program (Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009). Children not only miss out on gaining new knowledge and experiences but also positive interactions that happen on a day to day basis in an education program (Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009). When children are in school, there is a greater chance for them to learn and experiment as well as become successful individuals in the future (Byrde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009).

Amount of time spent in an educational program also relates to students learning to transition into new programs as they grow older (Berthelsen, Carrington, Dunbar, Hand, Meldrum, Nicholson, Walker, & Whiteford, 2012). Transitions can be difficult for students, especially students with disabilities moving into an inclusive classroom (Berthelsen, Carrington, Dunbar, Hand, Meldrum, Nicholson, Walker, & Whiteford, 2012). The more time students spend
adjusting into the transitional program, the easier it becomes (Berthelsen, Carrington, Dunbar, Hand, Meldrum, Nicholson, Walker, & Whiteford, 2012). There are many benefits to an inclusive setting for general education and special education students in the social aspect and in academics (Cole, Dale, Jenkins & Mills, 1991). It is also useful to involve communication between parent and teacher for a successful experience (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim, 2012; Schofield & Widger, 2012). The transition is not always easy, but it can definitely be valuable and beneficial for all learners involved (Berthelsen, Carrington, Dunbar, Hand, Meldrum, Nicholson, Walker, & Whiteford, 2012). Time spent in the transitional period urges children to accept change and to grow in their new classroom environment (Berthelsen, Carrington, Dunbar, Hand, Meldrum, Nicholson, Walker, & Whiteford, 2012).

Academic achievement and socialization are two important features of early childhood education, but without proper time, they are useless (Byrde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009). In order for children to be successful in their schooling career, there must be an adequate amount of time for students to learn and engage in an educational setting (Byrde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009). Anytime a child misses class, they are missing out on learning experiences (Byrde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009). Children benefit from early childhood education when they are actively involved and a part of the group (Howell & Kemp, 2010; Hung & Wang, 2010). Time allows for children to expand their knowledge and learn how to interact with others every single day (Britt Drugli & Mari Undheim 2012; Byrde & Hough, 1996; Bingham, Hall-Kenyon & Korth, 2009; Schofield & Widger 2012; Howell & Kemp, 2010; Hung & Wang, 2010).
Part Two: Importance of Picture Books

Chapter 4: Literacy

All early childhood settings, whether serving as a home away from home for infants and toddlers or a classroom for primary-age students, should have a comfortable library area well stocked with a diverse collection of good books (“Beyond the Library Corner: Incorporating Books throughout the Curriculum,” 2007). The library area is a place where children can explore and read books alone, with peers, or with teachers (“Beyond the Library Corner: Incorporating Books throughout the Curriculum,” 2007). It is an essential strategy for supporting children’s early literacy skills (“Beyond the Library Corner: Incorporating Books throughout the Curriculum,” 2007). In short, books can expand children’s play, introduce new concepts and content, and inspire creative expression (“Beyond the Library Corner: Incorporating Books throughout the Curriculum,” 2007).

Children benefit in many ways from actively engaging in high quality children’s literature, and picture books provide a natural avenue to motivate and encourage students’ writing (Paquette, 2007). Shared book experiences in small or large group settings can lead to meaningful writing discussions and applications (Paquette, 2007). Using high quality children’s literature provides children with multiple reading and writing benefits (Paquette, 2007). Children apply skills in all areas of the language arts, including writing through meaningful experiences with picture books, and shared book interactions in small or large group settings can lead to purposeful writing discussions and applications (Paquette, 2007). Teachers who share quality picture books with young children are promoting literacy in the fullest sense of the word (Paquette, 2007). Using high quality children’s literature in the classroom offers multiple
advantages (Paquette, 2007). In addition to capturing students’ attention, accommodating differences, provoking conversation, and sheer reading enjoyment, children’s literature can be an effective avenue to motivate and engage student writers (Paquette, 2007). It allows students to visualize how authors use written language to write appealing and entertaining stories (Paquette, 2007). Picture books provide children with emergent literacy skills right from the start. Parents of babies can read books to infants and develop a wonderful beginning into the literacy world. The literacy process starts very early on and will grow with time.

There is much more to a picture book than just pictures and words on a page. Storybook reading helps children to gain general knowledge, practice cognitive thinking, and learn about the rhythms and conventions of written language (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007). Literacy skills can be embedded when using an engaging children’s picture book instead of focusing on skills in isolation (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007). Just from reading one high quality picture book to a group of students, the children could be able to examine pieces of the story, come up with new words, sing a song about the story, change the words to create their own version of the book, make new word sounds, and act out scenes from the story in dramatic play (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007). There are many ways that children can learn a variety of skills from just one picture book.

What is a picture book? Many individuals have seen books with words and or pictures, but what makes it a picture book? A picture book is different from a children’s book that contains illustrations (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007). In a picture book, both the picture and text are equally important (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007). They contain at least three elements: what is told with words, what is told through the pictures, and what is conveyed from the combination of the two (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007). A fourth element is the child’s personal association with the
book (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007). They can be fiction or nonfiction and the illustrations can be photographs as well as drawings, paintings or collage (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007).

Picture books support literacy in so many ways. Through such activities as looking through new books, rereading (or pretend reading), stories that the teacher has read, imagining new endings for popular stories, or creating artistic renderings of favorite stories, young children can interact with text in meaningful ways (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007). Picture books should be a part of every day in the early childhood years (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007). Reading to children and engaging them in activities that encourage the use of expressive language, phonological awareness, and high level thinking is critical for the development of the skills and dispositions that are necessary for reading and writing (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007).

Picture books provide children with rich vocabulary and support known and unknown words. When the story reading includes explanations of particular words, dialogue about new vocabulary, high-level questions, and other active participation by children that language development is further enhanced (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007). Even wordless picture books that may not fit the traditional definition are a wonderful way to encourage children to use expressive language, as they use visual literacy and knowledge of story sequence to become the author of the story (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007).

Authentic children’s literature contains vocabulary and language structures designed to tell a story, as opposed to the vocabulary and language structures that are present in decodable texts (Hassett, 2009). This means that children have the chance to hear and use words that they may or may not be familiar with; and with teacher support and scaffolding, children can begin to use new ways of thinking and talking as a part of their own oral language (Hassett, 2009).
A research article stated, “Unlike early reading materials with controlled vocabulary designed to help children practice decoding and word recognition strategies, authentic children’s literature assumes that, with good teacher support, children can read and understand higher level vocabulary as a prerequisite for understanding what the stories mean” (Hassett, p. 7, 2009). Children should be learning letters, letter sounds and vocabulary while they are reading. The simple theory also known as the old way of teaching supports letters; sounds then words and repeating that process over and over again (Johnson, 2006). The complex theory supports teaching the child while they are reading and learning as they go along. Educators would be prompting students to problem solve, self-monitor and link new discoveries with prior knowledge so students can build off of what they already understand (Johnson, 2006).

Language is another crucial component included when children engage in picture books. Phonological awareness, which is the ability to hear, identify and manipulate the sounds of spoken language, can be integrated into the literacy curriculum when reading picture books that focus on sounds (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007). As children listen to songs, nursery rhymes, poems and books with repetitive words and phrases they begin to play with the language (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007). Many picture books contain predictable rhymes, rhythms, alliteration, and a great deal of word play that invite children to complete lines, make up nonsense words, and engage in other types of phonological-based activities, when these types of activities are promoted by the teacher (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007). Picture books also teach students about phonemic awareness, which is the ability to hear phonemes as units of sound and is a critical skill used for reading and writing (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007).

Research has shown that picture books provide print-rich environments for young students and when additional literacy props and tools are added to centers in classrooms,
children’s conversations and understanding of written language are enhanced (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007). Children should be able to expand and extend the experiences they read about in books and require literacy tools to do so such as art areas with open ended materials, writing and drawing supplies, paper, paint, three-dimensional materials, long periods of time, and working independently or collaboratively with a partner or small group (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007). This allows children to create their own interpretations and allows the teacher to be a guiding facilitator in the learning process.

Picture books and picture book activities can truly benefit all learners in the classroom. Educators can accommodate students with disabilities or struggling readers through differentiated instruction. A research article (Seplocha & Strasser, 2007) stated:

One teacher noted that Quincy was having difficulty reading rhymes. So she read Trapani’s (1998) *The Itsy Bitsy Spider* to him. Then using a flannel board, Quincy acted out the song with a flannel spider and other props. The next day, the teacher extended this activity even further. She put other felt animals next to the flannel board and invited Quincy and Fatima to change the animals and make up a new song. Together the two children giggled as they sang, *The itsy bitsy kitty went up the water spout. Down came the water and cried the kitty out. Out came the sun and the kitty cried away and the itsy bitsy spider went out the day-de-day.*

There are many wonderful ways to modify lessons to benefit all learners in the classroom through picture book activities.

Picture books without any words at all are also of importance to literacy. Wordless picture books was briefly mentioned earlier, but provides important skills to young children such
as: developing book handling behaviors, focusing on children’s strengths, adapting to special needs, inspiring story telling in many different forms and supporting curricular integration to name just a few (Conrad, Dragich, Jalongo & Zhang, 2002). An excellent example of wordless picture books engaging student’s interest levels was told in a particular research article titled, “Using Wordless Picture Books to Support Student Literacy” by Natalie Conrad, Denise Dragich, Renck Jalongo and Ann Zhang. One of the authors (2002) stated:

I struck up a conversation with two rambunctious brothers, ages 3 and 6, who were waiting with their mother directly in front of me. Then I remembered that there was a copy of the humorous pictorial account of a pet frog’s disruptive visit to a fancy restaurant, *Frog Goes to Dinner* (1974), in my purse. When I asked the boys if they wanted to “look at a funny book,” the older of the two eyed me skeptically, evidently wondering if this was just another teacher’s ploy to get him to read. But after I showed him that the book had no words whatsoever and the story was told entirely through the pictures, he brightened. Within a few moments, both boys were stretched out on the carpet commenting on the slapstick humor, poring over the details in the illustrations, and laughing delightedly together…

This passage shows a precise example of young children engaged and motivated to read. The boys in the article were initially nervous to look at the book because reading can be difficult and even intimidating for students at times. But the picture book without any words at all immediately eased the boys and encouraged them to interpret the book on their own using creativity and prior knowledge. The best reward of all is to see the students interacting with the picture book, smiling and laughing throughout it all. That is what all educators want from their students, to learn and have fun while doing it!
Wordless picture books also provide a great amount of additional activities to follow after a student has completed the book. One beneficial lesson would be for a child to create the words for a wordless picture book (Conrad, Dragich, Jalongo & Zhang, 2002). Students would be able to have their own take on the story and share their creativity by adding the words they feel fitting. The class could even share their stories to see how each child sees the story in similar and different views. There is much to be learned from collaborating with peers to find out new ideas or ways of looking at something. Some other useful suggestions based on research involving wordless picture books in the classroom include: Recording a story based on the pictures, change the format of the wordless book, draw a prequel or sequel, focus on the plot, dramatize the story, create a group mural, write a text in a different language, make a story from another character’s point of view, use classroom photographs to create a wordless story, take a book with text and make it into a wordless story, and invent a wordless book (Conrad, Dragich, Jalongo & Zhang, 2002). These are all exceptional ideas to use with early childhood education students to enhance their understanding of picture books and wordless picture books.
Chapter 5: Creating Picture Books

Vignette (Glover & Ray, pg. xiii, 2008)

On a single day in May, privileged as we were to be sitting alongside preschool writers who were making picture books, we saw children engaged in the most amazing thinking. In squiggled lines moving from front to back, Kee illustrated the sound of a siren coming from a fire truck. Evan made the eyes of his dinosaur slant sideways to show it looking back while running away from an erupting volcano. On the cover of a book about going to a Build-a-Bear Workshop, Lilly drew only the backs of people’s heads to show they are entering the store. And Nolan added lines to the page in his book illustrating a home run. The lines traced the path of the ball from the pitcher to the bat to the outfield, and then captures the player’s speedy spin around the bases.

These children range in ages from 3-5 years old and have such higher level thinking in their picture book making because they were encouraged by their educators. Children as young as 2 or 3 years old can make picture books and have meaning to it as well. Each child in the vignette were interested and engaged in their picture books and also thought of it as a fun activity rather than “school work.” The textbook, Already Ready by Katie Wood Ray and Matt Glover breaks apart the emergent writing process in two parts: Building understandings about young writers and teaching practices that nurture young writers.

What does it mean to be a writer? If you ask a preschooler, they would probably respond with something like: A writer makes books. In a simple way, the preschooler would be exactly right. Writers do make books, but there is much more involved. A writer has meaning to the story, edits their work, has a beginning and an end, plans their story in their head and then puts it
down on paper, which are just some of the main points an emergent writer needs to learn. Educators must also understand and be aware of the developmentally inappropriate expectations (Glover & Ray, 2008). Children are emergent writers and just beginning to learn the new skills. Writing could even consist of scribbling, making pictures, making one or two letters above a picture, nonsense words, invented spelling, or letter sounds (Glover & Ray, 2008). It is crucial for educators to never push an emergent writer outside of their Zone of Proximal Development. It is important to encourage and challenge students but it must be within their Zone of Proximal Development to ensure learning and understanding (Glover & Ray, 2008).

Why make picture books with children? Some of the many important reasons to allow children to make their own picture books are provided below (Brewster, p. 113-114, 1997):

- **Integration**: Making picture books is a natural way to integrate two powerful modes of thought and expression: the linguistic and the visual.
- **Documentation**: Bookmaking is a way to record meaningful experiences, while at the same time creating a lasting object which can be revisited.
- **Validation**: Books provide tangible evidence that efforts are valued.
- **Communication**: Bookmaking provides opportunities not only for private expressions but also for public sharing.
- **Collaboration**: Making books with a partner, in a small group or as an entire class, enables the child to contribute to something larger than self, celebrating community efforts.
- **Coordination**: Making picture books allows the use of many fine motor skills as well as many opportunities for problem solving.
**Motivation:** Bookmaking is highly motivating, particularly to children who are struggling with the reading/writing process.

Allowing children to create picture books has countless benefits and is also a fun and interactive experience for students. The author of, “Teaching Young Children to Make Picture Books,” stated, “My personal commitment to making picture books with children derives from the deep satisfaction I have watching the development of the *disposition* to record experiences, observations, stories and dreams in unique formats for saving and sharing” (Brewster, p.114, 1997). It is rewarding to watch emergent writers engaged in creating their own stories and expanding their knowledge of writing at the same time!

Children begin writing at all different stages. Some will use inventive spelling which consists of a child being intentional about which letters they are using to represent words for the first time (Glover & Ray, 2008). It typically would start with a consonant sound before a vowel sound and texts will then start to hold meaning which is empowering for young children to see writing similar to that of adults (Glover & Ray, 2008). It could also become frustrating to the child because once they begin writing those letters, then they are “expected” to read it correctly. Students may also use random strings of letters which usually do not have the correct sounds but show the child is connecting letters with pictures (Glover & Ray, 2008).

A huge part of being a writer is the child’s image of self as a writer. Children believe in themselves as writers because it is a part of them and what they are doing in school. If teachers make time, space and materials available so students can do what writers and illustrators do, then they will make books (Glover & Ray, 2008). Unfortunately, adults on the other hand may not be as easy to convince. The authors stated, “Many will more easily believe Sean is an illustrator
than a writer because they have fewer expectations for what it means for him to be an illustrator. His writing identity is a harder sell because his written artifacts don’t yet match adult expectations for what someone who knows how to write should be able to do” (Glover & Ray, p. 5, 2008). The idea behind the book was to show adults that children are writers with no other adjectives attached (Glover & Ray, 2008). An excellent example of a child’s image of himself as a writer was shown through 3 year old Nick. He was motivated to write a book based on his favorite authors stories. Nick applied themes from the authors other books into his own and even researched the author’s website online to learn more. Influenced by another writer, Nick saw himself as a writer too (Glover & Ray, 2008).

The authors of Already Ready discussed the concept of dictation at great length in the textbook. Dictation is defined in the book as, “… a teaching practice involves a child drawing (and sometimes writing) what he can on his own, and then an adult writes the words the child wants on the paper or in the book” (Glover & Ray, p. 98, 2008). Dictation plays a significant, yet negative role in a child’s work. Individuals may think that dictation is helpful and beneficial to emergent writers, but in fact it is just the opposite and slows the writing process down (Glover & Ray, 2008). Below are some common misconceptions about dictation (Glover & Ray, p.99-102, 2008):

- Honoring a child’s words- Adults can honor words in many other ways such as saying the words back to them, asking questions about their words, laughing (when appropriate), sighing and gasping in response to their words
- Helping to Complete a Difficult Task- If children are becoming frustrated or tired while writing then it is outside of their Zone of Proximal Development. Dictation will only bandage it not solve a problem in the long-term.
• Capturing Rich Writing- Children’s oral language will surpass their written language for years to come. Adults can encourage children to say the rich words that they know orally but cannot yet write in conjunction with whatever words they are able to get written down on paper.

• Making Sense of Their Writing- Dictation can help parents understand what their child wrote in a story, but it is not needed. The child can read the story themselves which will make it more interactive and exciting for the parent and child.

• Helping Them Know How to Write- Dictation does model letter formation, spelling, word spacing and punctuation but what children learn from teaching demonstration is so far outside their Zone of Proximal Development it will not benefit in the way one would think. It is still useful to children to observe proper writing techniques in other ways such as the daily schedule on the board, writing down observations about something the class studied, writing brainstorming ideas, recording class news and announcements, making a list of items needed to complete a project, etc.

There are many alternatives that educators and parents could use with children rather than dictation. Overall, it does more harm than good and should always be avoided when possible (Glover & Ray, 2008).

Vignette (Glover & Ray, p.125, 2008).

As Matt is reading Martin Waddell’s *Owl Babies* to a group of preschoolers, he stops at one point and rereads a particular page. He asks the children to listen to the language Waddell has used: “Soft and silent she swooped through the trees to Sarah and Percy and
Bill.” Without belaboring the point, Matt says simply, “I like the way that sounds. ‘Soft and silent she swooped through the trees.’” Then he continues on with the reading. With just a tiny bit of talk inserted into the read-aloud, Matt does some important teaching. He plants seeds of understanding about how writers craft literary language, how readers are drawn to this language, and what this language sounds like in texts.

Once children learn the foundations of the writing process, it is time to move along to the next phase of picture book writing which consists of supporting young writers through read aloud. “Reading-aloud is a complex event that involves not just reading and listening but also looking, thinking, and talking as books are shared- children and teachers making meaning together from all the rich meaning found in picture books” (Glover & Ray, p. 127, 2008). Children should be asking questions, answering questions, inferring, discussing, predicting and connecting to the text while the read-aloud is occurring. There is a great deal of higher level thinking going on and children as young as 3 years old can absolutely take part in a read-aloud. The authors state, “Every encounter with a picture book is simply saturated with literacy-learning potential and is perhaps the best investment a teacher can make when it comes to supporting the literate lives of children” (Glover & Ray, p. 145, 2008).

When young children are beginning to learn how to write a picture book, it is important for side by side teaching to occur with each student one on one (Glover & Ray, 2008). An excellent example is provided below straight from the book, Already Ready, by Matt Glover and Katie Wood Ray (p. 149, 2008):

Matt is at the writing table one afternoon when Tashiana comes over and sits beside him.

As she takes a blank book and gets some markers, Matt asks her what her book is going
to be about. After thinking for just a moment, Tashiana says, “A cat and a pumpkin.” Matt repeats this, “a cat and a pumpkin,” and then asks her which one she is going to draw first. She thinks for another moment and says, “a cat,” and then picks up a marker to get started. Before she begins, Matt suggests they look through the blank pages first and talk about how her book might go. Turning them as they talk, Matt makes the thinking they are doing more concrete by helping her see how the ideas would move across the pages.

It may seem like a simple conversation between a teacher and student, but so many crucial teaching points took place in that example. The side by side teaching helped the child to think about the writing process such as the beginning, middle and end of her story and also how her story was going to flow and make sense as a whole. Side by side teaching helps each child get off on the right track and benefits them for future picture book making independently as well. Side by side teaching should always be scheduled into an educator’s plan, especially when making picture books. It is also important to only nudge students along throughout the process rather than pushing them past their Zone of Proximal Development and always encourage their writing abilities by remembering appropriate expectations (Glover & Ray, 2008).

Side by side teaching consists of: posing problems, asking questions and making comments and suggestions (Glover & Ray, 2008). During these conversations, it is a good idea to make connections to other readings the students have done. Many emergent writers enjoy making their own version of a book they read or heard in the classroom. Language is also important in side by side teaching. Some students do not yet understand the words the teacher may be using when discussing a picture book. It is beneficial to explain any confusing words such as “what is your book about” or “what have you written so far” which are commonly used
when teacher and student talk about picture books (Glover & Ray, 2008). Lastly, it is helpful for the teacher to repeat words the student says during the conversation. It supports holding the child’s meaning over time, helps them remember the language they have crafted and honors authentic language from the student (Glover & Ray, 2008). Side by side teaching is an important part to picture book making!

A final piece that takes place after students have created a picture book is share time. Students work hard on making a picture book, so allowing them to share it with the class and teacher is crucial! After all, books are meant to be shared with others. An example of teacher and student interactions when a student shares a picture book is provided below (Glover & Ray, p. 183, 2008):

Kameron comes up first and stands beside Matt who is holding up his book about a giant so that everyone can see it. Because it is so early in the year, Matt provides lots of assistance as he and Kameron share the book. As they look at each page, Kameron says a little bit, and then Matt restates it in his best read-aloud voice, bringing the book to life for the other children. Over time, with lots of demonstrations of how to read and share books with others, Kameron and the other children will be able to do more and more of this sharing without the teacher’s assistance, but for now, the sharing is very interactive. When they’ve finished sharing the book, Matt points out two smart things Kameron did as a writer. He wrote his name on the cover, “Just like Mo Willems puts his name on the cover,” Matt says, “Isn’t it smart how Kameron made his whole book about just one thing. A giant. Every page is about a giant.”
Early on in the school year, share time involves the student and teacher working together. The gradual release process is used by being very interactive in the beginning and little by little the student takes over. The demonstrations by each student are an excellent model for the entire class to see how share time occurs. The author, Matt Glover, also used some great teaching moments by mentioning to the class some excellent pieces of the writing process that the child used in his picture book. Lastly, share time is extremely valuable. A picture book is for sharing, just like authors write books for others to read and share, students write books for the same reason (Glover & Ray, 2008).

The book, *Already Ready*, by Katie Wood Ray and Matt Glover, provided examples and demonstrations of the emergent writing and picture book making process specifically for preschool and kindergarten children. These foundational aspects of writing were focused on emergent writers, however many of these practices can be applied at any grade level such as: having appropriate expectations, crafting language, focus of writing, writing is a process, meaning of picture books, Zone of Proximal Development, Gradual Release Theory, making connections and image as a writer. These are used in *any* grade level!
Chapter 6: Social Studies

Social studies is a content area that is taught starting in preschool and leading all throughout a student’s schooling career. The five threads of social studies play a huge role in all aspects of the subject area. Everything that students learn in social studies breaks down into each thread. A summary of each thread is provided below (Grant & Vansledright, 2004):

1.) Thread name: Economic
   Discipline: Economics
   Key ideas/questions:
   Property- What do people own? How do they come to own it?
   Means of exchange- What form of exchange (for example, money) do people use to obtain what they want?
   Labor/Management- Who works for whom in a society? How does that relationship work?
   Scarcity/Surplus- Which goods and services are plentiful in a society and which are scarce? How does the scarcity or surplus of something influence its cost?

2.) Thread name: Geographic
   Discipline: Geography
   Key ideas/questions:
   Land forms- What are the surface features of an area? Which features matter to the inhabitants and in what ways?
   Location- Where are people, places and surface features located? How does the location of one entity influence that of another?
   Climate/Weather- What are the prevailing weather and climatic conditions? How do these conditions affect life in a particular area?
   Resources- What natural resources are available and in what supply? Which of those resources do the inhabitants use?
   Population- How are people distributed across an area and how densely are they concentrated? How do the people of an area interact with their physical surrounding?
3.) Thread name: Political

   Discipline: Political science

   Key ideas/questions:
   
   Decision making- How are rules made, interpreted, and enforced in a society?

   Power- Who holds power in a society and who doesn’t? How has this changed (if it has) over time?

   Structure of government- How have people decided to organize themselves to make decisions? What benefits and drawbacks to these forms of government are apparent? How is the structure of government changed?

4.) Thread name: Global

   Discipline: Anthropology, International Relations

   Key ideas/questions:
   
   Competition/Cooperation- How do cultural groups interact? In what ways do they cooperate and in what ways do they compete?

   Conflict- How do cultural groups handle conflicts between themselves?

   Change- How do norms, values, and institutions of cultural groups change over time?

5.) Thread name: Sociocultural

   Disciplines: Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology

   Key ideas/questions:
   
   Class- How is the society organized? Which groups have more power, influence, and such than others? Is it possibly to move from class to class?

   Race/Ethnicity/Gender- How do these factors influence the way people are perceived throughout the society?

   Education- How do people transfer the accumulating knowledge and experience from one generation to another?
   Arts- How do people represent themselves and their lives in writing, art, music, and dance?

   Recreation/Leisure- How do people spend time when they are not working or attending to family matters?
The five threads allow students to comprehend all parts of social studies by breaking it down into smaller ideas. The threads can be touched upon in the early grades and expand in the higher grades for deeper level thinking.

Literature has the power to touch the hearts and minds of readers of all ages (Rowell, 2007). Picture books are crucial in every subject area to enhance, motivate, engage and inspire positive learning experiences in school. Social studies is a content area that provides students with an understanding of people and places, and literature can play a very important role. Some of the critical themes that students learn in social studies are diversity, cultural experiences, race, gender, and sexual orientation along with the five threads tied into these concepts. Literature can help students to understand these complex ideas using language they can relate to and comprehend.

**Vignette:** (Hardie, p. 95, 2011)

Once upon a time, traditional story books would have us believe, the majority of families consisted of children who lived with their mother and father. But the happily-ever-after stereotypical family that teachers might have once assumed matched the children in their classrooms is diminishing. Nowadays families are diverse and complex. A child may live in a family consisting of one parent, two parents, same-sex parents, grandparents, adoptive parents, step-parents or foster parents. As some family circumstances may be hidden from the teacher’s gaze, it is important that teachers portray acceptance of multiple family compositions.

One concept that is still somewhat controversial in many classrooms in social studies is the topic of same sex couples/parents. There is a huge amount of literature for students of all
ages related to the topic, yet most classrooms and libraries in schools are lacking these books. Children come from diverse families and homes, and many picture books do not show these diverse families. “Nonetheless, millions of children lack access to books characteristic of them, their families or their friends. Picture books depicting children in households headed by gays and lesbians or in families with homosexual members or friends are frequently missing from many preschool and primary classrooms as well as 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” (Rowell, p.24, 2007). Diversity is so important in classrooms, yet some educators have not incorporated all forms of diversity into their curriculum. Children with same sex parents should be able to see their families in picture books and it would also be beneficial for other children in the class to learn and understand the different types of families.

In the United States, the number of families with gay or lesbian parents is increasing and is estimated at between 6 and 14 million children with same sex parents (Rowell, 2007). It is becoming evident that educators will have students at some point with same sex parents and it is beneficial to be prepared and ready to include that student and his or her family into the curriculum. “Gay friendly books can make a positive difference in the classroom: children from same-sex parent families feel their families are included and other children learn about and gain respect and acceptance for other types of families” (Rowell, p. 25, 2007). It benefits all children in the inclusive classroom!

It is understandable that teachers may be uncomfortable to teach concepts of same sex families. Homosexuals have been one of the most maligned subgroups in society related to violence, prejudice and negative portrayals (Rowell, p. 24, 2007). Some children with same sex families are even afraid to talk about it because they know that it is not the norm and is linked to
many negative ideas. It is up to the teachers of today and future educators to put a stop to the prejudice and begin educating students so they can understand that there are many kinds of families in the world and that it is okay to be different.

A wonderful way to introduce the topic of same sex families is through picture books. It takes some of the edge off the teacher because picture books do an excellent job at explaining and helping children to understand different types of people and families. Research has shown that, “A majority of gay-friendly books are interesting and enjoyable to children. Young children from same sex parent families can recognize themselves, and all are encouraged to talk about the commonalities of happy family lives. This literature contributes to the validating of many young children’s lives and to erasing homophobia” (Rowell, p. 25, 2007). The only way that children can understand this complex topic is to be educated about it and talk about it openly and freely. Children and even adults are scared of the unknown, so the best way to solve the issue is to discuss it in a comfortable and safe environment.

Research shows that, “In recent years, publishers have presented gay-friendly picture books with clever illustrations and engaging stories, including board books for toddlers, leveled materials for beginning readers, bilingual stories, and chapter books” (Rowell, p. 25, 2007). There is a wide variety of books for all ages from early childhood to elementary and also into middle and high school students. Books can incorporate same sex animals which may be an easier start to the topic, and then gradually expanding to people over time. Picture books allow educators to close the gap and provide a better understanding of a topic that is only going to continue to expand.
A study done in New Zealand observed kindergarten children in a diverse urban classroom. The students engaged in a variety of picture books about same gender families. The study showed that “children were open to the possibilities of non-traditional families in one New Zealand kindergarten. At no time during the research did any child suggest that you could not have two mummies or two daddies” (Kelly, 2011). The research showed that children can understand different types of families and are open to learning about them as well.

Picture books can be very positive and beneficial in social studies. Specifically when educating students about gay and lesbian families in the sociocultural thread. “Gay-sensitive picturebooks can help young children to understand themselves and others while modeling for them what is important in homes, schools and society. Picturebooks help to define the issues and translate them into experiences and language that children can understand and identify with” (Chick, p. 15, 2008). Students will understand that “differences are good and there is no such thing as a perfect or normal family” (Chick, p. 17, 2008). Picture books related to gay and lesbian families have come a long way over the years, but studies have shown that there is still room to improve. Kay Chick, author of “Fostering an Appreciation for all Kinds of Families,” stated, “Picturebooks with gay and lesbian characters also tend towards families with only one child. This gap in the existing literature leaves no opportunity to explore issues between siblings or differences in the ways that children in the same family manage problems and emotions” (Chick, p. 21, 2008). Same gender family picture books provide excellent understandings of diversity and should continue to expand and become used more often in classrooms around the world.
Part Four: Analysis of Examples and Experiences

Chapter 7: Engaging in Literacy

Emergent literacy begins in preschool and is crucial for children to understand how to read and write at an early age. It begins when a child is born and is enhanced through observation and participating in literacy activities (Justice & Kaderavek, 2002). Children can experience literacy when they are listening to a book read by someone else, looking at print, looking at pictures in a story and through many other activities. Even everyday language and communication provide children with literacy examples. Literacy is a part of every day in and out of the classroom.

Picture book reading begins when children are very small. Some excellent suggestions from a parenting website include mixing up the child’s library at home or in school. The website recommended (www.babycenter.com):

- Don’t overlook nonfiction. There are some great introductory books out there about everything from animals to trucks.
- Touch on what’s familiar. Three-year-olds love to read about things that occur in their everyday life, especially when the main character is a preschooler (or young animal): going to bed, shopping, cooking, going on vacation.
- Look to books to combat fears. Ask a children’s librarian for titles that help your child face his fears about thunderstorms, for example, or those crazy emotions he can’t control, like sibling rivalry.
- Don’t toss the easier books with fewer words, like nursery rhymes. Before you know it, your child will be "reading" them on his own. The repetition helps him
learn to relate what he's memorized to the words on the page, an important pre-reading skill.

The website included many useful tips and suggestions for parents with young children before they enter and while they are attending school. In relation to picture books, the website stated (www.babycenter.com):

Preschoolers take naturally to books, making this a wonderful age to build a lifetime habit. Introduce your preschooler to a wide variety — with different types of illustrations (paintings, collage, photos) and different kinds of text (storybooks, nonfiction, rhymes, other wordplay). Next to snuggling together with a children’s book, the best way to raise an eager reader is to let him see you reading books for your own pleasure, too.

Picture books are an important part of literacy even before a child can read a book on his or her own. Parents are a child’s first teacher, so these habits should be instilled in a child early on in their life and continue to be carried out when they enter school.

Shared story book reading promotes emergent literacy development for not only general education students but also for students with disabilities who may struggle with literacy (Justice & Kaderavek, 2002). The first step to engage students in shared reading is to incorporate student interest and appeal. Students with disabilities especially may need support in this area because many do not find books appealing to them (Justice & Kaderavek, 2002). This can occur for many reasons such as (Justice & Kaderacek, p. 8-9, 2002):

- Shared storybook reading is a language-based activity. For children exhibiting impaired language skills, book reading can be an overwhelming and demanding task.
- Children’s enjoyment of book reading, as with any activity, is mediated by their active engagement in the activity. Children with disabilities, for a variety of reasons may not be as actively engaged in storybook reading interactions as their peers without disabilities. Awareness of the potential for children to dislike or to be disengaged is important when using shared storybook reading as a means for facilitating emergent literacy knowledge.

In order to encourage students with disabilities to feel confident in shared reading activities, educators must collaborate with the child (Justice & Kaderavek, 2002). When an adult reads a book to a child, the adult does most of the work such as holding the book, turning the pages, reading the words, etc. It is important for adults and children to collaborate, especially for students with disabilities. Children should hold the book with the adult such as at a table together and turn the pages together. Not only should the adult ask questions about the book, but also about the pictures. Students with disabilities may feel more comfortable answering questions about pictures that they can see and relate to rather than words they hear from the adult. Justice & Kaderavek state, “Storytime should be a pleasurable, positive experience for the child, one in which the child is able to exert some control (p. 10, 2002). The table below shows examples of ways to collaborate during storybook reading (Justice & Kaderavek, p. 10, 2002):

- Pausing- Pause occasionally during reading and wait for the child’s comments. Pause after turning to a new page so the child can look at the picture and spontaneously comment or question. Pause after reading each page so the child can comment on story or pictures.
- Let child pick the reading location- Children enjoy reading in different places: on the floor, in a favorite chair, on the back steps. Allow the child to pick the reading location.
• Increase child’s opportunities to physically manipulate the book- Allow the child to hold the book. Encourage the child to freely turn the pages. Use books featuring manipulable features (slot books, flap books).

• Match the interaction to child’s abilities and interests- Adapt the story, the words, or the discussion in any way that makes the book more enjoyable for the child. As children mature and develop, they will be more interested in the “real” story.

• Ask child to “read” the book to you- Children enjoy “reading” a familiar book. It is fine to say “Wow, I like the way you read that book,” even if they are not really reading.

It is important to encourage and engage students with or without disabilities during storybook reading. “Teachers, other professionals, and parents can use specific shared-reading techniques to create positive social interactions centered on storybooks. In turn, these positive shared-reading experiences can help develop motivated, engaged and highly knowledgeable emergent readers” (Justice & Kaderavek, p. 12, 2002).

The following page provides a wonderful guide for students to use when choosing a book to read independently or also for an adult to read to them based on their interest and what they want. Interest is critical when reading or listening to picture books for students of all ages. If the book or story does not interest the child, then it will not be an engaging and interactive experience. Incorporating the “Good-fit books” model from the book The Daily Five, by Gail Boushey and Joan Moser, help students to pick a book that they want to read based on their choice, purpose, interest, comprehension, and knowledge level. Students can also learn the difference between books that are too easy, too difficult or just right for them. Reading the best fit book for each student is highly beneficial in emergent literacy. The page below shows a
model of “Good-fit books” and also a fun rhyme for students to sing when reading with a peer (Boushey & Moser, 2006).
I PICK

Purpose: Why do I want to read?
Interest: Does it interest me?
Comprehend: Do I understand it?
Know: Do I know most of the words?

www.cuteclassroomcreations.blogspot.com
EEKK!

Elbow to elbow, knee to knee.
I’ll read to you and you’ll read to me.
Elbow to elbow, knee to knee.
Book in the middle so we both can see!
Another useful guide for educators and parents to use when selecting books is all about getting the most out of picture books. If children did not learn, connect, relate or understand the story then something was missing during the reading. Picture books provide students with illustrations, print, learning about the world around them, building reading skills and even exploring art (Reading is Fundamental, www.bookpeopleunite.org).

In order to engage students in the reading process, they must first want to read or take part in a read-a-loud. The first step is to interest or hook the students with the illustrations. Children are intrigued by looking at the cover of a book or even participating in a book introduction to see if it interests them. A book introduction allows children to observe the pictures, get an idea of what the story will be about, look at and say some of the vocabulary used in the story and get an overall idea if the book interests them. An article about picture books stated (Reading is Fundamental, www.bookpeopleunite.org):

For our youngest children, pictures are an introduction into the world of books. Long before they can read, children respond to images in an effort to place themselves and the others in their lives into the world around them. Picture books aren’t just for young children. Older children are often more motivated to read picture books than books without illustrations because they see them as more fun and easier to read. Picture books are also appealing as a break from longer novels because most can be read in a single sitting.

Pictures bring the story to life for children regardless of their age! Students can use their imagination and connect to something in their own life or something they have read before,
which in turn makes the book more real to them (Reading is Fundamental, www.bookpeopleunite.org).

Picture books also help children build reading skills by understanding that words have meaning through pictures even before they are able to read the words. For the youngest leaners, books can even help children to identify colors, shapes, numbers, and letters just by looking at the pictures. They can then begin to recognize the pictures relate to the words on the page. Older children build on reading skills as well through comprehension. An article from a group called “Reading is Fundamental,” stated (www.bookpeopleunite.org):

They can use the pictures to predict what’s going to happen next. The images can teach children to watch, look, and listen for cues, warning signs, and exciting things they might otherwise miss. More experienced readers can learn how to cross reference the text and pictures in order to “read between the lines.” Choose books whose illustrations convey meaning not contained in the text, and help older readers play detective by going back and forth between the story and the pictures.

Picture books can be beneficial and enjoyable by children at all stages of reading. The article stated that Pre-readers do best with bold and colorful illustrations of everyday objects; beginning readers can take part in simple story lines with pictures that match the words, and independent readers can look deeper at the illustrations that tell a story of their own in fiction or provide information of their own in non-fiction for a greater challenge (Reading is Fundamental, www.bookpeopleunite.org).
Chapter 8: Literacy in the Classroom

In my own personal teaching experiences, I have encountered many picture book activities that benefit student achievement and success. This chapter is meant to provide examples that I have experienced first-hand when working one on one with a student or with an entire class of students. Literacy is a huge part of picture books and has many rewarding and positive benefits for the children I have worked with so far in my career. Below are a few lessons and activities related to picture books with students I have taught in the past that engaged and motivated them to learn.

Example One: Lesson Plan for English Language Learner

I will be working one on one with a 1st grade ELL student named Isabella and she will be reading the book “Monsters Munch Lunch” by Abigail Tabby.

Before reading the book, I will give a very detailed book introduction. I will read the title and author of the book and show Isabella where the title and authors names are on the cover. I will explain that the author is the person who wrote the story. I will ask her about the characters in the front of the book and have Isabella explain to me what it looks like they are doing. Together we will discuss the cover and then open the book to look at the pictures. At this point, I will talk about the words “rumble” and “grumble” on page 4 with Isabella. I will explain that sometimes when you are very hungry, your tummy makes a noise. I will also explain that a grumble is when you say something quietly usually because you are upset about something and it means talking. I want her to be aware of the vocabulary and also make sure she understands the meaning. Then I will ask her to repeat the words after me so she knows how to say them. At this point, I will give Isabella another example of the words in a different context such as: I forgot to
feed my cat this morning. Her tummy will rumble because she is hungry! The boy walked away grumbling because he did not get a cookie! On page 19, I will go over the words “whisk” and “brisk.” I will explain the definitions of those words (stirring the food fast). Then I will model them in another sentence: Please hand me the whisk so I can stir the brownie mix. We must walk briskly so we do not get wet in the rain.

Next, we will look at the pictures and talk about what is going on in each image. I will give Isabella sticky notes and she will place them on words she does not know or understand so we can come back to them later and discuss them in detail. If she comes to a word she does not know, I will urge her to use context clues such as what comes before and after the word and what would make sense and look right. It is important to take the time to listen carefully to the student and show patience while she is reading and understanding the book.

The next time we read the book I will continue to scaffold with Isabella and use the gradual release process. Eventually, she will be able to read the book independently. This activity is beneficial for any ELL student because I focus on the book introduction and spend a great deal of time explaining and examining the book with the student. This way, the student has some knowledge of the book and is not going into it “blind.” I am not giving away the book at all. I am just preparing the student and providing more meaning through conversations, looking at pictures, and having connections. I also allow the student to practice tricky vocabulary and words she may not know what they mean. I provide examples within the book and also examples outside of the book so she can hear it in more than one context. I also used sticky notes so she can show me the words she is not familiar with and we can come back to them later. The entire process is through scaffolding and will be gradually released as time went on.
Example One: Wrap up

The student I was working with was an English Language Learner and her primary language was Spanish. The lesson took place towards the middle of the school year, so she did have some prior knowledge of the English language. The student was becoming more independent as time went on by my use of the gradual release process. I started off helping Isabella heavily then little by little I wanted her to take over and do a majority of the reading. The sticky notes helped Isabella to become more independent because instead of stopping and asking for help, she simply placed a sticky note on a word and continued reading. In one instance, she was able to read on and then discovered she knew the word after all by reading ahead. The print in this particular book is large and bold so the student could focus on the words. The print also directly related to the pictures on each page. If Isabella was stuck on a word, I told her to first look at the pictures to see if they could help her out. She was able to read the word “shopping” on page 6 by using pictures as the context clue because it showed the characters with a shopping cart in a grocery store. The pictures, the large and bold print, and her use of context clues helped Isabella expand on her knowledge of literacy while reading the picture book.
Example Two: Picture book as a lesson plan

A wonderful early childhood picture book called, Pumpkin Soup by Helen Cooper can be introduced to children in the fall season. It is a perfect time to read the story in correlation to the season. The illustrations in the story are excellent and truly make readers hungry for pumpkin soup. The illustrations also relate to the print on the page. This story would be beneficial as a read aloud but the students could easily get involved by making some of the fun sound effects that occur throughout the book. Even preschool age children would show interest in the story and connect to some of the important themes about taking turns and getting along. Below is a mini-unit plan that I used with 1st grade students. The unit could be easily formatted and modified to fit the needs of the students in the class.

Pumpkin Soup- A reading/writing mini-unit (Bainbridge, 2012).

Day 1:

-Read the book Pumpkin Soup by Helen Cooper.

-Do the sequencing activity to re-tell the story.

Day 2:

-Review the book Pumpkin Soup.

-Complete the graphic organizer together, paying special attention to the last part– what the characters learned as part of the summary.
Day 3:

-Make pumpkin soup as a class.

-Complete a how-to writing to describe how to make the soup.

-After sampling the soup, create a class chart describing student reactions.

-Take lots of pictures during the activity for Day 5!

Day 4:

-Complete the graphic organizer together or individually. Students should be sure to add what they learned about themselves, pumpkin soup, cooking… whatever they are taking away from the experience to the last part of the graphic organizer.

-Students will then write a personal narrative to share the pumpkin soup experience with others.

Day 5:

-Give each student their picture from the soup day. They will glue it in the middle of the “frame” and decorate the border to go along with their picture. Display the picture along with students’ writing in the hallway.

**Example Two: Wrap Up**

This mini-unit plan was extremely engaging and motivated the students to participate to finish each step of the process. The students were very interested in the story and really wanted to make pumpkin soup themselves. When I shared with them that we would be making pumpkin soup they all shouted in excitement and wanted to participate in the activities I had planned. The
sequencing activity helped the students re-tell the story and practice the order of events for them. I had sentences from the story typed on paper and the students were able to cut them out and paste them in order on construction paper. The graphic organizer also helped students to better understand the themes and ideas of the story. The following day when we made the soup, the students had a great time and all worked together just like in the story so no problems would occur. The students especially loved sampling the soup and recording their peers reactions to see if they liked it or did not like it. This was integrated to math by creating a chart with the class data and results of the soup tasting. The personal narrative was also helpful for students to practice their writing in a fun and engaging way. The students wanted to write about their experiences with the pumpkin soup so they were motivated from the start. Lastly, the picture was a great touch because students had fun decorating around their picture from the day they made pumpkin soup. They were proud and eager to share their hard work! This mini-unit plan focused on literacy and even some math. The students absolutely loved it!
Chapter 9: Social Studies Activities

This chapter provides examples of positive and engaging Social Studies lessons from my own teaching experiences directly connected to picture books. The picture books I have used for Social Studies covered some important and also some very deep themes for children. It was very useful to me as the educator to talk about these concepts through picture books. The stories were written in a way to help young learners connect and understand the topics. The pictures in the stories were just as critical as the words to provide a visual for the children. The first lesson is all about teaching respect and how to treat others which is extremely important in a class full of young children. The students could easily get out of control so it is important for them to learn and understand how to treat their peers as well as adults so the days always run smoothly. The next lesson is about a controversial topic of same sex families. This topic is still new in education and should be discussed so students can begin to understand that all families are diverse. Culturally rich classroom environments are crucial to education and diversity. There are many types of cultures and many types of families in the world. No two families are the same and it is so important that young children can understand that concept early on.

Example One: Connecting picture books and feelings

The story, Have You Filled a Bucket Today? by Carol McCloud and illustrated by David Messing is a great book to introduce in the beginning of the year with preschool age children up through elementary students. The picture book talks about being kind, having good thoughts and good feelings. It explains that everyone has an invisible bucket that they carry around with them. If the bucket is full, then you feel happy but if it is empty, you feel sad or
lonely. The story describes how to fill a bucket by showing kindness and love which is a “bucket filler”. It also shows examples of a “bucket dipper” which is someone who says or does mean things. The message of the story is powerful and helps children understand why it is important to be kind and nice to others. Below is a Social Studies lesson I used with Kindergarten children:

**Procedures:**

Today we’re going to talk about how we can make our classroom space, our school space and every space we go a nice place to be: Our homes, the playground, a relative’s home. Each and every one of you can help to make that place a nice place to be. We are going to read a story called *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?* and we’re going to talk about the story as we read.

**Objective:**

Today we are going to read the book *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?* by Carol McCloud. The book’s message is that we fill each other’s invisible buckets when we show respect and kindness to others. When we are unkind to others, we dip in their bucket and it empties our own. Our happiness increases when we treat each other well.

**Lesson:**

1. First read the book *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?* by Carol McCloud.

2. Ask the children if they know what the word invisible means. Discuss if necessary.

3. Stop at page 4. “How are the children on this page different? What do you see? How are they alike? What do they all have?

4. Stop at page 9. To activate prior knowledge ask “Think of a time when you’ve felt happy. This
is a time when you’re bucket was full”.

5. Stop at page 12 & 13. Draw the children’s attention to the children who are being kind. “Are their buckets full or empty? How are the children filling other people’s buckets”? Discuss.

6. Stop at page 14 & 15. Draw the children’s attention to the children who are being unkind. Are their buckets full or empty? Discuss.

7. Finish reading the story.

8. “I know that you can all be bucket fillers. You know what? I bet each of you has been a bucket filler and you didn’t even know you were being one”.

**Guided Practice:**

Explain to the students that I will pass out “Bucket Fillers” and “Bucket Dippers”. Each student will have a turn to come up to the anchor chart and place their label in the correct column. We will discuss what makes each a bucket filler or dipper and why. If it is a bucket dipper, we will discuss what could be done instead to make it a bucket filler. Then we will try to develop an additional list of bucket fillers.

**Situations:**

1. Saying good morning to your teacher or classmates. (Filler)

2. Hurting someone with your hands (Dipper)

3. Being disrespectful. (Dipper)

4. Sharing with a friend. (Filler)

5. Hugging a family member or friend. (Filler)
6. Not telling the truth. (Dipper)

7. Tattling to get someone in trouble. (Dipper)

8. Pushing and shoving. (Dipper)

9. Saying please and thank you. (Filler)

10. Helping clean up. (Filler)

11. Helping a friend read. (Filler)

12. Cutting in line. (Dipper)

13. Opening the door for someone. (Filler)

14. Giving someone a compliment (Filler)

15. Making fun of someone (Dipper)

16. Being a bully (Dipper)

17. Sharing your snack with someone (Filler)

18. Asking someone to play with you. (Filler)

19. Making someone cry (Dipper)

20. Telling someone that they can’t play with you (Dipper)

21. Being extra helpful to teachers and adults (Filler)

22. Hurting someone’s feelings (Dipper)

23. Using unkind words (Dipper)

After the game has been completed, the students will sit in a circle around the carpet square and we will learn the Bucket Filler Pledge:

“I promise to do my best to be a bucket filler at school, at home, and everywhere I go.”
The “Bucket Filler” pockets will then be explained. Students will go back to their desks and decorate their buckets. These buckets will then be laminated for durability.

**Independent Practice:**

The students will independently decide what they think is a bucket filler or bucket dipper. They will also be able to tell me how they can fill someone else’s bucket.

**Closing:**

Either at the end of the lesson or the next day, ask students to share the “Bucket Filling” activities that they are noticing and how they made them feel. Ask how they felt when they filled a bucket. If anyone experienced “Bucket Dipping,” ask how that made them feel. Once the students have understood the Bucket Filler concept, they will be shown where the buckets will be placed and the rules of writing bucket filler notes.

**Example One: Wrap up**

This lesson allows students to really take apart the important themes from the story. Students dig deeper and focus on a variety of situations that could arise in or out of a classroom setting. The teacher breaks down each page for the students and spends time talking about what the importance of the story is. Children learn to understand an important concept of respecting others. This is a picture book that really connects to young students and is something they can easily relate to. The pictures give an excellent description of what the words explain in written form. The students enjoyed the lesson and it impacted the way they were treating each other. We set up a bucket in the classroom and students loved filling it with kind and thoughtful comments.
At the end of each week we would spend time reading what others wrote. This picture book can really help children learn how to treat others and also learn about feelings.

**Example Two: Same Gendered Parents**

This is a lesson that I did with my 2 year old daughter. I wanted to teach her about same gendered families and understand how a toddler processed the new concepts and ideas of a family different from her own. My thoughts were that if a toddler can understand and accept the themes, then other children should as well. I was skeptical at first thinking that she may be too young, but I wanted to experiment and see just how young children can begin to learn about diversity. I wrote a narrative about my experience with my daughter when I read her the books, *Mommy, Mama & Me* and *Daddy, Papa & Me* by Leslea Newman. This was part of an inquiry I was participating in and want to share my experience with this topic. Below are my findings:

The topic I decided to research for my inquiry was same-sex parents and families. When learning about this topic, I was very nervous at first because it is still somewhat controversial. The more I researched, the more comfortable I became and I gained a lot of background knowledge as well. I am so glad that I did all of my research before selecting a book about the topic of same-sex parents. I felt confident and was able to select appropriate books at the library. I was also not aware of just how many books are available about same-sex parents. I actually thought that I would have a hard time finding books, but that was not the case at all! I found over 15 books that I loved and would fit for a wide range of students aging from toddlers through late elementary school and early middle school years. It was wonderful to see so many books about this topic to educate children about the different types of families in our society.
My next step was to find a student to read one of these excellent books with. I do not have my own classroom yet, so finding a student was a struggle for me. While I was looking for more books and wondering which student I would read the book to, I found two perfect books about same-sex families. As soon as I found these two books, I knew right away that I was going to do my read aloud with my 2 year old daughter Maya. She never crossed my mind at first because of her young age and the topic being so deep. I did not think Maya would even be able to understand the key idea of same-sex families, but when I found the books, *Mommy, Mama, and Me* and *Daddy, Papa, and Me* by Leslea Newman, I knew that it would be a great fit! These books contain mostly pictures with just a few words on each page. The books are also very user friendly for toddlers because the pages are all hard with no possibilities of ripping them. *Mommy, Mama, and Me* and *Daddy, Papa, and Me* are very mild with the introduction of same-sex parents and show that these families are just like heterosexual families.

The first book I choose to read with my daughter was, *Mommy, Mama, and Me*. She could really relate to this book because most of the situations that occurred happen in her own life every day. On the first few pages, one of the Moms pick the little girl up and the other Mom pours juice in her cup. Maya could identify the cup and make connections with her Sippy cups. Another page showed a Mom combing the little girl’s hair, rocking in a chair, packing a snack and riding on Mommy’s back. These are all ideas that relate to Maya in a way that she can understand as well. The book went through a typical day in the life of the two Mommies’ and the little girl. It was just like a heterosexual family and Maya was able to see how much fun they had together.

The next book I read with Maya was *Daddy, Papa, and Me*. She loved this book as well about a day in the life of two Fathers and a little boy. The Daddy book was very similar to the
Mommy book with the concept of same-sex families being addressed in a mild manor. Maya was able to connect with this book very well and related to playing the games with her own Daddy and Mommy. The Dads in the book played dress up, made paper air planes, played with toy cars, painted pictures, baked a pie, played instruments, had a tea party and played at the park. They were all very simple concepts that Maya was able to understand well because she has done most all of them in her own life. The pictures also helped her to see what was going on as well as hearing me read to her. In the Daddy book, the same-sex family had so much fun and Maya had a smile on her face the entire time we were reading. It was so wonderful to see her enjoying the book and wanting to have me read it over and over again just like the Mommy book.

The first time we read the Mommy book; I showed my daughter the cover and asked her what she saw. Her response was that there was a Mommy, a Grandma, and a little girl. For some reason, that thought never crossed my mind when I was anticipating her responses. I was surprised at how she was able to see two adult women and a little girl on the cover, but instead of thinking it was two Mommies, she thought one was a Mommy and the other was a Grandma. Once I thought about it, her reaction to the cover of the book really made a lot of sense to me. Maya is only used to her own family which consists of a Mommy and a Daddy in her home. I even thought of the idea that if Maya did not have a Daddy, and we read a book about a Mommy and a Daddy, she would probably look at the Daddy in the story and wonder or ask who that was. Since she is so young, Maya is only able to connect and relate to things that are involved in her current life. I was amazed that she was able to think about the two women and make the connection of one being a Mommy and the other being Grandma because she sees her Grandma a few times a week.
The next time we read through the Mommy book, Maya asked where the Daddy was and if he was at work. I also found this response very interesting because Maya’s Daddy works all day, so she was able to connect that maybe the Daddy in the story was at work. I explained to her that this little girl only has two Mommies in her home and Maya then said she wanted to play with the two Mommies. By this point, she was starting to understand that two Mommies were part of the family and there was not a Daddy. Maya also thought that the two Mommies looked nice and fun to be around. She wanted to read the book over and over because she loved looking at the pictures of the happy family.

One of the last times we read the Mommy book together, Maya really understood what was going on. She looked at the cover and I asked her what she saw. Maya said she saw a Mommy, another Mommy, and a little girl. At the end of the story, one of the Mommies gave the little girl a bath and Maya made a connection and stated that Daddy gives her a bath at night when Mommy is at work or class. I believe Maya was able to realize that the two Mommies in the book had the same roles as her own Mommy and Daddy.

The first time Maya and I read Daddy, Papa, and Me, she had a lot of the same reactions as she did with the Mommy book. She thought that on the cover of the book were a Daddy, a Grandpa, and a little boy. I explained to her that the little boy has two Daddies in this story. She asked where the Mommy was and I said that the little boy does not have a Mommy, but his two Daddies act like a Mommy and a Daddy in his family. While we were reading through the story, she loved the tea party because she has her own tea party set. She asked if she could have tea with her Daddy and her Grandpa later that night. At this point, I think that Maya was still confused about the fact that the little boy in the story had two Daddies and she was still seeing the concept as a Daddy and Grandpa.
The next time we read the Daddy book, I realized one reason why Maya could be getting confused with the Daddy and Grandpa issue. Maya calls one of her Grandpa’s in her own life “Papa”. One of the Dads in the story was called Papa as well, so Maya probably just associated the name with her Grandfather that she calls Papa. I then changed the name to “Dada” when reading her the story again and that definitely helped with the confusion.

The final time Maya and I read the Daddy book, she knew that there were two Daddies on the cover with their little boy. After the story I asked her what she thought about it and she said they all had fun and wanted to go night-night. Maya was able to see that this was just another family that loves each other and has fun together.

I really loved reading these stories with my daughter. I was not quite sure what to expect and how she would react to the concept, but she did wonderful! I feel that I opened the doors for Maya to see that there are many types of different families in our world. She was only aware of our family because that is all she has been exposed to so far. I would like to continue introducing new ideas and topics with my daughter as she gets older. If I find any more toddler books relating to the topic of same-sex families, I would definitely allow my daughter to explore and learn more about it!

My teaching methods and comfort levels have definitely been impacted through this project. Before learning about same-sex families, I would never want to teach these ideas in my classroom. I would feel very nervous and uncomfortable if I had a student with same-sex parents in my classroom and probably would have no idea how to handle the situation. Through my research, I gained confidence, knowledge, and acceptance to the topic of same-sex families. I found a wonderful resource that will definitely help me as a teacher to educate students about
same-sex families as well as make students in my classroom with same-sex parents feel welcome and accepted.

This experience really opened my eyes to the different types of social studies concepts in our world. Social studies always seemed to be my least enjoyed subject and I honestly do not remember much about it from when I was in school. Researching a civil rights topic through inquiry and doing a read aloud about the topic with my own daughter was just an amazing experience for me. I enjoyed learning about same-sex families with the struggles as well as accomplishments these groups of people have been through over the years. I feel that my daughter is also more aware of the concept of family and that it has many different forms. The overall theme I wanted Maya to understand through this project was that love is what makes a family. It does not matter if the family consists of a Mommy and a Daddy, two Mommies, two Daddies, single parents, Grandparents, or guardians. All that matters is everyone loves one another. That is family!
Chapter 10: Social Studies: Thoughts and Opinions of Others

Same gendered couples are still a controversial topic and issue throughout the country, but are starting to be addressed in schools. Many people have very different thoughts on the topic. Based on research, and people I spoke with and interviewed about the topic, the data reveals that students should be able to learn about a variety of families in school. Students all come from diverse families and should have their own family make-up in the school curriculum. Students who are not aware of same gendered families will have the opportunity to learn and understand a family different from their own. Below are two interviews I had with a middle school teacher and a social worker. Before the interview, I let each person look through and read five picture books about same-gendered families. The books were: Mommy, Mama, and Me, by Leslea Newman, Daddy, Papa, and Me, by Leslea Newman, And Tango Makes Three, by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell, Daddy’s Roommate, by Michael Willhoite and Daddy’s Wedding by Michael Willhoite. Each person interviewed was asked the same exact questions. The questions and responses are provided below.
Interview #1

Name: Kerrie Gianvecchio

Career: Social Worker

Education: Master’s Degree in Social Work

Questions & Answers:

1.) Q: What are your thoughts on same-gendered families?

   A: I think that as long as they are happy and in love that it is fine. If they love their
   children and are happy that is a family. That is all that matters. I would rather see a happy
   same-gendered family than an un-happy heterosexual family. I just think a family is a
   family. It does not matter how they are made up.

2.) Q: Do you feel the topic of same-gendered families should be included in the school
   curriculum? Why or why not?

   A: Yes. I do not have a problem with it at all. I do not want it to seem so different to
   children. I feel that all types of families should be recognized. The school does not have
   to single same-sex families out but they can talk about other types of families as well as
   same-sex families. Teachers should always talk about ALL families, not just the common
   types. There are so many types of families. Children could be raised by a grandparent,
   step parent, foster parent as well. Two Moms or two Dads are just another form of a
   family raising their children.
3.) Q: How do you think students would react to this topic in school?
   
   A: I think that elementary age students would probably be more accepting of everything that they would be talking about. It also depends what they have already heard about the topic from family or friends at home. Middle and high school age students would probably be difficult to talk about this topic. They might have negative attitudes because they are older and could think it is just a joke, or try to take it too far. They also could have more debates about the topic with one another and some students may already support same gendered families or remain against it.

4.) Q: After looking at the picture books of same-gendered families, how do you feel about children learning about this topic through picture books?
   
   A: The picture books definitely normalize it for the children. They are actually seeing it in a book so it is validating it to them and it is also done in a relatable way through a picture book. Children enjoy books and the stories explain the touchy subject in a calm and child-friendly way. It takes some of the pressure off by reading the stories to children rather than just sitting there and talking about it face to face which could be awkward or uncomfortable for some children. The books for very young children are great because it is not very forward and just simply shows a family with two Moms or two Dads having fun and doing things that any family would do. The kids could definitely relate to it.
5.) Q: Would these picture books help students understand and accept diverse families?
   A: Yes! They are a great way to introduce the topic to children of any age. When we can see it, read it and hear more about it then we will become accepting to it. Students can understand all types of cultures and families. It is best when they are educated about a topic rather than hearing things that may not even be true. Picture books are a wonderful start to a topic that is not so easy to discuss for many people.

Interview #2

Name: Anthony Gianvecchio

Career: Middle School Math Teacher

Education: Master’s in Secondary Education

Questions & Answers:

1.) Q: What are your thoughts on same-gendered families?
   A: I have nothing against them. People can do what they want to make them happy and that is all that matters. I feel that same-gendered families are starting to become more common because it is in the media more and many states are making it legal for same-gender couples to get married now. I am only concerned about the children that have same-gendered parents because they could get bullied or targeted in school since many
kids are uneducated about the topic. Students need to learn about it so the bullying and teasing can stop at an early age.

2.) Q: Do you feel the topic of same-gendered families should be included in the school curriculum? Why or why not?
A: Yes, I am not sure where or what subject, maybe Social Studies. But kids should definitely know that it exists. If they do not know anything about it, then they will just think that it is not right. It definitely needs to be involved in education so students can actually learn about it and understand the facts rather than what they may have heard. Even television could cause a bias and confuse students on the topic. Teachers do not have to say that same-gender families are right or wrong, but just state the facts so students know the truth. There should be no opinions involved in this topic. They need to understand that people will get married no matter what and there are a variety of couples and families.

3.) Q: How do you think students would react to this topic?
A: I think for elementary age students, the teacher would just have to explain first that they are going to talk about something serious and it is a mature topic. I think after they understand that it was serious, they would handle it fine. It is better to teach the students while they are young because they will be much more accepting to it than older students or adults even. I think that middle school age students would be the worst to talk about
this topic with. They won’t know how to react and cannot control their emotions. They would probably blurt things out without thinking because they are not mature. They might think it is a joke and start laughing. High school students might handle it better than middle school. They are more mature and older. They are in relationships at that age and may be able to understand or even relate to the topic if they have a friend or family member in a same-sex relationship. They could also have deeper discussions in class and ask meaningful questions.

4.) Q: After looking at the picture books of same-gendered families, how do you feel about children learning about this topic through picture books?
A: I think first of all you have to know your students and think how they will react and be prepared before beginning. I would want to start with the more subtle books about the topic to gradually introduce it in a mild way. They are also better for younger students as well so they are not confused from the start. The books are presented in a child-friendly way so they would not question it as much. The other two books (Daddy’s Roommate and Daddy’s Wedding) could cause some confusion because it was too direct, not subtle at all and I think that with this topic the kids need subtlety.

5.) Q: Would these picture books help children understand and accept diverse families?
A: Yes. Students would know that it exists and there are so many kinds of families in the world. If they happen to know someone with same-gendered parents, then they would have some knowledge and be more comfortable about the concept. The picture books are an excellent tool to help explain the topic to children. They are naturally drawn to books and it is a great conversation starter to introduce the discussion. The earlier students learn about it the better it will be in the long run. Teachers should absolutely start talking about the different types of families early on in a child’s education. The best way to understand and accept differences is to become educated first.

Summary

It was interesting to see that both the social worker and teacher felt mostly the same about same gendered families and including it in schools. They also both felt that the picture books would be an excellent tool and guide for children to better understand and relate to the families in the story. Depending on the age, there is a picture book for everyone about this topic. The board books can be used for very young children and toddlers even. It is never too soon to talk about diverse families with children. They will benefit from learning more about same-gendered families because they will be more accepting to all families. The only concern that both individuals stated after my interview was that the parents of students may not be comfortable with the topic and might be upset if their child is learning about it in school. The teacher could be in a tough situation but, hopefully parents will understand that their child should learn about all types of families and not just the “norm.” A family is a family, it doesn’t matter how they are made up, all that matters is they care and love one another.
Part Five: Social Studies Lesson Plans

Chapter 11: Lesson Plan before Changes

In this chapter, I will provide a current early childhood Social Studies lesson plan that is used in many classrooms today. This lesson will show the concepts and themes that children are taught in Social Studies, and will also show some important issues that are lacking. Below is a Kindergarten lesson on families: (Lesson plan used from Social Studies unit plan book: _Here we go: Kindergarten teacher's edition_, 2003)

Unit One: Our Big Book of Who We Are

**Lesson One**: Families

Time: 2 Days

Main Ideas: Children will identify a family unit and members of the family

Vocabulary: mother, father, brother, sister, family

Objectives: 1.) Describe aspects of a family. 2.) Identify ways in which people are alike and different. 3.) Identify individuals, such as parents, grandparents, guardians, and teachers, who are important children’s lives.
**Introduction:** Teacher reads the following, then again together as a class:

All that I am.
And all that I’ll be.
I learn from my friends and family.
I learn from school and the people I know.
I learn from most everywhere I go.
What will I learn next?
I’ll learn from the pages of a book.

**Class Songs:**

You Are My Mother (Sung to the tune of “You are my Sunshine”)

You are my mother, my dear, sweet mother.
You show you love me in many ways.
You give me hugs and lots of kisses,
Please know I love you every day.

Oh, My Daddy (Sung to the tune of “Clementine”)

Oh, my daddy. Oh, my daddy.
Oh, my very special dad,
I will always be so thankful,
For my very special dad.
-Teacher will have a discussion with the class and write on the white board:

My name is_______.

There are ____ people in my family.

One thing I like to do is______________.

My favorite thing at school is__________.

-Students will each have an opportunity to answer some or all of the questions.

-Next, the teacher will show pictures of families and also of Olivia and her family. Olivia has a mother, a father, a sister, a brother, and a grandmother. Children can talk about Olivia’s family and relate her family to the other pictures of families.

-Ask: What does a family mean? Have children think about their own families as they define the word. Call on children to name people in Olivia’s family such as mother, father, brother, sister.

Discuss:

-Show children pictures of other families and ask how this family is like Olivia’s family. How is it different? (Example: It has two grandparents and no baby).

-Which families have the most members?

-Which have the fewest members?

-Can only two people make a family?

-How do you think the family members feel about one another? Why do you think that?
Activity:

-Children will draw and label each member of their families on construction paper.

-Children will be able to bring in pictures of their family and share the drawing and the pictures as well and will hang around the room.

-As children talk about their family, encourage them to use vocabulary words mother, father, sister, brother.

Closing:

-Have children work in small groups to decide on a sentence that answers the lesson question *Who is in a family?* Children’s answers should suggest that families come in different sizes and that a family may include a mother, a father, one or more children, grandparents, and/or other relatives.

-Reteach: Have children identify the family members in one or more of the pictures.

-Extend: Find pictures of families. Have children find and cut out magazine pictures that show families. Include pictures of people from around the world. Have children sort the pictures to show large and small families. Ask children to suggest other ways the pictures might be sorted.

-Enrich: Provide self-stick notes on which teacher has printed the names of family members (mother, father, baby). As children identify family members in the pictures, they can stick the appropriate notes beside the pictures.
**Extension/Curriculum Connection:** Brother and Sister Graph

Objective: Construct graphs in order to answer questions

Materials: chart paper, pink and blue paper squares

Learning Style: Verbal/Logical/Visual

Group: 4 students

Time: 15-20 minutes

1.) Help children create a bar graph to show the number of brothers and sisters each has.

2.) Call on individuals to affix the appropriate number of blue (brother) and pink (sister) squares onto the graph.

3.) Ask questions based on the graph.

**Wrap Up**

This lesson is a nice way to introduce the topic of families in a kindergarten classroom, but is definitely lacking many important themes. Children do need to learn about mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers, but the lesson did not talk about varieties of families. The lesson just assumed that the normal family consists of a mother, father, brother, and sister. What about a mother, a mother, a sister and a brother? Or a Grandmother, a brother and a brother? The lesson failed to talk about different families in detail. One part of the lesson mentioned comparing and contrasting Olivia’s family, but only in regards to the amount of people in her family, not who was in the family. The following chapter will show this lesson modified and updated to fit the needs of *all* types of families.
Chapter 12: Lesson Plan after Changes

Unit One: Our Big Book of Who We Are

Lesson One: Families

Time: 2 Days

Main Ideas: Children will identify a family unit and members of the family

Vocabulary: mother, father, brother, sister, family, grandmother, grandfather

Objectives: 1.) Describe aspects of a family. 2.) Identify ways in which people are alike and different. 3.) Identify individuals, such as parents, grandparents, guardians, and teachers, who are important children’s lives. 4.) Discuss the different types of families

Introduction: Teacher reads the following, then again together as a class:

All that I am.
And all that I’ll be.
I learn from my friends and family.
I learn from school and the people I know.
I learn from most everywhere I go.
What will I learn next?
I’ll learn from the pages of a book.

-Teacher will have a discussion with the class and write on the white board:

My name is_______.

There are ____ people in my family.

One thing I like to do is____________.
My favorite thing at school is___________.

-Students will each have an opportunity to answer some or all of the questions.

-Next, the teacher will show pictures of families and also of Olivia and her family. Olivia has a mother, a father, a sister, a brother, and a grandmother. Children can talk about Olivia’s family and relate her family to the other pictures of families.

-Pictures of the families the teacher will show:
-Ask: What does a family mean? How are the family members in these pictures? Have children think about their own families as they define the word. Call on children to name people in the families shown such as mother, father, mothers, fathers, brother, sister, grandmother, grandfather.

**Discuss:**

-Show children pictures of other families and ask how this family is like Olivia’s family. How is it different? (Example: It has two mothers, two fathers, one parent, grandparents, etc)

-Which families have the most members?

-Which have the fewest members?

-Can only two people make a family?

-How do you think the family members feel about one another? Why do you think that?
Class Songs:

*You Are My Mothers* (Sung to the tune of “You are My Sunshine”) *Same gender family version, came from original lesson plan but I added “Mothers” rather than just “Mother” to include children with two mothers*

You are my mothers, my dear, sweet mothers
You show you love me in many ways
You give me hugs and lots of kisses,
Please know I love you every day.

*Oh, My Daddies* (Sung to the tune of “Clementine”) *Same gender family version, came from original lesson plan but I added “Daddies” rather than just “Daddy” to include children with two fathers*

Oh, my daddies. Oh, my daddies.
Oh, my very special dads,
I will always be so thankful,
For my very special dads.

*Moms and Dads* (Sung to the tune of “Jingle Bells”) *Same gender family version that I created to include children with two Moms or two Dads*

I have two Moms, I have two Dads
And they love me very much
Oh, what fun it is to have a special family, Yay!
**Moms and Dads** (Sung to the tune of “Jingle Bells”) *Heterosexual family version that I created*

I have a Mom, I have a Dad  
And they love me very much  
Oh, what fun it is to have a special family, Yay!

**You Are My Mother** (Sung to the tune of “You are my Sunshine”) *Heterosexual family version, from the original lesson plan*

You are my mother, my dear, sweet mother.  
You show you love me in many ways.  
You give me hugs and lots of kisses,  
Please know I love you every day.

**Oh, My Daddy** (Sung to the tune of “Clementine”) *Heterosexual family version, from the original lesson plan*

Oh, my daddy. Oh, my daddy.  
Oh, my very special dad,  
I will always be so thankful,  
For my very special dad.
Activity:
-The teacher will read the book *Mommy, Mama and Me* by Leslea Newman and *Daddy, Papa and Me* by Leslea Newman.

-Talk with the class about the child that has two mothers and the child that has two fathers.

-Ask the class if that is a family too and explain that families can be made up of many different kinds of people.

-Allow children to share thoughts, feelings or questions related to the stories about two mothers or two fathers in a family.

-Next, children will draw and label each member of their own families on construction paper.

-Children will be able to bring in actual pictures of their family and share the drawing and the pictures and hang around the room to show all the different types of families in the classroom.
-As children talk about their family, encourage them to use vocabulary words mother, father, sister, brother, grandmother, grandfather.

**Closing:**

-Have children work in small groups to decide on a sentence that answers the lesson question *Who is in a family?* Children’s answers should suggest that families come in different sizes and that a family may include a mother, a father, two mothers, two fathers, one or more children, grandparents, and/or other relatives.

-Reteach: Have children identify the family members in one or more of the pictures.

-Extend: Find pictures of families. Have children find and cut out magazine pictures that show families. Include pictures of people from around the world, families with a mother and a father, families with two mothers, families with two fathers, families with only a mother, families with only a father, multicultural families, mixed race families, etc. Have children sort the pictures to show large and small families. Ask children to suggest other ways the pictures might be sorted.

-Enrich: Provide self-stick notes on which teacher has printed the names of family members (mother, father, baby). As children identify family members in the pictures, they can stick the appropriate notes beside the pictures.

**Extension/Curriculum Connection:** Family Graph

Objective: Construct graphs in order to answer questions
Materials: chart paper, different colored squares

Learning Style: Verbal/Logical/Visual

Group: 4 students

Time: 15-20 minutes

1.) Help children create a bar graph to show the number of family members each has.

2.) Call on individuals to affix the appropriate number of squares onto the graph.

3.) Ask questions based on the graph.

Conclusion

This lesson plan is similar to the original, except it is no longer lacking the variety of diverse and alternative families. Right from the start, the students are introduced to many different types of families by observing the pictures and having a discussion with the teacher. This could be the first time some of the children have seen a family that consists of two mothers or two fathers. It is an excellent time to talk about diverse families and connect it into the original lesson on families in general. This topic does not have to be singled out, and can easily be integrated into any lesson already in the curriculum. The children will then dive deeper into
the subject by listening to the picture books about two different families: one family that has two mothers, and one family that has two fathers. Both books show all the fun activities that the families do together. Children can ask questions and learn more about a family different or similar to their own. There may even be a child in the class that has a family like in the picture books and would like to share more or talk about their family with the class. Children learning from a child first hand would be a wonderful opportunity. The parents of the child may even want to come in one day and talk to the students to help them learn more about alternative families.

The songs in the lesson can be easily geared to fit the diverse needs of the children in the class. Teachers can get creative and make up fun songs about families for the children to sing along to and relate to their own family. Lastly, I changed the graph around from a brother and sister graph to a family graph. Some students may not have any brothers or sisters but everyone in the classroom has a family. I also changed the colors from blue and pink to any assortment of colors. The gender color bias should not have an effect in the lesson because not all boys like blue and not all girls like pink. The graph is still connected to families and integrating math into the lesson as well in a way that can reach out to all the students in the classroom. This was an example of just one kindergarten Social Studies lesson plan that I changed around to incorporate the important themes of diverse families. Children of all ages should be exposed to diverse and alternative families in schools and picture books provide the opportunity to open up the discussions. Education has the power to change the world one lesson at a time!
Beneficial Resource for Educators

In my research, I came across an extremely useful resource for current and future teachers. When discussing and teaching the concepts of same gendered families, some people may feel nervous or uncomfortable at first. The resource that I came across is very helpful for teachers and also parents as well. It discusses how same gendered parents feel, how educators feel and also how the children feel. There are facts, fictions and fears about same gendered families addressed, questions and answers, rights and responsibilities, a glossary of terms and additional resources for families and educators as well. The booklet is titled, “Opening Doors: Lesbian and Gay Parents and Schools” by Aimee Gelnaw, Margie Brickley, Hilary Marsh and Daniel Ryan. It can be found on the internet at:


I highly recommend any educator to look at this booklet because in our teaching careers, we will be teaching a child with same gender parents.
References


(n.d.). *Getting the most out of picture books.* Retrieved from [www.bookpeopleunite.org](http://www.bookpeopleunite.org)


