



Content Analysis of LGBTQ Picture Books for Elementary Education Through an Intersectional Lens

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Diversity and inclusion have become a critical topic in contemporary society. Children engaging in story time with their family members and teachers can use stories from picture books as an educational tool to illustrate various social settings which provide a window into the wider outside world and a reflection of their own world, a concept known as “mirror and window”. However, LGBTQ representation has not been consistently perceived equitably compared to the heterosexual population, often dehumanized or unrealistic. Many LGBTQ students mentioned the need to see more portrayals of LGBTQ families and increasingly positive and realistic portrayals of LGBTQ characters. One independent publisher, Olly Pike, produces LGBTQ-inclusive picture books to support educators in providing representation and promoting an inclusive space in schools for diversity discussions. This case study utilizes content analysis of five LGBTQ-inclusive picture books from Olly Pike to understand the emerging themes that arise related to the support for LGBTQ and heterosexual students and foster an inclusive space in schools, leading to themes of diversity and representation that benefits critical discussions in schools and classrooms. Inter-rater reliability was established between the two authors for validity of emerging themes. Results revealed seven emerging themes: 1) Diversity and Inclusion (e.g. family structures, sexuality, ethnicity), 2) Daily Life, 3) Anthropomorphism, 4) Stereotypes, and 5) Overarching Educational Goals. Implications of findings reveal the benefit of incorporating LGBTQ-inclusive picture books to facilitate all students’ learning and understanding of SEL skills that largely tie with becoming responsible citizens that is respectful of diversity and specifically for LGBTQ students to see themselves positively represented, fostering a sense of belonging.

Keywords: LGBTQ, content analysis, picture books, elementary education, teacher education, diversity, inclusion

INTRODUCTION

Diversity and inclusion has become a critical topic in contemporary society. Teachers and parents who engage in story time with their children can use stories from picture books as educational tools to illustrate various social settings which provide a window into the wider outside world, known as the “mirror and window” concept where a mirror is a story that reflects one’s own culture and helps build their identity and a window is a resource that offers the reader a view into someone else’s experiences (Bishop, 1990). When students read books where they see characters like themselves who are valued in the world, they feel a sense of belonging (Christ and Sharma, 2018; Harris, 2019).

Additionally, when students read books about other identities and cultures, they can learn how other people conduct themselves in the world and their experiences fitting in with society. Since children may not be exposed to differences in culture, skin color, religion, sexuality, gender, and other group differences, picture books can be an effective tool to foster children's self-recognition, understanding, and acceptance of other cultures.

One culture of focus and major contention from parents and communities (Page, 2017) is the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community. The inclusion and acceptance of the LGBTQ community has come a long way in overcoming legal barriers since 1996 (i.e., Supreme Court of Canada adding sexual orientation in the list of prohibited grounds in the *Canadian Human Rights Act*; Walker, 2016). However, moving from legal inclusion to societal inclusion, LGBTQ members have not been consistently perceived as equals when compared to the heterosexual population. LGBTQ people are often dehumanized within textbooks and in media (e.g. books, videos) and shown as an "at risk" group whose stories are often linked to issues such as suicidal ideation, substance abuse, and sexual risk taking (Griffin and Ouellett, 2003) or, on the other hand, depicted as living in affluent environments in major cities with high education and SES (Hollibaugh and Weiss, 2015). By seeing negative and inaccurate representations of LGBTQ individuals in diverse mediums, children may not fully understand the diversity of families and can become difficult to make connections between themselves and others through the mirror and window, creating a relative invisibility of LGBTQ members.

Relative invisibility refers to an absence of rich, positive depictions of a particular group, with their portrayal typically being stereotypical and narrow. This limits schematic representations of possible selves and causes negatively represented group members to question both their individual value and their value within society (Gomillion and Giuliano, 2011). Therefore, accurate and inclusive portrayals of LGBTQ individuals in picture books serve as positive role models with whom LGBTQ children can connect with, letting them know they are not alone, and provides them with a broader understanding of themselves (mirror) and others (window).

However, previous research has shown that there is minimal LGBTQ representation in books. For example, Young (2019) shows that only 14.7% of the top titles from Lambda Literary Awards and Stonewall Book Awards were picture books. Therefore, though picture books can provide opportunities for being mirrors and windows for younger students, the current collection of LGBTQ-inclusive picture books is minimal. As these books can foster supportive spaces where young readers can increase their knowledge of the world and the diverse topics that surround LGBTQ populations, there is a need to understand the current literature on the state of LGBTQ-inclusive picture books for children, specifically elementary education.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality can be defined as the examination of race, sex, class, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity and

expression, disability, and other marginalized identities and how their combination interacts in different settings (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Gillborn, 2015). Relevant to education, recent research shows that the majority of LGBTQ-inclusive picture books and media depict White LGBTQ individuals who live in affluent neighborhoods, hinting at high SES (Hermann-Wilmarth and Ryan, 2019). Representations such as these decrease the books' effectiveness as a mirror and window should students be unable to connect or identify with any of the LGBTQ characters if the students themselves are not affluent or White. Therefore, the lens through which such LGBTQ-inclusive picture books are seen is unidimensional, depicting only stereotypical LGBTQ communities. Taking an intersectional approach to help understand how other identities, such as LGBTQ-POC, can allow for a broader, more inclusive mirror and window. Educators can use these books as an opportunity to help students develop the skills needed to respectfully communicate with peers, engage in thoughtful dialogue around complex topics, and deepen their understanding of the ways in which diversity, equity, and inclusion are relevant for everyone (Haggard, 2014; Crawley, 2020), which can also increase academic success (e.g. attitudes and connection towards school; Crawley, 2018), and decrease behavioral problems (e.g. less disruptive, more engaged; Ryan and Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018).

Goal, Purpose, and Objectives

As previous research primarily focused on award-winning authors and big publishing companies to derive their findings on their themes surrounding the inclusivity and "mirror and window" of their LGBTQ-inclusive children's picture books, picture books from an indie or small author with an independent publishing company can provide a different aspect of their method of incorporating LGBTQ representation in their picture books. Additionally, research on LGBTQ-inclusive children's picture books have mentioned several concerns in award-winning books such that common LGBTQ representation were 1) negative and/or LGBTQ-conflict-based, 2) disguised LGBTQ-explicit content under subtle hints, euphemisms, or anthropomorphic characters, and 3) lacking in diversity within the LGBTQ community (Ryan and Hermann-Wilmarth, 2013; Ryan and Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018; Bettridge et al., 2019; Young, 2019). The minimization of LGBTQ-explicit concerns can be a method to bypass and appease publishing companies (Taxel, 2002; Crawley, 2017; Knopp-Schwyn and Fracentese, 2019) rather than to combat LGBTQ issues. Therefore, the purpose of this case study is to analyze LGBTQ-inclusive picture books by an independent publisher to understand whether they differ from their big publishing house counterparts in terms of accurate LGBTQ representations as they have more freedom from publishing companies.

The independent publisher, Olly Pike, created 'Pop'n'Olly' as a LGBT+ and equality educational resource specifically geared towards educational stakeholders including teachers, students, staff, and parents to help support and encourage an accepting and understanding society where students develop and grow up to be more mindful and inclusive (Pike, 2021). They have been

increasingly implemented in schools across the United Kingdom to foster positive LGBTQ representation and inclusion in their classrooms. This independent publisher was chosen as their mission is to provide literature specifically for educators to address the need for LGBTQ representation in picture books and promote discussions surrounding LGBTQ diversity and equity, with some picture books having explicit questions organized according to school grade.

The novel lens of exploring an independent publishing company allows for the opportunity to explore themes that may arise in these LGBTQ-inclusive children's picture books, and to determine if similar concerns are present. Specifically, the objective of this study is to analyze LGBTQ-inclusive children's picture books through the lens of mirror and window and intersectionality to identify themes relating to diversity, positive representation, and changes towards explicit LGBTQ-language with human characters.

LGBTQ Books for Elementary Education

As educational curriculums are increasingly emphasizing the importance of Universal Design for Learning, inclusion, and diversity (Kieran and Anderson, 2018; Unal et al., 2020), teachers are conscious of the current selection of classroom materials that they share with their students. Particularly, seeking out diversity in their reading selections can help students develop their self-worth and understand how to participate in a society with all types of people, providing the role of a "mirror" for some students and a "window" through which students can view experiences other than their own (Bishop, 1990). The concept of mirror and window is particularly important for LGBTQ elementary-aged students as this is the developmental period where they are engaged with and observing many different types of people around them as they develop basic social-emotional skills, such as empathy and understanding differences in people that they meet (Buchanan et al., 2020). For LGBTQ students, however, if they do not see themselves (mirror) in class material, such as picture books, they may develop a sense of isolation and feel that there is something wrong with them (Snapp et al., 2015). Additionally, when they do see representation of LGBTQ community in class content, it is predominantly viewed as negative, where they are at risk for negative behaviors (e.g. depression, anxiety) or perceived as a deviant (Gowen and Wings-Yanez, 2014). Therefore, there is a need to understand the current situation of the incorporation of LGBTQ-inclusive picture books in elementary education to help children develop self-connections through seeing themselves in these stories (mirror) or understanding or families and individuals' experiences (window).

However, there has been ongoing controversy in North American Library Associations with expressing diversity in children's books (Paterson, 2018). Many children's books that contain LGBTQ characters have been placed in a list of the most controversial and inappropriate books for discussing topics deemed unsuitable for young children, such as non-traditional families. For example, *And Tango Makes Three* is a book about two male penguins who fall in love and desire a family together. The book has been one of the most challenged picture books from

2006 through 2012 (Toman, 2014). However, teachers who have taught with this book have mentioned that its purpose is to foster discussion and understanding about different types of people, create a sense of community, and to teach children to accept others for who they are (Phillips and Larson, 2012; Goldberg et al., 2017; Brody, 2020), reinforcing the importance in an educational society that values social-emotional learning (SEL). However, by challenging and censoring LGBTQ-inclusive picture books in school libraries, it limits the opportunities for students to use picture books as a mirror and a window to understand themselves through LGBTQ representation as well as see other accurate LGBTQ depictions to increase their acceptance of others.

Though there are clear benefits in incorporating LGBTQ-inclusive picture books, current research has identified several concerns. First, there is a lack of diversity within the LGBTQ-inclusive picture books themselves. Although authors of these books have diversified their characters in terms of sexuality and gender identity/expression, research has found an underrepresentation of marginalized populations within the LGBTQ community. For example, Hedberg et al. (2020) found that award-winning children's picture books have representations of few sexualities and identities other than lesbian and gay. Therefore, there is a lack of representation of bisexuality, transgender, or queer-identified characters, making it difficult for these students to recognize themselves and understand others in these books.

Secondly, authors often use subtle hints, euphemisms, and anthropomorphisms to depict LGBTQ-related content, such as when defining same-sex relationships. Recent research has mentioned this may be a strategy to sidestep controversy and disputes with publication companies or a way to make the LGBTQ-content more age-appropriate for elementary-aged children (e.g., Andrianova, 2021). However, as Young (2019) has shown, by not making the terms explicit and humanistic, children may not be able to make connections between themselves and the characters if the LGBTQ content is subtle and written "between the lines".

Thirdly is how LGBTQ individuals are depicted in these picture books. For example, picture books commonly depict LGBTQ characters encountering LGBTQ-specific problems, such as harassment or physical violence (Young, 2019; Capuzza, 2020). This can be beneficial as a window through which to understand the difficulties that LGBTQ individuals experience and a mirror to validate the reader if they are having relatable problems. However, as Young (2019) has mentioned, there needs to be a balance of both conflict-based and positive empowerment-based stories as the negative and conflict-ridden stories can reinforce the idea that LGBTQ people are outliers, deviants, full of LGBTQ-related problems, and are not treated equally. Current research has mentioned that LGBTQ individuals want to see these positive and realistic portrayals, such as LGBTQ characters doing regular tasks and encountering non-LGBTQ-specific problems, which equates that LGBTQ characters are the same as heterosexual characters (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2013; Cook, 2018). In other words, LGBTQ individuals would like to see themselves depicted as people with average lives who also happen to be LGBTQ.

To further increase their diversity, picture books such as “*And Tango Makes Three*”, “*In Our Mother’s House*”, “*Mommy, Mama and Me*” which depict happy families as two same-sex parents and their adopted child, can include diverse family structures, as marriage and two-parents can be considered a heterosexual societal standard (Goldberg, 2014; Liang and Cahrssen, 2019). As society is increasingly diverse and encompassing of complex identities (Alper et al., 2016), it is important to take into account an intersectional aspect beyond their LGBTQ identity, such as those who are associated as person of color (POC) and those who are considered to have a disability.

METHODS

Content Analysis

The study utilizes content analysis (CA; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005), a systematic coding and categorizing method to determine trends and patterns of words and phrases, their frequencies, their relationships, and the structures and discourses of communication (Gbrich, 2007; Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Content analysis can be defined as a process whereby the objective is to systematically transform a large amount of text into a highly organized and concise summary of key results. The process involves the systematic coding and categorizing of codes, tallying frequencies of codes and categories, identifying relationships and patterns, and building from and reflecting on the raw data (Vaismoradi et al., 2013; Erlingsson and Brysiewicz, 2017). As the data source for this study involves LGBTQ-inclusive children’s picture books, both qualitative and quantitative data analyses will be chosen to count frequencies of descriptive data and analyze the themes that arise based on the systematic coding process. Descriptive data refers to descriptors of the images and words in the picture books. Such descriptors are emergent codes based on organic responses grounded by the guiding question and concepts following content analysis procedures.

Content analysis has increased validity through the triangulation of inter-rater reliability with the second author acting as a trained rater. With inter-rater reliability, CA can be an effective method to handle and organize the large amounts of data through the rigid process of triangulation by the inter-raters. This allows categorization of diverse information and examination of relationships between categories to identify emergent themes. Inter-rater reliability was established through iterative individual coding with reviews over areas of disagreement. ATLAS.ti 8 was used to initiate an iterative coding process where both authors individually coded the images and words of each of the five picture books. Initial codes were brainstormed during initial coding processes. Using ATLAS.ti 8, initial codes were grounded by the guiding question surrounding the concept of mirror and window and intersectionality towards LGBTQ representation. An iterative coding process allowed for an organic emergence and reorganization of codes and themes throughout the analysis. As both authors kept the guiding question and concepts in mind, relevant codes emerged to

explain its connection to the question of intersectionality and mirror and window.

Study Design

Five LGBTQ-inclusive children’s picture books were analyzed, published from 2015 through 2020. Olly Pike’s five LGBTQ-inclusive children’s picture books have been chosen as their explicit goal is to “combat ideas of prejudice and homo/bi/transphobia” (Pike, 2021). At the time of analysis, Pop“n”Olly only had these five picture books available for purchase that focused on LGBTQ issues. When analyzing the picture books, codes were divided between picture and words as Azano et al. (2017) has shown that both pictures and words can depict varying meaning and content. Prior to consolidating the initial codes that emerged from the five picture books, initial inter-rater reliability was calculated based on initial, independent coding. Initial inter-rater reliability was 80.94% across the five books. Following qualitative content analysis procedures, disagreements were discussed, and an iterative and recursive process was conducted to refine the codes until agreed by both authors. Based on the five picture books, there were a total of 48 codes that arose ($N_{\text{picture}} = 24$; $N_{\text{words}} = 24$). Relevant codes grounded by the guiding research question include: 1) positive event: LGBTQ-related, 2) types of support (community, family, peer), 3) ethnicity, 4) family, 5) clothing, 6) gender roles, and 7) traditional family setting, to name a few.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Pop“n”Olly is created by Olly Pike with the specific purpose of acting as a “LGBT+ and Equality educational resource”. Pike’s purpose is to expand educational resources and incorporate into educational systems for children, parents, guardians, and teachers a way to analyze and break down ideas of prejudice and homo/bi/transphobia (Pike, 2021). In the educational flaps at the beginning or end of the book, Olly adapts fairy tales and stories to represent diversity and to include characters with other marginalized identities such as LGBTQ, race, socioeconomic status who encourage an accepting and understanding society for future generations. Based on the five self-published books by Pop“n”Olly, it was evident that all five books were fictional and four of five were considered contemporary fiction, with *Kenny Lives with Erica and Martina* representing historical fiction (inspired by the 1981 book, *Jenny lives with Eric and Martin*). Refer to **Table 1** for further details on the five chosen picture books.

Themes

Content analysis of images and words of the five LGBTQ-inclusive picture books resulted in five overarching themes: 1) diversity, 2) anthropomorphism, 3) daily life, 4) stereotypes, and 5) overarching educational goals.

Diversity was present through all five picture books, through the use of both the images and dialogue. The theme can be broken down into 1) clothing (Picture = 18.14%), 2) diverse socioeconomic status (low, average, high; Picture = 17.31%; Words = 36.19%), 3) sex (Picture = 15.14%; Words = 4.29%),

TABLE 1 | Summary of the five LGBTQ-inclusive picture books.

Book title	Publication year	Author statement or purpose	Educational goals	Protagonist	Other characters	Conflicts and plots	Genre
Prince Henry	2015	A fairytale romance intended for young readers, "Prince Henry" delivers a positive message of both love and equality	N/A	Human—Henry	Human - Thomas (Friend/ Partner) - King, Queen (Henry's mother and father) - Princes, Princesses (Henry's brothers/ sisters, other princes/princesses) Animal - Dragon, Unicorn, Rabbit	Prince Henry and his friend Thomas (non-royalty) have been friends for a while. Prince Henry's parents want him to be married to another royalty. However, he comes into conflict when he wants to marry Thomas, but is not allowed due to non-royalty	Contemporary Fiction
Jamie	2015	A story of determination, hard work and transition. With some clever mice and a pumpkin car, join Jamie as she becomes . . . Jamie	N/A	Human—Jamie	Human - Older brothers - Fairy godmother - Guests - Princess Animal - Three mice	Jamie is treated like a maid at home by her stepbrothers and fairy godmother. She is not allowed to wear her stepbrothers' clothing and not allowed to go to the grand ball. Her mice friends help her feel comfortable as she becomes he to go to the grand ball as his authentic self	Contemporary Fiction
Princess Penny and the Pea	2016	It's not easy being a princess. There are so many rules. Penny just wants to have fun like everyone else. A tale that questions whether our differences should determine how we are treated	N/A	Human—Princess Penny	Human - Advisors - Townspeople Animal/Object - Magical Pea - Unicorn	Princess Penny wanted to experience activities like any other individual in her kingdom. However, her advisors did not condone non-princess like behaviors and forced her to act like a princess. One day, conflict arose as they met a magical pea who also wanted to be treated like other peas but was not allowed by the advisors	Contemporary Fiction
Goldilocks and the Five Bear Families	2018	This book is an adapted fairytale designed to teach children about family diversity	There are so many different types of families that we couldn't fit them all into this story. Can you help us by drawing some more?	Human - Goldilocks	Animals—Various bear families including • Bear • Polar Bears • Koala Bears • Teddy Bears • Panda Bears	Goldilocks is set out on a journey to give mail to different types of bear families	Contemporary Fiction
Kenny Lives with Erica and Martina	2019	I hope this book will educate children about diversity, equality and acceptance, and I hope it will inspire them to act whenever they see anyone else's human rights being compromised	Lesson ideas and discussion questions for parents and teachers present at the level of Key Stage 1, Key Stage 2, with further discussion questions. For example, "What do you think it is that	Human - Kenny	Human • Erica, Martina (moms) • Jenny, Hasan (new couple/neighbors) • Community members Animal • Colorful cat (of Jenny, Hasan)	Kenny and his parents, depicted as grey people, meet two people that had colors other than grey. He was fascinated by the different colors he had never seen before but the grey	Historical Fiction

(Continued on following page)

TABLE 1 | (Continued) Summary of the five LGBTQ-inclusive picture books.

Book title	Publication year	Author statement or purpose	Educational goals	Protagonist	Other characters	Conflicts and plots	Genre
			makes some people want to treat others unfairly?"		• Grey dog (of community)	community thought otherwise and isolated the two people of other colors	

4) colors: gender-neutral (Picture = 14.14%), 5) ethnicity/color (Picture = 11.65%; Words = 5.52%), 6) individual differences (Picture = 9.32%; Words = 20.86%), 7) gender identity and expression (Picture = 4.66%; Words = 8.59%), 8) disability (Picture = 3.83%), 9) sexuality (Picture = 3.66%; Words = 16.56%), and 10) family (Picture = 2.16%; Words = 7.98%).

Previous concerns on the use of subtle hints, euphemisms, and anthropomorphic animals and objects to depict LGBTQ-related content were present mainly in one picture book, *Goldilocks and the Five Bear Families*, where diverse families were presented as bear families comprised of different types of bears such as the same-sex polar bear family, extended koala bear family, and the single-parent gender neutral teddy bear family. Other books presented a magical pea (*Princess Penny and the Pea*) and mice (*Jamie*) who supported their human protagonist and progressed the plotline. This was the case for Princess Penny in *Princess Penny and the Pea* where the magical pea was shown to be different from other peas but expressed the fact that though the pea can speak and is different from the other peas, the magical pea wanted to be treated like other peas and be eaten. This was the main plot and purpose of the story as this was compared to Princess Penny’s discontent that although she is a princess, she did not want to act and behave like a princess but wanted to be treated like any other average human.

The theme of daily life was present through all five picture books, through the use of both images and dialogue. The theme can be broken down into 1) positive event: non-LGBTQ-related (Picture = 18.54%; Words = 13.20%), 2) conflict (Picture = 17.88%; Words = 26.90%), 3) daily life (Picture = 16.56%; Words = 11.17%), 4) peer support (Picture = 14.57%; Words = 16.24%), 5) positive event: LGBTQ-related (Picture = 10.60%; Words = 7.61%), 6) event (Picture = 9.27%; Words = 11.68%), 7) community support (Picture = 7.28%; Words = 6.09%), and 8) family support (Picture = 5.30%; Words = 7.11%)

The theme of stereotypes was present through all five picture books, through the use of both the images and dialogue. The theme can be broken down into 1) lack of diversity (Picture = 61.11%; Words = 20.00%), 2) traditional family setting (Picture = 21.11%; Words = 12.50%), 3) traditional gender roles (Picture = 17.78%; Words = 26.25%), and 4) stereotyping behaviors (Words = 41.25%).

The theme of overarching educational goals was present through all five picture books, through the use of both images and dialogue. The theme can be broken down into 1) purpose of story (Picture = 100%; Words = 61.40%), 2) educational support (Words = 26.32%), and 3) additional resources (Words = 12.28%). Detailed frequencies of codes and themes extracted from the five LGBTQ-inclusive picture books can be found in **Table 2**.

DISCUSSION

Diversity

Disability was shown in the forefront for only *Princess Penny and the Pea* where the protagonist, Princess Penny, was shown to be enjoying herself despite being in a wheelchair. In *Goldilocks and the Five Bear Families*, Goldilocks met with a single-parent teddy bear family who had adopted many children, one of whom was a rabbit in a wheelchair. Although the images in the books show disabilities (e.g. wheelchair), the dialogue did not make explicit connections to their disability. This suggests a surface representation of disability and the ability for the educator to facilitate a meaningful discussion surrounding the images of these characters to allow students with disabilities to self-identify and make authentic connections, aligning with the concept of mirror and window.

Ethnicity and color were shown through all five picture books. For example, different colors were present to depict different ethnicities of the animals in *Goldilocks and the Five Bear Families*. Different ethnicities were present at the forefront in *Kenny lives with Erica and Martina* where there was discrimination between the grey community and the people of other colors besides grey. The different representation of ethnic minorities allows the educator to discuss with their students how the experiences of grey versus color (*Kenny lives with Erica and Martina*) and the different color families (*Goldilocks and the Five Bear Families*) tie into current society. For students who are discriminated against due to their skin color, the presence of ethnic diversity in these books can provide important mirror and window connections, thereby fostering academic engagement (Maestri, 2016; Bruijn et al., 2020) and a sense of belonging (Youngs, 2015; Nishina et al., 2019).

Family was a category highlighted in three of the five picture books (*Goldilocks and the Five Bear Families*, *Jamie*, and *Kenny Lives with Erica and Martina*). Family was at the forefront of *Goldilocks* as she went to give mail to her community, which consisted of diverse family structures, such as a single-parent family with adopted children and an extended family. The presence of diverse families allows the educator to facilitate discussion on diverse family structures, allowing students to recognize and understand the different family structures amongst their peers.

Gender identity and expression was highlighted in all five picture books. For *Jamie*, gender identity and expression was explicit as Jamie wanted to feel like herself as she sewed her own

TABLE 2 | Frequency table of categories extracted from the five LGBTQ-inclusive picture books.

Categories	Goldilocks and the five bear families	Jamie	Kenny lives with Erica and Martina	Prince Henry	Princess Penny and the pea
Daily Tasks (Picture)—8 codes	3	18	28	29	20
Conflict	0	1	10	4	12
Daily Life	1	2	4	10	8
Event	1	0	3	6	4
Positive Event: LGBTQ-Related	0	10	1	5	0
Positive Event: Non-LGBTQ-Related	3	4	11	7	3
Types of Support					
o Community Support	0	0	11	0	0
o Family Support	0	0	4	4	0
o Peer Support	0	7	5	9	1
Daily Tasks (Words)—8 codes	8	29	35	38	30
Conflict	0	10	15	11	17
Daily Life	5	2	5	6	4
Event	2	5	4	6	6
Positive Event: LGBTQ-Related	0	6	1	8	0
Positive Event: Non-LGBTQ-Related	3	5	10	2	6
Types of Support					
o Community Support	0	0	12	0	0
o Family Support	0	2	4	8	0
o Peer Support	0	8	7	9	8
Diversity (Picture)—12 codes	16	34	33	36	28
(Dis)ability	2	2	10	3	6
Ethnicity/Color	13	12	24	5	16
Family	7	1	5	0	0
Clothing	13	29	27	17	23
Gender Identity/Expression	2	19	4	3	0
o Colors: Gender-neutral	14	24	29	16	2
Individual Differences	5	1	29	4	17
Sex	9	25	21	9	27
Sexuality	2	4	7	9	0
SES*: Average	3	7	9	1	0
SES*: High	0	15	1	33	24
SES*: Low	0	10	0	1	0
Diversity (Words)—9 codes	12	25	31	28	16
Ethnicity/Color	3	0	6	0	0
Family	8	1	4	0	0
Gender Identity/Expression	1	10	3	0	0
Individual Differences	2	2	20	3	7
Sex	0	3	2	1	1
Sexuality	2	2	10	13	0
SES*: Average	1	1	0	2	0
SES*: High	0	12	0	20	14
SES*: Low	0	5	0	4	0
Stereotypes (Picture)—3 codes	5	17	8	29	12
Traditional Family Setting	5	0	6	8	0
Gender Roles	4	4	3	3	2
Lack of diversity	0	15	1	29	10
Stereotypes (Words)—4 codes	5	15	14	15	17
Stereotyping behaviors	0	6	7	4	16
Traditional Family Setting	4	0	3	3	0
Gender Roles	2	10	2	0	7
Lack of diversity	0	4	3	9	0
Overarching Meta-Book Goals—4 codes	3	6	19	8	11
(Picture) Purpose of Story	0	0	1	1	2
(Words) Additional Resources	2	2	3	0	0
(Words) Educational Support	1	2	12	0	0
(Words) Purpose of Story	2	5	12	7	9

clothes and had her friends cut her hair to become who he felt comfortable being. The clothing that Jamie created for himself was a black suit, stereotypically associated with males. Jamie's name was also a gender-neutral name, symbolic of Jamie being allowed to choose what gender he identified with most. In *Goldilocks and the Five Bear Families*, gender identity and expression were shown in both dialogue and images as she went to give mail to a single-parent teddy bear family who adopted many different types and colors of animals. The teddy bear was referred to as Mx. Teddy Bear, highlighting how to address individuals who are outside the Mr. and Mrs. binary. Some of the parents in the bear families wore dresses of neutral (e.g. blue, green) or feminine colors (e.g. red, pink). Therefore, the presence of various colors, clothing types, and other expressions of gender can facilitate conversations between teachers and students about gender identity and expression. Interestingly, there were no instances where male characters were depicted in clothing outside of traditional male clothing, which if the educator navigates it effectively, can create discussions surrounding the need to be more representative of feminine male characters in picture books.

Individual differences were the main focus for two of the five picture books (*Kenny lives with Erica and Martina*, *Princess Penny*). Individual differences can be understood as characteristics that differentiate one individual from another. In *Princess Penny and the Pea*, Princess Penny wanted to be herself, a unique person doing what she wanted to do and not be constricted to her identity as a princess. For Kenny in *Kenny lives with Erica and Martina*, Kenny used colored paints to make their grey community more inclusive of both grey people and color people. The presence of individual differences in these stories allows the educator to facilitate discussions with their students to help them understand individual differences as positive characteristics, rather than negative qualities as commonly depicted, which leads to negative self-connections and portrayal of diverse students (Gomillion and Giuliano, 2011). Educators, then, can proactively minimize incidents of victimization and foster a more positive school climate.

Previous literature has highlighted dominant depictions of male characters as the protagonist and female characters in the background as passive, one-dimensional characters (Hamilton et al., 2006; Filipovic, 2018). Female characters were the protagonist in three of the five picture books, lending to more sex diversity. For example, Princess Penny was shown as a female protagonist who stood up for herself after being stereotyped as having to act and behave in certain ways. The depiction of female characters allows the educator to facilitate a discussion on non-normative sex experiences and expression, such as the inequities that girls and women experience (Desai et al., 2016; Gould et al., 2016).

Sexuality was a category present for three of the five picture books. Goldilocks met a family who had same-sex parents. Kenny's parents were two mothers. Prince Henry showed same-sex attraction when he chose to marry his best friend, Thomas. The presence of sexuality allows the educator to facilitate discussions on how sexuality can be positively depicted, facilitating diversity, inclusion, and acceptance of

populations of different sexualities. As opposed to the common, negative depiction on homosexual representation (ie. HIV/AIDS; Gomillion and Giuliano, 2011; Bikowski, 2020), the positive portrayal of sexuality allows students to make authentic connections to their own selves in their own relationships or their parents (mirror) and for other students to understand the existence of such diverse families and relationships in the society (windows).

Diverse socioeconomic status (SES) was also prevalent in four of the picture books, specifically through the pictures with visual representations of homes and clothing, as well as the various terms used to address characters. In *Kenny lives with Erica and Martina*, the houses in the community can be classified as average to affluent homes, indicating an average SES. In *Jamie*, *Princess Penny and the Pea*, and *Prince Henry*, "princess", "prince", or "king" was often used to address the main characters, indicating high SES, with supporting characters as "advisors" and "servants", indicative of a lower SES. Though SES was diverse, the majority of the representation was of average-to-affluent representations which feeds into the unbalanced representation of LGBTQ individuals as being more affluent and can decrease students' ability to develop connections and an accurate understanding of others without teacher guidance.

Anthropomorphism—Humans vs. Animals/ Objects

Although there was anthropomorphic representation, pairing it with a human character can make the connection more relatable. Though the use of anthropomorphisms was minimal in many of the picture books, the presence of anthropomorphic characters to depict the main purpose, such as diverse families through diverse bears, is consistent with previous concerns found in award-winning picture books as well as those from big publishing companies. Therefore, though the five books chosen were from a self-publishing company, the author had chosen to incorporate anthropomorphic characters to depict the plot and purpose of the stories to understand the diverse family structures present. This can lead to unclear self- and other-connections (mirror and window) for students to understand how the diverse bear families may relate to their understanding of their own (mirror) or other students' (window) families. This minimizes students' learning opportunities to see their own representations or widen other students' understanding and acceptance of how this parallels contemporary society's diverse family structures, leading to ineffective outcomes of academic engagement and sense of belonging (Christ and Sharma, 2018; Crawley, 2018; Ryan and Hermann-Wilmarth, 2018; Harris, 2019).

Daily Life

Previous research on the theme of daily life had concerns as many depictions of LGBTQ individuals in their classroom material were either negative, such that LGBTQ depictions showed them facing LGBTQ-specific conflicts and non-supportive communities. LGBTQ students mentioned that the lack of "average", day-to-day LGBTQ experiences and depictions leads to difficulties for them to make self-connections (mirror) with

their own lives and for their heterosexual peers to understand the constitution of an “average”, day-to-day experience of a LGBTQ individual (window). The presence of this theme arose to understand the regular aspects that come from picture books (i. e. primarily fairy tale stories).

All five picture books contained aspects of daily life, both in the positive and negative, with all books showing positive experiences for marginalized individuals. *Goldilocks* was a contemporary and relatable story where the different sexually diverse families in *Goldilocks* were having a birthday celebration, a special day that any “average” LGBTQ or heterosexual individual can be a part of. For Henry and Thomas in *Prince Henry*, they were depicted as showing positive peer support and, eventually developing into a romantic relationship. Though Henry and Thomas liked each other romantically, they were still able to enjoy regular activities, spending time with friends, and having regular adventures. Positive family support was also evident in *Prince Henry* when Henry’s father understood his son’s perspective and revamped the law. In *Kenny lives with Erica and Martina*, positive everyday experiences were represented through the positive family, peer, and community support that Kenny received when addressing prejudice within his community. In *Jamie*, Jamie received positive peer support and acceptance from his mice friends and the princess for her transformation. Finally, the *Princess and the Pea* ended with an understanding and peer reconciliation between the Princess and her advisors. Evidence from all picture books shows the presence of positive, day-to-day, “average” experience for the LGBTQ characters, including community, family, and peer support, as well as everyday activities, counter to the concern of predominant negative experience of bullying and victimization common for LGBTQ characters in picture books (Toman, 2014).

However, negative daily life experiences were present in four of the picture books. In *Jamie*, Jamie was treated inequitably due to her clothing and looks, where she was discriminated against because of her appearance and expression, and, consequently, not accepted by her family. In *Princess Penny and the Pea*, Penny was stereotyped to act like a princess because she was a princess, and was not supported by her advisors throughout most of the story. Similarly, Jenny and Hasan in *Kenny lives with Erica and Martina* were discriminated against as they were colored and different from the grey community, parallel with the negative interactions and acceptance of LGBTQ from the community at large. Finally, in *Prince Henry*, Prince Henry was initially not supported by his father regarding his relationship with Thomas. All four picture books highlight both the mirror and window concept and intersectionality for students to recognize and understand that they can be stereotyped to believe to act a certain way and be discriminated against due to their differences and labels in their marginalized group. This highlights both an authentic connection that they will and can encounter such negative experiences themselves. However, educators can use the negative experiences to facilitate a meaningful discussion to understand and problem solve the issues that marginalized students experience and what peers can do to support students who are marginalized in a similar manner (i.e. LGBTQ identity, disability, ethnic minority) by exploring the problems and

solutions that the characters in all five books managed to achieve, whether for themselves or the community at large. This can help promote positive experiences and prevent negative experiences that can lead to common LGBTQ risks (e.g. truancy, depression, suicide; Aragon et al., 2014; Johns et al., 2019; Baams and Russell, 2020; Gorse, 2020).

Stereotypes

Stereotypes encompass traditional general structures (i.e. traditional two-parent family) and traditional gender roles (i.e. traditional maternal/mother role). For example, *Goldilocks and the Five Bear Families* showed several stereotypical portrayals of family structure (nuclear family that consists of a mother, father, and a child). In *Prince Henry*, Prince Henry was only allowed to have a traditional royal marriage and was not allowed to marry a servant. This can be understood as parallels to the legitimacy and realities of the society surrounding same-sex marriage. In *Kenny lives with Erica and Martina*, Kenny’s parents showed traditional maternal behaviors. Both of Kenny’s mothers cared for Kenny and provided him with emotional support, parallel to traits commonly associated with mothers. In *Princess Penny and the Pea*, traditionality was shown through both Princess Penny and the Pea’s role to act and behave in certain ways, parallel to the normative understanding of certain traditional roles and stereotyping due to pre-existing labels. The stereotypical acts and behaviors that the princess and magical pea were made to do can be understood as having preconceived notions that certain salient identities and labels (i.e. “princess”, “magical pea”) should act and behave in certain ways. Similarly, if the individual has a disability, they are assumed to not be able to do certain things (Lalvani, 2015) simply due to their disability label. This was evident in *Princess Penny and the Pea*. Though Princess Penny was shown to be in a wheelchair, the picture book depicted Princess Penny as being able to do more than what a stereotyped understanding of individuals with a physical disability can do (i. e. swimming). Therefore, though there were instances of stereotyped attitudes and behaviors according to their identities and labels, there were also actions and dialogue that indicated that Princess Penny and the Pea were more than the stereotype indicated.

Across all five picture books, stereotyping attitudes and behaviors that encompass traditional family structures, dating relationships, and gender roles were present. Additionally, the lack of diversity shown in three of the five books (*Prince Henry*, *Princess Penny and the Pea*, and *Jamie*) show primarily characters of White and affluent backgrounds. Though stereotypes were present, the presence of non-stereotypical pictures and dialogue of family structures, dating relationships, and gender roles allows the educator to discuss with their students how stereotypes can be detrimental to the wellbeing of the individual (e.g. Crawley, 2017) and move towards discussions surrounding diversity and the presence of diverse populations in the society. This lends to the concept of mirror and window, extending how students can understand that though there are people who may have nuclear families, there are other students with single parent families, and students and their parents in non-heteronormative dating

relationships and non-traditional gender roles. As such, the presence of stereotypes in such picture books can foster meaningful discussion and social emotional learning skills that can benefit students to recognize, understand, and act in ways to be inclusive of all populations as future responsible citizens in the society.

Overarching Educational Goals

Though all five picture books can be considered as LGBTQ-inclusive due to the incorporation of LGBTQ characters, all five picture books related not only to LGBTQ individuals but to those who are marginalized and have multiple intersectional identities as well (i. e. disability, ethnic minority, other marginalized identities due to individual differences). The theme of diversity, equity, and acceptance could be seen throughout all five picture books in various forms. For example, in *Kenny lives with Erica and Martina*, the purpose was to teach children about individual differences, equality, and acceptance of all differences. Throughout the story, there was a conflict between the grey community and people of other colors besides grey, resulting in the other people of color leaving the grey community. This is a parallel experience that many marginalized communities experience around the world (Evans-Winters and Esposito, 2010; Hipolito-Delgado and Zion, 2015; Simon et al., 2020), highlighting many opportunities for the educator to facilitate a discussion for students to recognize and understand the societal realities for marginalized populations (e.g. ethnic minority, sexual minority, individuals with (dis)abilities). In *Goldilocks and the Five Bear Families*, the purpose was to teach children about family diversity through an adapted fairy tale, with discussion questions at the end of the book to promote a wider understanding through critical thinking questions that allow students to understand how diverse families can be represented in the community and in their own family. The goal of diversity and inclusion through family diversity was highlighted.

Therefore, though all five picture books delved into different purposes and had variations in their conflicts, the overarching educational goal was to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion of all students, mapping onto the experiences of intersectional identities of not only LGBTQ individuals but those of multiple marginalized identities and the mirror and window for students to self-identify (mirror) with their class material and other students to understand identities outside of their own (window), promoting opportunities and discussions for diversity and inclusion. These books have the opportunity to be resources for elementary educators to incorporate into their curriculum, particularly relevant to English Language Arts (Blackburn and Miller, 2017), to both learn ELA-related skills (e.g. reading comprehension) and learn social-emotional skills, that can map onto understanding how to interact with populations different from themselves (window) and for authentic connections to be made for marginalized students to feel a sense of belongingness in their classroom and foster school engagement (mirror) (Glazier and Seo, 2005; Christ and Sharma, 2018; Harris, 2019).

Limitations

Although the study highlighted themes surrounding intersectional diversity and positive, day-to-day representations of LGBTQ individuals, several limitations were present. First, the sampling procedure was non-random and focused on identifying LGBTQ-inclusive picture books that were not previously researched. As this was a case study focused on one independent publishing company, limitations may exist in how other independent publishers portray LGBTQ individuals in picture books. However, this company was chosen due to their specific educational goals to promote diversity and inclusion for LGBTQ students. At the time of analysis, a cursory search resulted in Pop“n”Olly’ being one of the only publishing companies with a focus on providing pedagogical materials to promote positive LGBTQ discussions and representations. Therefore, themes that arose from the content analysis of these five LGBTQ-inclusive picture books (diversity and inclusion, anthropomorphism, stereotypes, types of support and daily life, and overarching educational goals) may be specific to LGBTQ-inclusive pictures from this specific independent publishing company. However, results from the content analysis align with some of the previous concerns in recent research on award winning LGBTQ-inclusive picture books (i.e. use of anthropomorphic animals), affirming the validity of previous research findings (e.g., Koss and Paciga, 2020).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In future work, conducting a deeper investigation on specific social-emotional learning skills (e.g. emotion regulation, problem solving, respect, maintaining positive relationships; CASEL, 2012; Heath et al., 2017) can clarify how LGBTQ-inclusive picture books can be used as a method to teach students social-emotional skills that are beneficial to reduce bullying and to improve school culture and climate for all students but particularly marginalized students, such as those who are LGBTQ (Johns et al., 2019). As LGBTQ-inclusive picture books have been shown to encompass a larger inclusive perspective, LGBTQ-inclusive picture books can be implemented in elementary education for purposes that are overarching/encompassing of intersectional groups, tackling skills that benefit students to be responsible citizens in their community. Though social-emotional learning was outside the scope of this study, while analyzing other emerging themes, all five picture books had ample dialogue and images that depicted various aspects of social-emotional learning, such as communication skills, problem solving, critical thinking, emotional regulation, and self-acceptance when encountered with stereotyped behavior and inequity. Further understanding LGBTQ-inclusive picture books in the context of social-emotional learning can shed light onto whether or not such books can lead to SEL benefits for all students. This lends to the importance of incorporating LGBTQ-inclusive picture books as a way to promote UDL within schools.

Based on the themes that arose from these LGBTQ-picture books, this points to a limitation of elementary education. Specifically, the educator's ability to facilitate the necessary discussions with their students to make self-connections (mirror) and for other students to recognize and understand their peers and community (window). Though both authors in this study are well-versed and have worked with students in inclusive education, lending to the trustworthiness of the themes, this cannot be assumed for all educators working with diverse students. As Caldarella et al. (2020) has mentioned, managing an inclusive classroom and fostering an inclusive space for all students, such as LGBTQ students, ethnic minority students, and students with disabilities, is difficult for many educators and is one of the leading causes of burnout and leaving the field. Therefore, although the LGBTQ-inclusive picture books highlight themes surrounding diversity and inclusion, support for educators to feel competent and knowledgeable to facilitate such discussions with their students is needed to effectively allow for students to make authentic connections with the class material (mirror) and for other students to recognize and understand how they can support their peers and be respectful citizens in the society. Surveying elementary educators to explore how to better support their pedagogical practices in facilitating LGBTQ and diversity-related discussions is needed to understand whether such LGBTQ-inclusive picture books can be effectively implemented in elementary-aged classrooms. Though this independent publishing company is seen to be successful in providing many copies of the five LGBTQ-inclusive picture books to UK schools, subsequently increasing awareness of LGBTQ diversity, there lies a gap to understand the efficacy of educators in facilitating critical discussions of intersectionality, and diversity and inclusion.

Another avenue for future research is to identify other LGBTQ-inclusive picture books from independent publishing companies similar to Pop“n”Olly. As award-winning LGBTQ-inclusive picture books from well-known publishing companies present a barrier with aforementioned concerns (i.e. anthropomorphism, negative LGBTQ experiences), future research on books from independent publishing companies may shed light on the contrast in presenting LGBTQ-inclusive content compared to picture books from well known publishing companies. Overall, the barriers stem from community backlash towards schools to incorporate specific LGBTQ-inclusive picture books in their school library and/or curriculum (e.g. Rodrigues, 2017; Meyer et al., 2019). This leads to a wider, systemic issue which prevents LGBTQ-inclusive picture books from being published in a form that is authentic to LGBTQ students (i.e. using average, day-to-day LGBTQ human characters instead of using anthropomorphic animals to represent diversity).

CONCLUSION

Picture books have been shown to be effective evidence-based tools for educators to introduce inclusive topics and discussions

that include marginalized populations. Much of school textbooks and chosen books are written in a heterocentric positionality, framed in the majority group where protagonists are typically White. As such, students who are marginalized and have intersectional identities (e.g. ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity and expression, disability, diverse family structures, sex) may encounter difficulties in understanding and engaging in their class material. This has shown to lead to decreased academic engagement, self-esteem, and self-competence. Most importantly, they perceive that they are less than others, typically shown in current media (i.e. predominant White culture), leading to many negative outcomes.

Through the lenses of intersectionality and mirror and window, this study highlighted emerging themes that support the use of LGBTQ-inclusive picture books for educators working at the elementary level. The picture books present in this study had themes surrounding 1) diversity and inclusion for various populations (family structure, sexuality, gender identity and expression, ethnicity, disability, sex, and individual differences), 2) anthropomorphism, 3) daily life including positive support, 4) stereotypes, and 5) overarching educational goals. Many of the themes map nicely onto opportunities for educators to facilitate learning moments with their students to make authentic connections of themselves (mirror) and for students to understand how others are different in their community (window). By including LGBTQ-inclusive picture books, students can see their own representation in a positive perspective, that they can have daily lives, that having a single parent family or having two moms is a normative thing and not to be made fun of, for example. As some of the books analyzed used anthropomorphic animals to discuss such deep topics surrounding social emotional learning, this requires the effort on the educators' part to effectively open and facilitate such discussions with their students, as there are many euphemisms that elementary students may not make connections to themselves or their community without support. Therefore, with the effective facilitation of topics included in LGBTQ-inclusive picture books, these books can serve as effective tools to both teach English/social studies competencies while keeping in mind the need to connect diverse students in the classroom through the class material and foster inclusion, beneficial to students of all identities and background.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary Material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

EL: Conceptualized overarching project, data gathering, write-up
JA-W: Inter-rater for data analysis, thematic analysis discussion.

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