

Testimony
by
MerryLynn Gerstenschlager
before
the
Senate Committee on Education
on
Thursday, May 14, 2009

C.S.H.B. 130 by Patrick

Relating to an enhanced quality full-day prekindergarten program provided by public school districts in conjunction with community providers

Good Morning!

My name is MerryLynn Gerstenschlager and I am the Education Liaison for Texas Eagle Forum. We are opposed to House Bill 130 because it provides "free" daycare at taxpayer expense.

I would also like to address the accreditation of the private child care center.

Section 29.167 (b) states that "an eligible community provider must also meet one of the following criteria:"

The last choice, number (4), states, "the community provider must be accredited by a research-based, nationally recognized, and universally accessible accreditation system approved by the agency that requires a developmentally appropriate curriculum that includes math, science, social studies, literacy, and social and emotional components."

Members, I would ask the bill's author if the National Association for the Education of Young Children, or NAEYC, will be among the choices of accreditation systems.

I hope not... I want to read excerpts from an article that is posted at the NAEYC website. This article, titled, "Missing! Picture Books Reflecting Gay and Lesbian Families Make the Curriculum Inclusive for all Children," promotes placing books about the homosexual lifestyle in the preschool classroom for children, beginning at the age of two.

Science:

Ages 4-8 "And Tango Makes Two" is a story of the first penguin in a zoo to have two daddies.

Social Studies:

Ages 4-8 "How My Family Came to Be Daddy, Pappa and Me"

Ages 5-8 "Saturday is Pattyday" is about how a young boy feels hurt and confused when his two mommies separate.

Ages 3-7 "Daddy's Wedding" is about gay marriage

Art:

Ages 4-7 In "Molly's Family," one child says, "You can't have a mommy and a mamma!"

Phonemic Awareness:

Ages 2-5 "Everywhere Babies" is a rhyming book that includes several illustrations of two moms and two dads.

I have provided a copy of the entire article for your scrutiny.

It concludes with, "Let's hope that one day soon, these books or future ones will be found in early childhood classrooms and infused in the curriculum."

Members, our constitution calls for our government to protect Americans and says nothing about providing for us. Please protect our wallets and our children's innocence and vote against HB 130.

Thank you!!

Contact:

MerryLynn Gerstenschlager
Education Liaison
Texas Eagle Forum
105 High View Ct.
Weatherford, TX 76086
Cellular phone: 817-798-6204
E-mail: capitoldays140@hotmail.com

Missing!
Picture Books Reflecting Gay and Lesbian Families
Make the Curriculum Inclusive for All Children
<http://www.journal.naeyc.org/btj/200705/BTJMissing.asp>

Elizabeth H. Rowell

As **has long been recognized**, literature has the power to touch the hearts and minds of readers of all ages (Chapman 1999). Many early childhood teachers and librarians across the country feel they have adequate collections of picture books to meet their curriculum needs. Nonetheless, millions of children lack access to books characteristic of them, their families, or friends. Picture books depicting children in households headed by gays and lesbians or in families with homosexual members or friends are frequently missing from many preschool and primary classrooms as well as libraries (Goodman 1983; LGPA 1994; Betts 1995; Rubin 1995; Chapman 1997; Lamme & Lamme 2001/02; Rowell 2002). The lack of inclusive, gay-friendly picture books means some children cannot see their own lives or the full diversity of family life reflected in books.

The number of children raised in families headed by parents who are gay or lesbian is increasing. An estimated 6 to 14 million children in the United States have gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender parents (GLSEN 2003). Many other children know that some of their family members or friends are homosexual, and even as young as four some begin to be aware of their own sexuality differences (Herdt & Boxer 1993; Hunt 2002). Although most early childhood teachers are increasingly aware of the need to respond to the diversity of their students, sexual orientation is not always seen to be a part of that diversity (Colleary 1999).

Educational concerns

Historically, homosexuals have been one of the most maligned subgroups in society. Incidents of violence and prejudice as well as negative portrayals of gays and lesbians continue, and some young children are afraid to talk about their two moms or two dads. These realities directly influence the availability of materials and their use in early childhood settings.

The publishing history of gay-friendly picture books includes many struggles and determination and commitment by a few authors and small publishing companies. Fewer than 80 titles published or made available in the United States have reached the U.S. marketplace, and most go out of print quickly (Goodman 1983; Chapman 1997). Only some are readily available in local bookstores, but many, even those out of print, can be purchased online.

Teachers unawareness and fears

Gay-friendly picture books are rarely discussed in childrens literature classes, featured in library or bookstore displays, or marketed by popular book clubs. Some educators express concern about using inclusive materials because they think such books will be about sex (Wickens 1993).

Others may fear parental backlash or loss of their jobs if they read gay-friendly books in their classes. In the late 1950s and the 1960s, during the struggle to racially integrate U.S. schools, teachers often mentioned similar apprehensions and used such books as *The Rabbits Wedding*, by Garth Williams, and *The Snowy Day*, by Ezra Jack Keats, to promote understanding.

Typically, gay-friendly picture books, like books depicting heterosexual families, simply capture everyday family life experiences involving children, pets, family outings and celebrations, and families enjoying each others company. The fact that some characters are homosexuals is evident but not the main focus of the story.

Learning about oneself and others

Today, most early childhood programs and elementary schools offer a wide array of multicultural and multiracial books so that children can see themselves as well as learn about others. The next step is for programs and schools to choose a wider range of materials that portray children from all family configurations, including those having gay and lesbian parents. Some children will feel confirmed and others will learn about families different from their own.

A majority of gay-friendly books are interesting and enjoyable to children. Many that do not use the terms gay or lesbian provide important images for children who also have two moms or two dads as a result of divorce and remarriage. Other picture books focus more directly on gay and lesbian parents. The two moms or dads are referred to as parents, and sometimes they are portrayed showing outward signs of affection, such as one having an arm around the others shoulder. Young children from same-sex parent families can recognize themselves, and all are encouraged to talk about the commonalities of happy family lives. This literature contributes to the validation of many young childrens lives and to erasing homophobia.

Gay-friendly books can make a positive difference in the classroom: children from same-sex parent families feel their families are included and other children learn about and gain respect and acceptance for other types of families. When teachers and future teachers are aware of inclusive literature, integrate use of these books throughout the curriculum, and share their knowledge with others, they strengthen their programs, broaden childrens learning, and win supporters.

Literature quality, variety, and availability

In recent years publishers have presented gay-friendly picture books with clever illustrations and engaging stories, including board books for toddlers, leveled materials for beginning readers, bilingual stories, and chapter books. Most feature reality-based narrative stories having a plot, action, different types of settings, and situations that can elicit childrens reflections and class discussion. Inclusion of some of these books throughout the curriculum may help make the early childhood classroom a safer, more just and equal place for children of lesbian and gay families and more welcoming and supportive of their parents or homosexual relatives and friends (Clay 2004).

The picture books highlighted in this article have received favorable reviews from early childhood teachers, teacher candidates, and parents and are good choices for early childhood classroom and school libraries.

Infusion in the curriculum

How can teachers infuse a developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum with literature that includes gay and lesbian families? The answer is by choosing appropriate, inclusive literature that addresses early childhood standards and promotes goals and objectives related to self-affirmation, self-esteem, and learning about human diversity.

When a child in the class is being teased about his or her family structure or another is making unkind comments about someones family, the teacher can read stories with similar situations to open up discussion that can promote antibias awareness and action. As with all types of materials, it is important for the teacher to personally review books and select ones children will profit from and enjoy.

Literacy is key in the early childhood curriculum and integral to all learning. But the use of literature can go beyond literacy learning to support learning throughout the curriculum. Teachers can use books such as the following to introduce and reinforce concepts in all areas of the curriculum.

Math

Mathematics is an important part of young childrens everyday experiences. Picture books help teachers make math tie-ins as well as integrate math learning throughout the curriculum. These two picture books show same-sex parented families, just like all families, helping children develop counting skills and math concepts. Adding them to the math center also prompts fun with numbers and reading enjoyment.

***1, 2, 3: A Family Counting Book*, by Bobbie Combs. Illus. Danamarie Hosler. 2000. Ridley Park, PA: Two Lives Publishing. 32 pp. Ages 4 to 7.**

This delightful picture book highlights the numbers 1 through 20 and features multiracial gay and lesbian parents in a variety of settings without mentioning family structure. The families are doing things most young children would enjoy, such as seven skaters rolling down the street and eight popsicles for a special treat.

Children can count items on each page and discuss the things the families are doing. They could also each select a number, write and illustrate a number of similar things they do or could do with their families, and collect them to make a Class Family Counting Book.

***One Hundred Is a Family*, by Pam Muoz Ryan. Illus. Benrei Huang. 1996. New York: Hyperion. 28 pp. Ages 4 to 7.**

Multiculturally diverse family groups come in many sizes, including two moms and a child illustrated with the accompanying caption: THREE is a family counting the sparkling stars at night. As a class activity, children could call out the bold number on each page and make a book graph, then repeat the exercise creating a class graph of the numbers of members of their individual families.

Science

Young children enjoy exploring and learning about natural phenomena. These books, which include same-sex parents, could help children to learn more about living things, habitats, and seasons as well as different family configurations.

***And Tango Makes Three*, by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell. Illus. Henry Cole. 2005. New York: Simon & Schuster. 32 pp. Ages 4 to 8.**

Two male Chinstrap penguins in New York City's Central Park Zoo were a couple for many years and even tried to hatch a rock before their keeper put an egg that needed care in their nest. Baby Tango was the first penguin in the zoo with two daddies. This well-written and well-illustrated true story for young children contains information about all penguins. Discussions could inspire penguin, bird, or zoo study.

***Postcards from Buster: Busters Sugartime*, by Marc Brown. 2006. Boston: Little, Brown. 32 pp. Ages 4 to 8.**

Although Buster, the traveling TV rabbit, is unlike most other bunnies, the photos and information about the two-mom families and the maple sugar-making process are real. The leveled book and available DVD could be compared with each other and other factual sources about sugar time in New England in focused discussions and using a Venn diagram.

***Flying Free*, by Jennifer C. Gregg. Illus. Janna Richards. 2004. North Charleston, NC: Book Surge. 28 pp. Ages 5 to 8.**

A firefly captured by a five-year-old with two moms is the narrator of this clever story. It could be used to promote young children's understanding of the needs of insects and help develop responsible behavior toward living things. The class could discuss what is real and fiction in this picture book, compared with some other fact-focused materials about fireflies. Invite children to pretend they are different types of insects confined to places unlike their natural habitats. Encourage them to write stories about their feelings.

Social studies

Family histories are important to young children, and the following books include same-sex parents. Teachers can find many ways to incorporate family histories in the curriculum. Social studies goals, for example, include expanding children's horizons by recognizing and respecting similarities and differences among individuals and groups, understanding and appreciating their own and others' cultures and traditions, mastering problem-solving techniques, building positive interpersonal interactions, and developing the strength of character to stand up for themselves and others when treated unfairly (Derman-Sparks & ABC Task Force 1989; Kostelnik, Soderman, & Whiren 2007). Two of the picture books described below feature stories of adoption to help all children understand this way of creating a family.

***All Families Are Special*, by Norma Simon. Illus. Teresa Flavin. 2003. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman. 32 pp. Ages 4 to 6.**

The kindergarten teacher and her students in this book share information about their

different types of families. One child mentions her two mommies, who both have green thumbs. At the end of the family-sharing session, the teacher says, No families are the same. All families are definitely special! Engage the children in talking about characteristics of the families in the book. Then, ask them to describe, write, or illustrate things they notice about the special people in their families.

***The Family Book*, by Todd Parr. 2003. Boston: Little, Brown. 32 pp. Ages 4 to 7.**

Young children will enjoy the comical illustrations on brightly colored pages in this book. It features different types of families, including some that look like their pets, share a house with others, or have two moms or two dads. Children could take the theme further, each thinking of something unique about his or her family to write about, illustrate on brightly colored paper, and display in the classroom.

***How My Family Came to Be Daddy, Papa and Me*, by Andrew R. Aldrich. Illus. Mike Motz. 2003. Oakland, CA: New Family Press. 32 pp. Ages 4 to 8.**

An adopted, school-age child in a gay-parented, biracial family narrates this joyful book written by the author to explain to his son how their forever family came to be. With a few words and vivid pictures, details rarely conveyed in adoption stories, such as meeting with the social worker, the home study, and filling out lots of papers, come alive. In class, after reading and discussing this family's story, children may ask lots of questions, share what they know about their own families, and explore together similarities and differences.

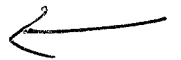
***The White Swan Express: A Story about Adoption*, by Jean D. Okimoto and Elaine M. Aoki. Illus. Meilo So. 2002. Boston: Clarion Books/Houghton Mifflin. 32 pp. Ages 5 to 8.**

Four families, including a pair of women and one single woman, travel to China to adopt their little girls. The pictures portray the excitement and love expressed for their new daughters. The story, based on the authors' experiences, will be familiar to many parents who have adopted children from China and other countries.

In class, this book could launch a study of families or China. Children can locate China on the map or learn Chinese expressions, such as *Wo shi ni de mama* (I am Mommy) and *Wo ai ni* (I love you). They can point out in the book's illustrations things that are different in China, such as eating utensils, clothing, and writing. Comparing babies' Chinese names prior to adoption with those given after could lead to children's discussions at home to learn how their own names were selected.

***Saturday Is Pattyday*, by Lesla Newman. Illus. Annette Hegell. 1993. Norwich, VT: New Victoria. 24 pp. Ages 5 to 8.**

Separation is the subject of this book, as a young boy feels hurt and confused when his two mommies end their relationship. He finds comfort in knowing that the mommy who moved away will still be part of his life and that he'll see her on Pattydays. All children whose parents have separated, divorced, or died can identify with this story and the feelings of loss.



***Tiger Flowers*, by Patricia Quinlan. Illus. Janet Wilson. 1994. New York: Dial Books. 32 pp. Ages 4 to 8.**

Narrated by the slightly older, supportive big brother of a three-year-old sister, this story deals with the two childrens feelings of loss and their familys remembrance of Uncle Michael, who died of AIDS. The book can help children share their experiences about what its like to lose a family member or friend and learn how to comfort a classmate experiencing a family death.

Both of the next two books celebrate loving, child-focused families and include humor. They can be beneficial if children are talking about weddings of any type.

***Daddys Wedding*, by Michael Willhoite. 1996. New York: Alyson Publications. 32 pp. Ages 3 to 7.**

As gay marriages or unions are increasingly in the news, some children may have feelings of confusion, while others may have already attended such weddings or commitment ceremonies. This book focuses on the commitment ceremony of young Nicks dad and his partner. Nick is the best man, and his mother and stepfather also attend the festive event.

***Mum and Mum Are Getting Married*, by K. Settington. Illus. Alice Priestly. 2004. Toronto, Canada: Second Story Press. 24 pp. Ages 4 to 8.**

The two mums children, young daughter and son, serve as flower petal and ring bearers in this more informal declaration of marriage, with family and friends present.

Art

Young children are usually creatively motivated and eager to learn more about art. At first, experimenting with colors and materials is more enjoyable than the created product, but later the meaning and effect of their work on others become significant. These books emphasize the importance of the message of childrens artwork in relation to their lives in two-mom families.

***Antonios Card/La Tarjeta de Antonio*, by Rigoberto Gonzalez. Illus. Cecilia Concepcion Ivarez. 2005. Bilingual Spanish/English. San Francisco: Childrens Book Press. 32 pp. Ages 6 and up.**

Leslie, Antonios mothers partner, is an artist who sometimes wears paint-splattered clothes when she walks him home from school. When the children make fun of her appearance, he is hesitant about displaying his carefully made Mothers Day card picturing his two moms sharing a book with him. After discussing his dilemma with his mom and doing some problem solving, Antonio realizes he is lucky to have Leslie as part of his family and takes her to see his card displayed at school.

***Mollys Family*, by Nancy Garden. Illus. Sharon Wooding. 2004. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 32 pp. Ages 4 to 7.**

Even kindergarten children may have stereotypic views of families and can make hurtful remarks. After seeing Mollys drawing of her family, one child says, You cant have a mommy and a mama. The other children agree and make similar comments that reveal

the biases some have already acquired.

Even though Molly's teacher is understanding and encouraging, Molly decides not to have the picture of her family displayed at open house. Later, with the support of her two moms, Molly faces the problem and solves it. She realizes that even if a family is different, it can be real and loving. She displays her picture at school the next day.

Literacy

Most early childhood educators include phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency as part of the literacy curriculum. Books depicting same-sex parents can be used effectively to promote necessary skills for building literacy strategies and at the same time support positive recognition of gay and lesbian family structures.

In the very moving video, *Both My Moms Names Are Judy* (see Resources for Teachers, p. 10), children as young as age seven from same-sex parented families discuss how they love their two moms or two dads and wish that in kindergarten the reading and talking about books had included their types of families so they might have experienced less harassment. Another enlightening video, **Its Elementary: Talking about Gay Issues in School** (see Resources for Teachers, p. 10), shows first and second grade teachers reading aloud a book about same-sex parents, *Ashas Mums*, by Rosamund Elwin and Michele Paule. The teachers discuss gay and lesbian families with their interested students. One segment includes a smiling little girl listening to this story as she proudly sits between her own two mothers, whom she and her teacher both acknowledge.

The following are examples of how books can be used to promote literacy as well as enhance understanding of different types of families.

Phonemic awareness (listening to the sounds of words)

Emma and Meesha *My Boy: A Two Mom Story*, by Kaitlyn Considine. Illus. Binny Hobbs. 2003. Ridley Park, PA: Two Lives Publishing. 28 pp. Ages 3 to 6.

Young Emma's treatment of her cat, Meesha, is the focus of this amusing rhyming story. After first reading aloud the book to the children, a teacher could use the technique of oral cloze (deletion of words) to get the children to supply missing rhyming words, with fluency and gusto. An example is, Emma starts to paint him brown. But Mama says, Put that paint brush _____ [down]. Teachers could also use this book to promote discussions on pet care.

***Everywhere Babies*, by Susan Meyers. Illus. Marla Frazee. 2001. Orlando, FL: Harcourt. 32 pp. Ages 2 to 5.**

This delightful rhyming book celebrates babies and includes several illustrations of two moms and two dads. The realistic illustrations feature all types of families and activities with which children can identify, such as, Every day, everywhere, babies are growing. They can run, they can jump, they can slide, they can swing, they can dig, they can climb, they can talk, they can sing. Most children will find their own families in this book and provide the rhyming word at the end of each phrase.

Ages 2-5

Phonics (identifying letter sounds)

***ABC: A Family Alphabet Book*, by Bobbie Combs. Illus. Brian Rappa and Desiree Keane. 2001. Ridley Park, PA: Two Lives Publishing. 32 pp. Ages 3 to 5.**

his alphabet book portrays racially diverse, gay and lesbian parents and their young children in typical family situations, such as playing games, going on picnics, and reading together. The short, catchy text highlights one word on each page that is featured in the illustrations: C is for cookies. Both of my dads know how to make great chocolate chip cookies. While someone reads the book aloud, young children will eagerly join in with the repetition of the highlighted key word for each letter. Each child can then select a letter to use to create a similar type of illustrated phrase about his or her family as a contribution to a class book, *ABC: Our Class Family Alphabet Book*.

Vocabulary (the meaning of words)

***Felicias Favorite Story*, by Leslea Newman. Illus. Adriana Romo. Ridley Park, PA: Two Lives Publishing. 2002. 24 pp. Ages 3 to 5.**

Felicias favorite story about her Guatemalan adoption is told by her two moms, with Felicias sometimes amusing help on words. For example, when one mom says, We named you Felicia, a Spanish name that means . . . Felicia, with exaggerated facial expressions and gestures, says, Funny, Sad, Scary, and finally the correct meaning, Happy!

The teacher can list these words and have children discuss how they are similar to or very different from the meaning of Felicias name. Young children may take home the assignment of asking their parents how they got their own names and what they mean. In class, children can then finish sentence stems, such as this: I was named _____ because _____. My name means _____. They can also write and illustrate their own favorite family stories for a class book, *Our Favorite Family Stories*.

Comprehension (using leveled readers)

***Going to Fair Day and My House*, 2002; *Koalas on Parade and The Rainbow Cubby House*, 2005, by Brenna and Vicki Harding. Illus. Chris Bray-Cotton. New South Wales, Australia; Ridley Park: PA: Two Lives Publishing. 12 pp. in each book. Ages 5 to 8.**

A mother and young daughter wrote these books, which have vocabulary suitable for first and second grade readers and are used in some Australian schools. The narrator, a young girl, obviously enjoys her two mums and their special pets.

Based on the colorful covers, young readers can predict what each story is about. They can then compare each storys events with familiar ones in their own lives as well as with other books in the series. Many beginning readers can enjoy these books on their own and will frequently select them for quiet reading times.

Fluency and expressive reading

***Mama Eat Ant, Yuck!* by Barbara Lynn Edmonds. Illus. Matthew Dariele. 2000. Hundredth Munchy Publications. 28 pp. Ages 4 to 7.**

This humorous story is about baby Emma, whose first words are, Mama Eat Ant, Yuck! She says this when one of her two moms accidentally eats some ants that are in the raisins. Emma continues to say only these four words in many different situations throughout the book.

Teachers can write Emmas phrase on chart paper and encourage children to say it using appropriate expression, along with the person reading the book aloud. This unique story may introduce some enthusiastic listeners to a different type of family. It could also be one that children from lesbian-parented families could readily identify with, even if their moms dont eat ants.

Conclusion

Early childhood educators carefully reflect on the messages conveyed about family diversity in the materials they select to use. Picture books depicting gay and lesbian families can enhance the curriculum and make an important contribution to young childrens development. Families comprised of same-sex parents or those who have gay and lesbian family members or friends will feel that the people they know and love are evident in the materials used in their childs school. Children from all types of families can develop their understanding and appreciation of the commonalities in loving relationships and homes.

Including these books can help prevent or end harassment that often begins in preschool and kindergarten because some children with two moms or two dads are perceived as different. Lets hope that one day soon, these books or future ones will be found in early childhood classrooms and infused in the curriculum.

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Resources for Teachers

Video recordings and online links

Both My Moms Names Are Judy In this very moving video, children seven years old and up of same-sex parented families discuss how they love their two moms or two dads and wish their schools had started in kindergarten to read and talk about books that include their types of families to prevent some of the harassment they experienced. Source: Lesbian and Gay Parents Association, 1994. DVD. 10 min. San Francisco: LGPA. For information: shayndel@aol.com.

Its Elementary: Talking about Gay Issues in School This enlightening video, produced

by D. Chasnoff and H. Cohen, includes first and second grade teachers reading aloud *Ashas Mums*, a same-sex parent book by R. Elwin and M. Paulse, and discussing gay and lesbian families with the children. One segment pictures a smiling little girl listening to this story as she proudly sits between her own two mothers, who are acknowledged by the child and the teacher. Source: Womens Educational Media, 1996. VHS. 8 min. San Francisco: www.womedia.org.

Family Pride Coalition<http://familypride.org>

COLAGEChildren of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere<http://colage.org>

Two Lives PublishingA source for childrens bookswww.twolives.com

Brochure and books from NAEYC

***Code of Ethical Conduct & Statement of Commitment*, rev. 2005, brochure.**

Principles. P-1.3: We shall not participate in practices that discriminate against children by denying benefits, giving special advantages, or excluding them from programs or activities on the basis of their sex, race, national origin, religious beliefs, medical condition, disability, or the marital status/family structure, sexual orientation, or religious beliefs or other affiliations of their families.

***Spotlight on Young Children and Families*, ed. D. Koralek, 2007, 64 pp.** A collection of 14 articles, resources for supporting and involving families in meaningful ways, and questions and follow-up activities for reflecting, discussing, and exploring family diversity. From the introduction by Ruth Ann Halacka Ball: Make families feel welcome. Building and sustaining home-school relationships involves welcoming families into programs and classrooms, listening to their wisdom and questions, offering meaningful suggestions, and valuing who they are as families.

***A World of Difference: Readings on Teaching Young Children in a Diverse Society*, ed. C. Copple, 2003, 192 pp.** A collection of readings to help teachers work with young children and their families in ways truly responsive to their differences and effective in combating bias.

Further reading

Letts, W., & J.T. Sears, eds. 1999. *Queering elementary education: Advancing the dialogue about sexualities and schooling*. Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield.

Wolpert, E. 1999. *Start seeing diversity: The basic guide to an anti-bias classroom*. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf.

Elizabeth H. Rowell, PhD, is professor of graduate and undergraduate early childhood education and literacy at Rhode Island College (RIC) in Providence. With Elizabeths help, RIC acquired an extensive historical collection of gay-friendly picture books for young children published or distributed in the United States. Elizabeth can be reached at erowell@ric.edu.