

## VIVA LA DIFFERENCE: EXPLORING LGBTIQ DIVERSITY IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM

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*Dr Lorri Beveridge, Michael Murray and Hannah Gillard explore the high gravitas and practicalities of raising awareness of intersex, sexuality and gender diverse people in the primary classroom through teaching LGBTIQ literature.<sup>1</sup> Teaching students LGBTIQ texts can better address students' academic and emotional needs...*

### SETTING THE SCENE

The scene is a Year 6 classroom. The lesson is a novella study of a text dealing with racism, *Mrs Whitlam* (Pascoe, 2016). Increasingly, deep and significant class discussions are sprouting and intertwining, making the text come alive, resulting in high student engagement, that oftentimes occurs when teachers draw on quality texts in the teaching of English. Defined by Ewing, Callow and Rushton (2016, p103), quality texts are those that engage students and teachers alike, are rich in language and imagery, multi-layered and evoke a range of different communities and responses. Conversations about quality texts allow children to dive into rabbit-holes, to engage in complex and nuanced conversations they might not be exposed to inside and/or outside school, yet are so crucially important to their young lives. These conversations help children to make sense of their world in an open way, as they explore issues dialogically through the eyes of characters in texts, fostering positive wellbeing, at a safe distance. *Mrs Whitlam* narrates the struggles of an adolescent girl, tussling against covert racism in her daily life. The teacher in the Year 6 classroom steers the class to strengthen meaning through the complex interplay of context, narrative and character. One eloquent class member contributes at length regarding a particularly relevant aspect of the text. To encourage continuation of the important conversation string, the teacher reflects to the class, "She said, ...".

The student promptly responds, "I am a boy", in a matter-of-fact way. Surprisingly, there is no reaction from the class. The teacher apologises profusely and moves the lesson right along.

The above narrative is a real-life example of a teacher feeling under-confident and underprepared to correctly address transgender and gender diverse students in the classroom. In this paper, we argue that teaching quality LGBTIQ literature can open up an exploratory and open space for students and teachers to learn about intersex identities, and sexuality and gender diversity. Teaching these modes of diversity through literature means intersex identities and gender and sexuality diversity can be explored in a way that involves all students (those within and outside LGBTIQ communities) so that LGBTIQ students don't feel singled out and confronted in the classroom due to questions or speculations about their difference. Teaching LGBTIQ texts can help make school a safer environment for LGBTIQ students, as well as their friends and family more broadly.

### WHY PRIMARY SCHOOLS SHOULD SUPPORT LGBTIQ STUDENTS AND ADDRESS INTERSEX IDENTITIES, AND SEXUALITY AND GENDER DIVERSITY

It is a reasonable expectation that LGBTIQ positive content is provided to children so they feel supported, and also so they can envision sexuality and gender diversity, for instance, as positive potentialities for themselves.

A related reason to teach LGBTIQ literature is the confronting, unacceptable and possibly all-too-familiar narrative of a child being misgendered in a classroom, which is a timely reminder to educators to reflect on how we support transgender and gender diverse students and their families. We may not be providing these students with the attention they require, and deserve, to set them up for success at school. The idiomatic expression, "viva la difference", attributed to

the French resistance movement (Vernet, 1992), encourages us to celebrate difference and diversity. Yet academic research ubiquitously points the finger at insensitive education systems, including a lack of LGBTIQ support, failure to recognise transgender identity, bullying and victimisation. These are widely regarded as contributing factors to spiralling youth suicide rates (Gorse, 2020; Lee & Wong, 2020; Turban & Ehrensaft, 2017).

Paediatric gender diversity is a burgeoning area of research (Ehrensaft, 2020; Ristori & Steensma, 2017; Henderson, 2016). Young children who are transgender or gender diverse also suffer from anxiety, depression and suicidality. A recent Canadian parent-report study (MacMullin, 2020) found that 9.1% of 6-12 year olds who expressed gender non-conformity had attempted suicide or self-harm. What is particularly notable in Australia is the *marked* scarcity of data on suicide and mental health for young people who are Indigenous and LGBTIQ (Henningham, 2021 p14; Rhodes and Byrne, 2021 p34). Scholar Mandy Henningham says this requires further research to recognise the impact of factors like intergenerational trauma and institutionalised racism on health outcomes for LGBTIQ and Indigenous young people (Henningham, 2021 p14). In recognising the poorer health outcomes for many LGBTIQ young people (and the need for more research), we as educators can assist LGBTIQ children and their families by creating inclusive school communities underpinned by values such as respect, acceptance (as opposed to tolerance) and honesty.

In failing to address the learning and wellbeing needs of LGBTIQ students, we are espousing a particular, mostly unintended, point of view, relegating our LGBTIQ students to the null curriculum, often referred to as the hidden curriculum (Kazeemi et al, 2020; Banja, 2020; Eisner, 1994). Schools socialise students in ways that are viewed as educationally significant, including shared values, images and beliefs (Eisner, 1994). The null curriculum is that which is not taught at school, important due to its conspiracy of silence. Pedagogy around intersex people, and those who are gender and sexuality diverse may indeed be regarded as part of the null curriculum. LGBTIQ diversity may be an uncomfortable subject for many educators to address.

The null curriculum implies that being heterosexual and 'cisgender' (a term meaning not transgender) is normal and being LGBTIQ is abnormal. Promoting awareness of sexuality and gender diversity reduces anti-LGBTIQ stereotypes, bullying and violence against LGBTIQ students.

Mel Smith (2020) argues that public schools are fundamentally, and necessarily, inclusive and have a particular responsibility to recognise and represent the diversity of their communities in the ways they plan and execute schooling. This responsibility does not begin in high school. According to Smith, 'the need to also incorporate LGBTIQ inclusive topics in the curriculum in primary schools is highlighted by the fact that at least half same sex attracted young people realise their attraction while in primary school (Hiller et al., 2013), and that there are often rainbow families that are not recognised, or acknowledged, in the stories that are read or the content that is covered in class'.

### **PRACTICAL WAYS PRIMARY SCHOOLS CAN SUPPORT LGBTIQ STUDENTS AND ADDRESS LGBTIQ DIVERSITY**

It takes a village to raise a child, according to an African proverb. Similarly, it takes a whole community to support LGBTIQ students in schools. We can collectively create inclusive school communities by focusing on a number of key strategies:

- Neither endorse nor empower heteronormativity<sup>2</sup> or gender stereotyping<sup>3</sup>. Create spaces for discussion about being intersex, and gender and sexuality diverse. Encourage class conversations about LGBTIQ issues in ways that students can connect with, for example, relations with family. This can be achieved by making conscious decisions about what stories to read to children, setting up classrooms and school routines free of gender constraints, including enabling students to wear the school uniform they want. If teachers fail to discuss intersex identities, and sexuality and gender diversity, many students will go unsupported and find fitting in socially at school challenging. A culture of care and inclusion is necessary for successful school performance.

- Explore LGBTIQ matters with young children in a safe, familiar space by reading books that reflect different family compositions, including LGBTIQ families, exploring classroom resources from a human rights perspective. In doing so, students learn that all families are special and to value diversity in our society. Students and their families have a right to see themselves reflected in books and other resources used in classrooms.
- Ensure staff are well-informed and have access to, and opportunities to discuss, research-based articles about bullying, and LGBTIQ students. Professional learning provides teachers with methods to intervene and de-escalate threatening situations. Teachers need to know they will be supported because teaching content on intersex identities, and gender and sexuality diversity, is regarded as controversial by some sectors in society. That said, some students and families do not identify with the nuclear family and deserve to read about families similar to their own. Teachers need to know that they have the support of school leaders when intervening in challenging situations. Together, teachers and school leaders play an important role in challenging phobias against LGBTQ people and bullying in schools, providing support to our LGBTIQ students and their families.
- Address issues of phobia against LGBTIQ students as a high priority. There is staff agreement that inappropriate language will not be tolerated, and staff will intervene to protect students from bullying and homophobia. Leadership attitudes are identified as the most influential factor in keeping LGBTIQ students safe at school. School leaders contribute to moral purpose in their schools and the wider community.
- Seek feedback from openly LGBTIQ students as to whether they feel safe at school. Interview parents, counsellors, psychologists and students themselves as to how to support LGBTQ students and what assistance they require to succeed at school. (DeJean & Sapp, 2017; Dewitt, 2012)

In addition to the points raised above, we make two other important suggestions about how primary schools can be more LGBTIQ inclusive. Firstly, when developing curriculum for LGBTIQ topics and when teaching this content, teachers and education departments should be aware that there are often specialist groups and resources that should be consulted in relation to different parts of LGBTIQ communities. This is important given the distinctiveness of identities and issues faced in intersex, and gender and sexuality diverse communities. Finding out which groups and resources to consult can be facilitated by online searches, reading LGBTIQ media, attending LGBTIQ events as well as consulting with LGBTIQ groups and community members. The importance of consulting specific communities when teaching and developing curriculum is emphasised by intersex activists in the Darlington Statement- a document published by intersex activists in 2017. Here, they, ‘call on education and awareness providers to develop content with intersex-led organisations and promote delivery by intersex people’ (p8). Notably, Intersex Human Rights Australia (2021) and Intersex Peer Support Australia (n.d.) are both specialist intersex groups in the Australian context that provide things like resources, information and support regarding intersex identities. Teachers and education departments being consultative, and recognising the specificity of experiences in LGBTIQ communities, is a practical way they can make primary schools more LGBTIQ inclusive.

Secondly, to make primary schools more LGBTIQ friendly, primary educators should include content that recognises the way LGBTIQ identities intersect and overlap with multiple forms of minoritised difference - for instance, being a young person who is part of LGBTIQ and Indigenous communities in Australia (Rhodes and Byrne 2021, p30). Research by David Rhodes and Matt Byrne shows a lack of attention is paid to being LGBTIQ and Indigenous in the education of primary teachers and students in Australia. Given the specificity of being part of both LGBTIQ and Indigenous communities, and the importance of educating children about Indigenous histories and cultures, teaching children about the particularities of LGBTIQ and Indigenous experiences is crucial. Understandably, Rhodes and Byrne note this

practice should be backed by the inclusion of non-tokenistic content covering the intersection of LGBTIQ and Indigenous experiences in the tertiary courses for primary teaching. In addition to this, they argue for, inter alia, the amendment of school and education department policies to speak to this intersection (Rhodes and Byrne 2021, pp37-38). One cost of not educating students about LGBTIQ and Indigenous identities is the potential siloing of minoritised difference, which can perpetuate the idea that being LGBTIQ and Indigenous, for instance, are mutually exclusive<sup>4</sup>. Writers who are part of LGBTIQ and Indigenous communities, like Maddee Clark and Mandy Henningham, have identified this stereotype as a serious issue (Clark 2014 quoted in Henningham 2019, pp101-102; Clark 2014 quoted in Henningham 2021, p12). For instance, drawing on the work of Maddee Clark, Henningham highlights the way Clark was questioned about the very existence of people who were both LGBTIQ and Indigenous (Clark 2014 quoted in Henningham 2021, p12). When teaching about LGBTIQ experiences at the primary level, education should be inclusive of the way gender and sexuality diversity, for instance, intersect with cultural and racial difference, to reflect the realities of young people's lives.

### CURRICULUM LINKS

The NSW PDHPE curriculum (NESA, 2019) addresses LGBTIQ students indirectly. Outcome PDe-1 – 5-1 relates to characteristics that make us similar and different, and how we manage personal challenges as they arise. PDe-1 – 5-2 relates to feeling safe and strategies to support self and others. Following on from here, PDe-6 – 5-6 deals with the importance of context in health and wellbeing. Similarly, PDe-7 – 5-7 describes actions that promote health, safety and wellbeing. In these COVID times, there has been a particular focus on student wellbeing, which coheres with addressing gender diversity at school.

The NSW English curriculum (NESA, 2012, 2019) also provides space for teachers to address issues of gender diversity in the classroom. Objective D, in particular, states that students will develop knowledge, understanding and skills in order to 'express themselves and their relationships with others and their world'. The

outcome for Stage 1 (Years 1-2) that occupies Objective D, EN1-11D, requires that a student 'responds to and composes a range of texts about familiar aspects of the world and their own experiences', including of course the LGBTIQ student's own experience of family. By Stage 2 (Years 3-4), the equivalent outcome, EN2-11D, extends this challenge to composing and responding to texts 'that express viewpoints of the world similar to and different from their own', indicating that by this stage students could be exposed, through texts, to experiences of gender that might be different to their own. For Stage 3 (Years 5-6), EN3-8D requires that a student considers how 'different viewpoints of their world, including aspects of culture, are represented in texts'. Gender diversity, an essential aspect of culture, falls neatly into the gamut of 'different viewpoints', but this outcome is a reminder that in English it is not gender diversity itself which is the focus but rather how gender diversity is represented in texts. Concepts endorsed in the English conceptual framework (NSW DoE & ETA, 2017), co-developed by the English Teachers Association NSW and the NSW Department of Education that support a focus on gender diversity, include narrative, character, context, representation, perspective, and point of view. Clearly the study of English in primary school provides rich opportunities for students to learn about gender diversity in relation to themselves, each other, and the world at large.

Even the new skills-oriented K-2 English syllabus (NESA, 2021), recently released but not due for mandatory implementation until 2023, recognises the diversity of learners in the classroom and requires that students 'identify aspects of their own world represented in texts' (Early Stage 1) and 'identify representations of groups and cultures in a range of texts' (Stage 1). The rationale of the English K-2 syllabus (2021) states 'students are to engage with Australian diversity by exploring a range of texts ... and a range of linguistic, cultural and social perspectives' (NESA, p9). By engaging with diverse literature, students feel empowered to express their identities, broadening their perspectives and world views.

Significantly, all curriculum documents in NSW schools (e.g. NESA, 2019) contain learning across the curriculum content, including cross-curriculum priorities, and general capabilities, areas that are embedded in all key learning areas, identified as essential learning for all students. Teaching students about LGBTIQ diversity in the primary classroom is supported, identified and incorporated by the following learning across the curriculum content. The icons below are visual symbols that identify the particular content embedded across the various syllabi:

- Cross curriculum priority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
- General capabilities of critical and creative thinking, ethical understanding, intercultural understanding and personal and social capability
- Additionally, other learning across the curriculum area of difference and diversity

The cross-curriculum priorities and capabilities, identified above, exemplify the high gravitas of learning about LGBTIQ diversity in primary classrooms. They are identified throughout our syllabus documents as important learning for all students.

### **TEXTS THAT ADDRESS LGBTIQ DIVERSITY AND IDEAS FOR THEIR USE IN THE PRIMARY CLASSROOM**

Books hook us in, and it is our challenge as educators to ensure that “the right book falls into the right hands” (Old Souls Book Club, 2021). Age-appropriate books, that depict LGBTIQ characters and families woven into their storylines, expose students to the diversity of the real world. Similarly, texts that empower students to stand up for themselves and others help children to learn coping skills that assist them in dealing with situations of homophobia and bullying. Quality literature provides a safe space to expose students to LGBTIQ related topics, which some might regard as controversial, in thought-provoking ways. Schools can play an important role in countering anti-LGBTIQ sentiment and lead the way towards a better world for everyone.

Reading a great book and identifying with its characters is an enjoyable and powerful means of opening up

conversational spaces with students. Many of the texts traditionally used in classrooms contain heterosexual and cisgender characters and images. LGBTIQ students do not see themselves or their families reflected in these texts. By drawing on texts that include LGBTIQ characters and non-traditional family structures, these students see mirrors of themselves. Characters are more relatable to them. Teachers are promoting self-acceptance in gender diverse students, and increased awareness in all students, curbing anti-LGBTIQ stereotypes and reducing bullying and violence against LGBTIQ students.

Appendix 1 below lists a wide range of texts for primary-aged children that address gender, sexuality and family diversity, including suggested links to the NSW curriculum, particularly English. It also provides an overview for teachers to assist them in selecting texts that address the wellbeing needs of students in their classrooms. These texts could form the basis of English units, focusing on concepts of narrative, character, context, theme and representation, perspective or point of view. Outcomes and content from other subjects, especially PDHPE, could be incorporated into these units. Note that while PDHPE curriculum fails to directly address issues related LGBTIQ experiences, there is enough scope in this syllabus to justify the inclusion of content that might promote learning for all students in relation to LGBTIQ diversity.

The books listed in Appendix 1 are but some of the vibrant LGBTIQ young people’s literature available, and we encourage teachers to be on the lookout for other age appropriate LGBTIQ texts they could teach. We encourage teachers to stay attuned for primary school texts that feature intersex identities, and that speak to the intersection between Indigenous and LGBTIQ experiences in Australia, so that students who occupy these identities can see themselves represented and feel included.

Whilst not a primary school text, we would like to highlight the recently released book *The Boy from The Mish* by Gary Lonesborough by Gary Lonesborough (2021) for exploring the intersection of Indigenous and LGBTIQ+ communities



The book is a queer Indigenous novel for readers 14 and up about a 17-year-old exploring his identity in a rural community of Australia. Finding and teaching texts that speak to the diversity of LGBTIQ experiences is crucial so that students and teachers can appreciate the heterogeneity of LGBTIQ communities.

curriculum relevant to that community. Additionally, education scholars David Rhodes and Matt Byrne have highlighted an array of opportunities for improving the primary school experience for teachers and students who are part of both Indigenous and LGBTIQ communities (Rhodes and Byrne 2021). This includes embedding teaching about the intersection of these identities in the university education of primary school teachers, and the modification of school and education department policies to recognise the experiences of those who are LGBTIQ and Indigenous (Rhodes and Byrne 2021, p.38-39). Doing so would improve pedagogy and encourage the celebration of 'diversity in all its forms' (Rhodes and Byrne, 2021 p.38).

## CONCLUSION

As can be seen through the narrative of the child being misgendered by a teacher at the beginning of this paper, it is crucial there is greater awareness and understanding of LGBTIQ issues within primary classrooms. Teaching students LGBTIQ literature, such as the texts that we have included in our appendix, in an accepting way creates an open, explorative space where children and teachers can be educated about intersex identities, and gender and sexuality diversity. As stated, we recommend teachers stay on the lookout for texts that address the multiplicity of LGBTIQ experiences - for instance, being Indigenous and sexuality and gender diverse. Teaching LGBTIQ texts is particularly important given the way LGBTIQ literature has been described as being part of the 'null' or 'hidden' curriculum' in schools. The invisibility of the diversity of LGBTIQ experiences can perpetuate heteronormative biases in teaching, which can result in children being unaware that being a part of the LGBTIQ community is a positive potentiality for them - one life course amongst many that is legitimate and that they can be proud of. Providing students with the opportunity to explore LGBTIQ experiences in an open, explorative way through texts is a positive move in the direction towards promoting better health and wellbeing outcomes for LGBTIQ students and teachers.

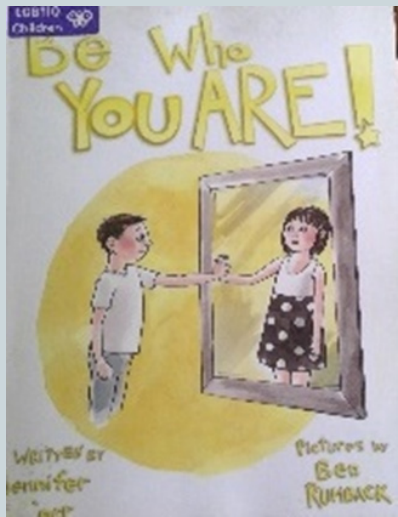
While this paper explores the power of literature to educate about LGBTIQ experiences, it is one change amongst many that could occur to make primary schools more LGBTIQ inclusive. For instance, we have discussed the importance of consulting with intersex communities regarding the development of educational

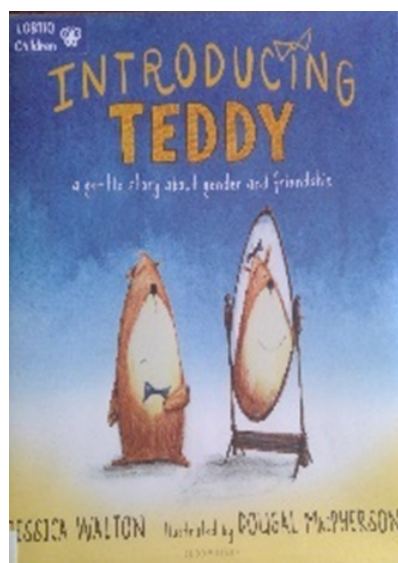
## ENDNOTES

- 1 'LGBTIQ+' is an acronym that popularly stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and more (signified through the '+'). The '+' is intended to be inclusive of gender and sexuality diverse identities not explicitly or fully represented by the letters 'LGBTIQ'.
- 2 Heteronormativity refers to the belief that heterosexuality, along with other dominant identities like being cisgender, are the default, preferred, or normal modes of being
- 3 Gender stereotyping is the propensity to evaluate people on the basis of their perceived gender
- 4 Numerous writers have explored how sexuality and gender diversity is something that has existed in Indigenous cultures in Australia since before colonisation (for instance, see Moon 2020; Riggs & Toone, 2017 quoted in Henningham 2019, p.103). Texts such as *Colouring the Rainbow: Blak Queer and Trans Perspectives. Life Stories and Essays* by First Nations People of Australia (2015), edited by Dino Hodge, is an important anthology that explores contemporary Indigenous, queer and trans experiences.

## APPENDIX 1

Texts that address gender and family diversity in the primary classroom.

TEXTS	CURRICULUM LINKS	OVERVIEW
 <p>Carr, J. &amp; Rumback, B. (2015). <i>Be Who You Are</i>. Bloomington, Indiana: Authorhouse.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suitable S1, S2.</li> <li>• PDe-1 identify who they are</li> <li>• PD1-1 describe characteristics that make us similar / different</li> <li>• PD2-1 explore strategies to manage physical, social, and emotiona change</li> <li>• English K-2 (2021): ENE, EN1-OCL-01; ENE, EN1-UARL-01</li> </ul>	<p>A child is born into the wrong body - one that doesn't match the gender the child feels inside. Assigned male at birth, the child is described as having a "girl brain". This book is designed to educate readers about gender diverse and transgender children.</p>



Walton, J. & McPherson, D. (2016). *Introducing Teddy: a gentle story about gender and friendship*. London, UK: Bloomsbury.

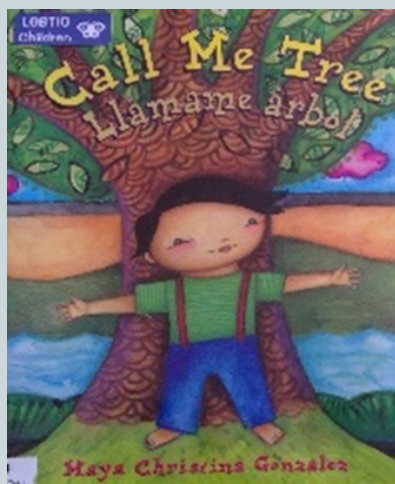
- Suitable ES1, S1.
- Useful text to discuss complex issues. The bear is the main character who is exploring gender identity in the text. Useful to act out and facilitate class discussion.
- English K-2 (2021):ENE, EN1-OLC-01; ENE, EN1-UARL-01

The main character is a teddy whose outside does not match what's felt on the inside. A story about being true to self, friendship and acceptance. "Wear whatever makes you happy" is the main message of the text.

**TEXTS**

**CURRICULUM LINKS**

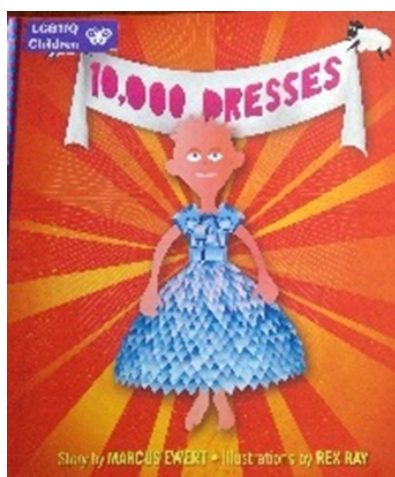
**OVERVIEW**



Gonzalas, M. (2014). *Call Me Tree. Llamame árbol*. San Francisco, CAL: Children's Book Press.

- Suitable ES1, S1.
- Multicultural text. English/Spanish vocabulary.
- Useful for teaching figurative language including metaphor, simile, personification. Also rhetorical questions.
- English K-2 (2021): ENE, EN1-CWT-01; ENE, EN1-UARL-01

The text figuratively describes a child growing from a seed, like a tree. "A seed, a tree, free to be me". The inspiring text encourages readers to reach for their dreams and accept themselves for who they are.



Ewert, M. & Ray, R. (2008). *10,000 Dresses*. NY: Seven Stories Press.

- Suitable S1, S2; possibly S3.
- The changing use of personal pronouns when referring to transgender and gender diverse people.
- English K-2 (2021): ENE, EN1-CWT-01
- English K-6 (2012): EN2-9B; EN3-6B.

Bailey is assigned male at birth but wishes to wear dresses-something others have told him boys can't do. Bailey struggles when her family won't accept her gender and dress preferences. She finally finds a friend who helps her feel confident in pursuing her dream to wear dresses and express her true identity.



**TEXTS**

**CURRICULUM LINKS**

**OVERVIEW**

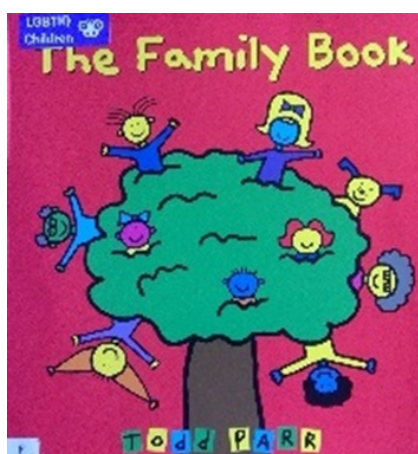


Valentine, J. & Schmidt, L. (2004). *The Daddy Machine*. Boston, Mass: Alyson Wonderland Publishers.

- Suitable S1, S2; possibly S3.
- A useful text to teach code and convention including punctuation, speech marks, sentence complexity.
- English K-2 (2021): ENE, EN1-CWT-01
- English K-6 (2012): EN2-9B; EN3-6B.

Two siblings with two mums long for a father. They make a daddy machine out of junk materials and make many more daddies than they bargain for. How do they solve their problem?

An extremely funny text.



Parr, T. (2010). *The Family Book*. NY: Hachette Book Group.

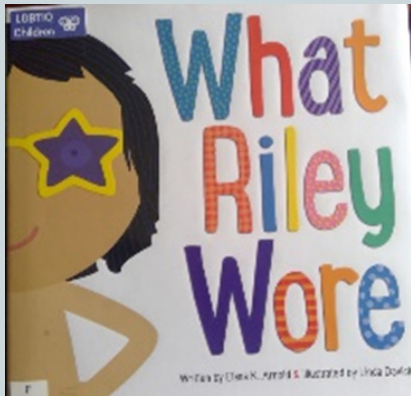
- ES1, S1.
- Identifying words describing diverse families e.g. “Some families have two mums and two dads”.
- English K-2 (2021): ENE, EN1-VOCAB-01; ENE, EN1-OLC-01.

There are different kinds of families. Bright, fluoro colours characterise the illustrations in this simple text. The book has multiple layers of meaning. A lot of information is inferred in few words. It is a useful text to discuss family diversity with young children.

**TEXTS**

**CURRICULUM LINKS**

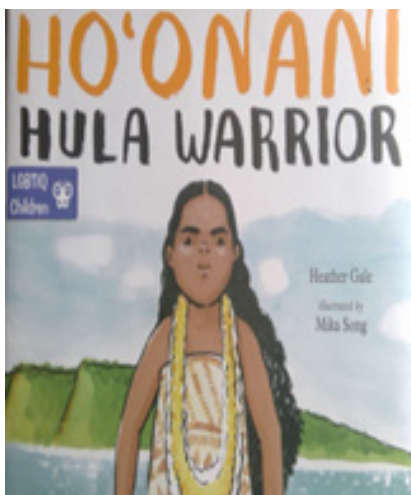
**OVERVIEW**



Arnold, E.K. & Davick, L. (2019). *What Riley wore*. NY: Beach Lane books.

- ES1, S1.
- Vocabulary- building word banks from illustrations.
- Discussion questions:
  - How is Riley different?
  - How does this make others feel in the text?
  - How does it make you feel?
- English K-2 (2021): ENE, EN1-VOCAB-01; ENE, EN1-OLC-01.

“Are you a boy or a girl?” the reader ponders throughout the text. Riley replies, “Today I’m a firefighter and a dancer and a monster hunter and a...”. Riley dresses according to how they are feeling, irrespective of gender expectations. The message of the text is, “We are all unique and important. It doesn’t matter whether we are a boy or a girl”. This text is a celebration of difference.



Gale, H. & Song, M. (2019). *Ho’Onani Hula Warrior*. NY: Tundra Books.

- ES1, S1, S2.
- Multicultural text. Links to History syllbus:
  - share heritage stories (ES1)
  - investigate changes in family life (S1)
  - identify traces of the past in the present (S2).
- English K-2 (2021): ENE, EN1-OLC-01; ENE, EN1-UARL-01; ENE, EN1-VOCAB-01.
- English K-6 (2012): EN2-9B; EN2-10C.

The protagonist doesn’t see herself as a boy or a girl, but occupies “a place in the middle”. She queries gender stereotypes and triumphs in a contemporary setting relevant to students today.

The story is consistent with “Mahu” people in Hawaiian culture, who embrace both male and female traits.

The theme of the text is “show respect for all people”.

**TEXTS**

**CURRICULUM LINKS**

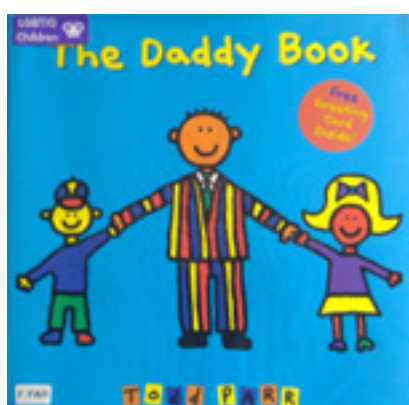
**OVERVIEW**



Willhoite, M. (1991). *Daddy's Roommate*. Boston, Mass: Alyson Wonderland Books.

- ES1, S1.
- Large, colourful illustrations which lend themselves to teaching visual literacy.
- Discussion questions:
  - What is happening in the pictures?
  - What stands out? Why?
  - What feelings are portrayed in the illustrations? How do you know?
- English K-2 (2021): ENE, EN1-OLC-01; ENE, EN1-UARL-01.

A social story which opens a communicative space about divorce and a child's growing understanding of homosexual love. "Being gay is one more form of love" and "Love is the best kind of happiness" are the main messages of the text.



Parr, T. (2010). *The Daddy Book*. NY: Hachette Book Group.

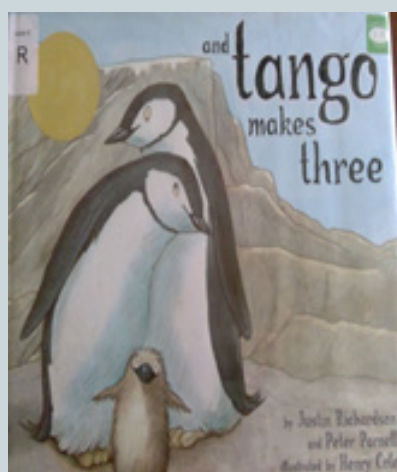
- ES1, S1.
- Sentence building describing the diversity (and similarities) of fathers e.g. "My/ your daddy has...".
- English K-2 (2021): ENE, EN1-OLC-01; ENE, EN1-UARL-01; ENE, EN1-CWT-01.

This book is about fathers who do different things with their children. Bright, fluoro colours in illustrations. Simple text. Multiple layers of meaning. A lot inferred in few words. The theme of the text is celebrating family diversity.

**TEXTS**

**CURRICULUM LINKS**

**OVERVIEW**



Richardson, J., Parnell, P. & Cole, H. (2005). *And Tango Makes Three*. NY: Simon & Schuster.

- Suitable S1, S2.
- Discussion: Do the two daddy penguins act the same way as other penguin parents? How are they the same/ different?
- English K-2 (2021): ENE, EN1-VOCAB-01 ENE, EN1-SPELL-01 prefixes, suffixes compound words ENE, EN1-UARL-01.

This is a true story of two male chinstrap penguins who live at the Central Park Zoo, NY, and raise a penguin chick together.

It raises questions about heterosexuality/homosexuality in the animal kingdom and how this might relate to humans.

New vocabulary: carousel, cotton top tamarin, ice rink, red panda bear.



Newman, L. & Cornell, L. (2015). *Heather Has Two Mummies*. London: Walker Books.

- Suitable ES1.
- Starting School
- English K-2 (2021): ENE, EN1-OLC-01; ENE, EN1-UARL-01; ENE, EN1-CWT-01.
- CAe3MVA makes artworks... to communicate ideas; CAe4IVA explores how artworks and the artwork of others communicate ideas.

A useful discussion starter about starting school and learning about other peoples' families. The setting of the text is a family consisting of two mums and a 5-year-old child who is starting school. At kindergarten, the children paint their families as an introduction to a lesson about family diversity. The main focus of the text is that each family is special, and the common link is that families love each other.

**TEXTS**

**CURRICULUM LINKS**

**OVERVIEW**



Savage, S. & Fisher, F. (2017). *Are You a Boy or a Girl?* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

- Suitable S1, S2.
- English K-2 (2021): EN1-OLC-01; EN1-UARL-01; EN1-CWT-01. Use background knowledge of a topic to make inferences about the ideas in a text. Identify text connectives, cohesive links in text.
- English K-6 (2012): EN2-11D. Responds to/ composes texts expressing views similar to/ different from own.

A child called Tiny likes to dress up and does not conform to gender norms. Children at their new school keep asking them whether they are a boy or a girl. Tiny avoids the question, as they do not identify as either a boy or a girl. A useful text to introduce the topic of gender diversity with young children.

Discussion:

- Why does it matter if Tiny is a boy or a girl?
- Why do you think Buster tries to bully Tiny? How do you know this?



Donaldson, J. & Scheffler, A. (2004). *The Gruffalo's Child*. London: Macmillan.

- Suitable ES1, S1.
- English K-2 (2021): EN1-OLC-01; EN1-UARL-01; EN1-CWT-01.ENE, EN1-PHOKW-01;ENE, EN-REFLU-01. ENE, EN1-RECOM-01.
- Identifying rhyme, rhythm in text. Word families, vowel digraphs. Punctuation including question marks, exclamation marks, quotation marks, direct speech. Opportunities to make meaning through drama. Creating story map to sequence activities in text. Building noun groups, verb groups. Narrative structure is also something to discuss.

Donaldson's widely popular, ubiquitous texts contain witty, rhythmic verses, instantly familiar to children and parents alike. The setting of *The Gruffalo's Child*, a sequel to the award-winning text, *The Gruffalo* (1999, 2019) is a single parent Gruffalo family in the deep, dark wood. It is unclear whether the child is male or female, and the author embellishes on this in Miller (2020).

Key discussion questions:

- Who looks after the Gruffalo's child?
- Did you wonder about the gender of the Gruffalo's child?
- If so, why? If not, why not? Do you think the child's gender matters?

**TEXTS**

**CURRICULUM LINKS**

**OVERVIEW**

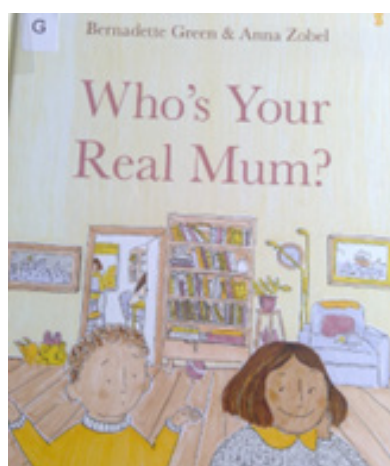


Hegarty, P. & Wheatcroft, R. (2017). *We are Family*. London: Caterpillar Books.

- Suitable S1, S2
- English K-2 (2021): EN1-OLC-01; EN1-UARL-01; EN1-CWT-01; EN1-PRINT-01.
- Visual literacy - following story maps in text. Recording student responses and captioning illustrations in text. Identifying contractions, rhyme, figurative language, nouns, verb groups.

A simple text that elaborates on the diversity of families. The book celebrates family similarities and differences.

The story in this text is descriptive, presented in rhyming couplets, with no clear storyline. However, the illustrations are multifarious and lend themselves well to modelled, guided and independent writing activities (EN1-7B, EN2-7B).



Green, B. & Zobel, A. (2020). *Who's Your Real Mum?* Brunswick, Vic: Scribble.

- Suitable ES1, S1.
- English K-2 (2021): ENE,1-OLC-01; ENE,1-UARL-01; ENE,1-CWT-01; ENE,1-PRINT-01.
- Modelled, guided and independent writing activity. Students write a text in Q&A format.

An imaginative text. Elvie has two mums. Both mums are equally important to Elvie. She compares her mums to superheroes. Her friend asks, "Who is your real mum?" The text is in a Q&A format. She tries to make her friend understand that both mums are equally important to her. Beautiful illustrations make effective use of colour – yellows/browns for reality, blues for imagination.

**TEXTS**

**CURRICULUM LINKS**

**OVERVIEW**



Bell, D. & Colpoys, A. (2017). *Under the Love Umbrella*. London: Scribble.

- Suitable ES1, S1.
- English K-2 (2021): ENE,1-OLC-01; ENE,1-UARL-01; ENE,1-RECOM-01. Use comprehension strategies to build literal and inferred meaning.
- Discussion:
  - What does “Under the Love Umbrella” mean?
  - Who do you love? Why?

A text of rhyming couplets which describes a parent’s over-arching love for their child. Familiar situations of sorrow, fear and danger are outlined, including being scared of the dark, bad dreams, frightening dogs, broken toys, arguments with friends, feeling shy, and having no friends.

The text is a segue into class discussions about significant people in children’s families and how they help them... Who do you love? Why?



Beer, S. (2018). *LOVE makes a family*. Richmond, Victoria: Little Hare Books.

- Suitable ES1, S1.
- English K-2 (2021) ENE,1-UARL-01; ENE,1-CWT-01; ENE,1-PRINT-01.
- Code and convention focus.:
  - Understands how sentence punctuation is used to enhance meaning and fluency. Focus on figurative language e.g. “lending a hand”.

A colourful text about family diversity. There are few words in this book. The words describe happy family situations to unpack and discuss with the class. The illustrations depict the diversity of families.

Discuss, “What is happening in the pictures?”

**TEXTS**

**CURRICULUM LINKS**

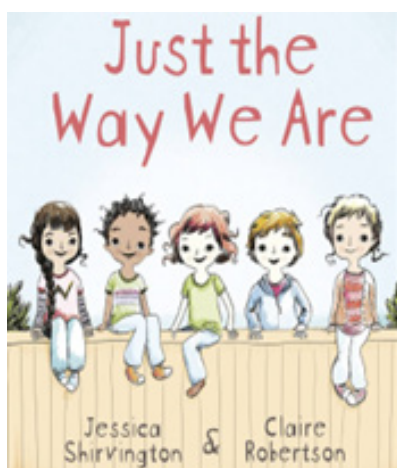
**OVERVIEW**



Keegan, L.J. & Stapleton, M. (2019). *Things in the Sea are touching me!* Gosford, NSW: Scholastic.

- Suitable ES1, S1.
- English K-2 (2021) ENE,1-OLC-01; ENE,1-UARL-01; ENE,1-RECOM-01; ENE,1-CWT-01
- Understands how text structure contributes to the meaning of texts, text organisation, narrative structure.
- Make a story map to visually represent the story. Sentence complexity. Phonics.ENE,1-PHOKW-01 e.g. see, me.

A child with two mums participates in a family outing to the beach. The child is scared of the water and her two mums comfort her and explain each of the sources of her fear. A story told with humour and warmth through a child's eyes.



Shirvington, J. & Robertson, C. (2020). *Just the Way We Are*. Sydney, NSW: ABC Books. HarperCollins.

- Targets ES1, S1.
- English K-2 (2021): ENE,1-OLC-01; ENE,1-UARL-01; EN1-REFLU-01.
- Draw on an increasing range of skills to read, view and comprehend a range of texts on increasingly challenging topics.

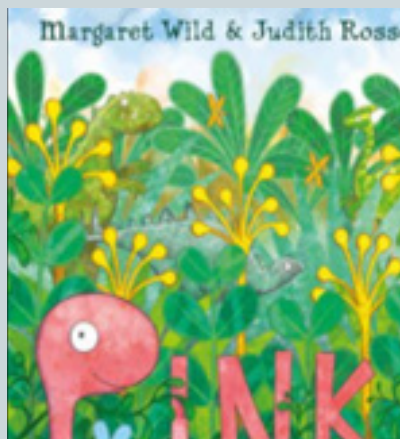
The text deals with family diversity, racial diversity and inclusion. The main characters are children from different racial backgrounds who describe their families from their particular points of view. This text is useful for students to see children like themselves in quality children's literature, in an engaging narrative format. It describes the inclusive, collaborative lived experience of children growing up in diverse families, through children's eyes.



**TEXTS**

**CURRICULUM LINKS**

**OVERVIEW**



Wild, M. & Rossell, J. (2020). *Pink*. Sydney, NSW: HarperCollins.

- Targets ES1. Publisher recommendation is for 2-5 years.
- English K-2 (2021): ENE,1-OLC-01; ENE,1-UARL-01; ENE,1-RECOM-01. ENE,1-CWT-01
- Recognises linking words in texts, responds to shared reading for enjoyment and pleasure. Compose texts using pictures and graphics to support their choice of words. Make connections between text and own life, retells story in sequence, identify main idea. Explore how words and pictures work together to make meaning.

The main message of this text is one of self-acceptance. The main character, Pink, is born into a family of green dinosaurs. She struggles to fit in, but her difference finally saves her and her friends. This text is the second collaboration between literary heavyweights Wild and Rossell. The first, *Bog Trotter* (2015), encourages children to challenge themselves to try new things. The colours in *Pink* comprise vibrant pinks and greens. The textures and luminosity of the illustrations make the characters come alive. This text lends itself to class discussions about how we are the same, yet different, and how difference should be viewed as a strength.



Stuart, S. (2020). *My Shadow is Pink*. Dandenong, Victoria: Larrikin House.

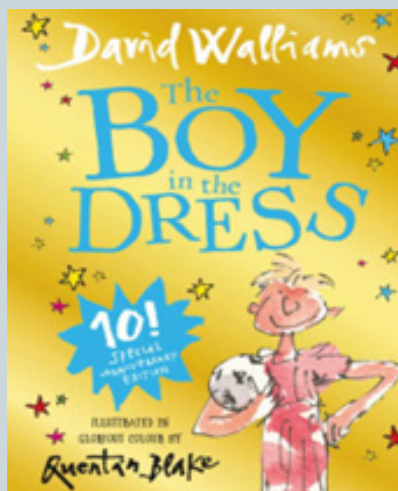
- ES1, S1. That said, I have discussed the important themes of equality, self- acceptance, diversity and gender identity in this text with adults- so possibly suitable for all ages.
- English K-2 (2021): ENE,1-OLC-01; ENE,1-UARL-01; ENE,1-RECOM-01.
- Discuss how that students may have different responses to a text, explore the different contribution of words and images to meaning in stories. Share feelings and thoughts about the events and characters in text.

This text is a rhyming narrative. It is about a boy who likes to dress in female clothing yet feels ashamed when his peers at school laugh at him. The author, Scott Stuart reported on his website that he wrote the story for his young son, who, on beginning school, was bullied for dressing up like Elsa, from the movie, *Frozen*. Through this text, Stuart aims to raise awareness of gender identity and diversity, in doing so broadening society's narrow view of masculinity. He aims to affirm to his child, and all children; "You are loved. Exactly as you are".

**TEXTS**

**CURRICULUM LINKS**

**OVERVIEW**



Walliams, D. & Blake, Q. (2008, 2018). *The Boy in the Dress*. London: HarperCollins.

- This text suitable S3.
- EN3-2A: Engage personally with texts, experiment and use aspects of composing that enhance learning and enjoyment, present a point of view about particular literary texts using appropriate metalanguage and reflecting on the viewpoints of others. EN3-3A Understand, interpret and experiment with literary devices; summarise a text and evaluate the intended message or theme.

A children’s book written by David Walliams, a comedian well-known for the television series, *Little Britain* (his first), and illustrated by Quentin Blake, well known illustrator of the Roald Dahl books. The text uses humour to explore children wearing clothes not normatively associated with their cisgender, their assigned gender at birth. Dennis, a 12 year old boy, enjoys football and fashion. His parents are divorced, and he lives with his father and brother, who do not tolerate or understand Dennis’s need to dress up in girls’ clothing. He is an ordinary boy, who lives in an ordinary town, with an unusual hobby. A humorous narrative which elicits interesting class discussions about the serious topic of gender stereotyping with pre and adolescent students.

N.B. K-2 NESA English outcomes elaborated <https://curriculum.nsw.edu.au/learning-areas/english/english-k-10>

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



### DR LORRAINE (LORRI) BEVERIDGE

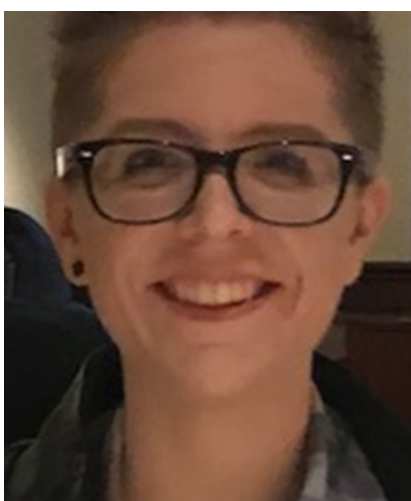
Dr Lorraine (Lorri) Beveridge is a sessional academic and independent consultant. She has published articles on aspects of teaching subject English in primary schools. Her doctoral research area is the impact and sustainability of collaborative teacher professional learning.



### MICHAEL MURRAY

Michael Murray is a former English teacher, head teacher and chief education officer, and working as an independent consultant in English and literacy K-12.

Lorri and Michael share a website that provides resources for teachers in subject English: <https://primaryenglish.education/>. Their shared passion is teaching the big ideas of English through the vehicle of quality texts.



### HANNAH GILLARD

Hannah Gillard is a non-binary academic in the final stages of their PhD at the University of Sydney. Hannah's doctoral research area is LGBTIQ+ diversity in the workplace.