WHAT IS A FAMILY?: USING INTERDISCIPLINARY INSTRUCTION TO TEACH ABOUT
DIVERSE FAMILIES IN THE EARLY ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

By

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents a qualitative study that utilized Design-Based Research (Reinking & Watkins, 1996) to understand how an interdisciplinary unit using project-based learning unit on diverse family structures and experiences can shift children's preconceptions about families. In this study, I addressed two research questions: 1. In what ways do children's preconceptions of families change after participating in a project-based learning unit on families? and 2. What aspects of the instruction helped build children's awareness of diverse families? To answer these questions, I drew on many data sources, including teacher and caregiver semi-structured interviews, child semi-structured pre-interviews, child semi-structured post-interviews, observational data from the classroom, and child work artifacts (Miles et al., 2014).

As part of this study, I developed a 12-day project-based learning unit aligned with state and national standards to provide interdisciplinary learning opportunities for first-grade students. Children were provided opportunities to learn through whole group (e.g., interactive read alouds and discussions), small group (e.g., writing center), and independent activities (e.g., listening center). Children in the project created two project products: 1. An informational class book on how to be inclusive to families at school; and 2. Individual personal narratives about their family histories. After participating in the project-based learning unit on families, children's preconceptions about families shifted and they demonstrated a more expanded understanding of family structures.

The study contributes to the current research based on project-based learning and interdisciplinary learning in social studies and literacy education. This study also adds to the understanding of how children can be taught about families in early elementary social studies. The dissertation includes a discussion of how the unit can be revised and improved for other

teachers who may want to teach family in more inclusive and inquiry-based ways and directions for future research on this topic. It is vital that children are offered learning opportunities that are inclusive of the different family structures and experiences so they can feel represented in schools and build a more complex, accurate, and inclusive understanding of family.

This dissertation is dedicated to Tristin, my parents, and Shumai.
Thank you for always believing in me and supporting me.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

[A family is] "like kids and then parents."

-*Zane,* First Grade Student

What is a family? This is a more complex question than I understood four years ago. In 2019, when I began my research on how children in early elementary school learn about families, I started with Merriam-Webster's (2019) definition of family, which states: "the basic unit in society traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their children" (Definition 1). This definition continues to be ubiquitous in American society and schools, which is problematic and marginalizing of families who transcend this narrow definition.

Family structures and experiences have always been diverse, but only recently has that diversity been acknowledged and, in some cases, accepted in the United States (Williams, n.d.). Controversy and judgment continue to this day over specific family structures (e.g., LGBTQIA+ families, same sex parents) or certain family experiences (e.g., homelessness, incarceration). Families with these structures and experiences continue to be marginalized or silenced in society, particularly in school settings. For example, Mother's and Father's Day celebrations continue to occur in schools, embedding heteronormativity in the operational definition of family at school (McCormick, 2021; Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). Children growing with gay parents, single parents, or other caregiving arrangements (e.g., living with their grandparents) are left out of events like these celebrations, implying that they do not have complete or "normal" families. Schools often fail to be spaces of inclusivity for families that vary from the traditional norms.

Statement of the Problem

Although family is informally taught throughout elementary school through school events and traditions, procedures and forms, and classroom conversations, family units are specifically taught in early elementary social studies (Halvorsen, 2013; McCormick, 202; Ravitch, 1987; Tschida & Buchanan). When curriculum and instruction fail to include diverse or marginalized family structures and experiences, children who transcend the "dominant narrative" can be silenced (Gold, 2015), impacting their learning and development, and limiting their understanding of their classmates (McCormick, 2021; Tschida & Buchanan, 2015). Alternatively, inclusive teaching of families can strengthen the relationship between family and school and improve child-learning (Lin & Bates, 2010).

For the purposes of this study, traditional families are defined as married, heterosexual parents with biological children living in a single generation household, sharing biological characteristics (e.g., race). Marginalized or diverse families are families that deviate from the dominant narratives about family structure or experiences. Marginalized or diverse families can include but not limited to, families who have experienced death of a partner or child, adoption, incarceration, poverty, immigration, LGBTQIA+ families, single parents, displacement, blended family, multiracial parents, multigenerational households, or divorce.

There is a lack of overall research on how family units are taught to children as well as what they learn about diverse families (Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). The research that does exist shows a lack of inclusivity in family units in social studies curricula and a need for improved curriculum materials to teach this unit. Children typically learn about family members, how families can vary in size, and how families differ across surface-level cultural traditions like holidays and foods (McCormick, 2021; Tschida et al., 2014). Curriculum materials often discuss

families through children's literature, but many curriculum materials call for books that are out of print or books that do not depict family diversity outside of racial identity (e.g., traditional family structures that are different races) (McCormick, 2021). These curriculum materials also include only brief, limited writing activities (e.g., exit tickets) or writing activities that only connect to the read aloud that day (McCormick, 2021), rather than authentic writing activities that are purposeful or thoughtful as they learn about families (Tschida & Buchanan, 2017).

Overall, children are still learning surface-level understandings of families rather than digging into the structures and experiences of families. As a result, there is a need to better understand how to teach about families more inclusively and equitably through the creation of an improved family unit that is culturally sustaining and responsive and inclusive of family diversity (Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2014). This study aims to fill in gaps in research about teaching and learning about diverse family structures and experiences in early elementary social studies. This study also aims to build on previous research in interdisciplinary learning in social studies and literacy for elementary-aged children.

What is a Family?: Learning About Family Diversity

Interdisciplinary social studies and literacy can support and improve engagement and learning of social studies and literacy content in classrooms (Strachan, 2015). For the purposes of this study, project-based learning was utilized as an interdisicplinary approach for children to learn about social studies content while also providing opportunities for literacy and social justice (Boss & Larmer, 2018; Duke, 2014; Duke et al., 2021; Halvorsen et al., 2012; High Quality Project Based Learning, 2018). Through utilizing project-based learning, children engage in research about the project's topic (e.g., families) and authentic writing for a meaningful audience (Duke, 2014). Children collaborate (e.g., during whole group discussions

and centers) and also work independently to successfully complete their project and present their project products to an audience at a final class celebration (Duke, 2014). Project-based learning allows children to utilize agency and build their inquiry skills (Duke, 2014). Project-based learning can also support engagement in learning when children are interested and curious about what they are learning (Hertzog, 2007).

This study developed and utilized a project-based learning unit, *What is a Family?: Learning About Family Diversity* as an interdisciplinary approach to understand the ways in which children's preconceptions of families changed after participating and what components of project-based learning helped children build awareness of diverse families. I designed the project-based learning family unit, *What is a Family?: Learning About Family Diversity* to address the problem that family units in early elementary social studies were not inclusive and equitable (McCormick, 2021). Children typically learn about families in early elementary social studies through traditional approaches such as family trees, Mother's Day and Father's Day projects, and the use of read alouds with exit tickets to check student thinking (McCormick, 2021; Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). Many teachers are given curriculum materials that lack diversity of family structure and experience (e.g., showing traditional structures of families) and utilize books that are out of print and outdated (McCormick, 2021). Because teachers teach about families in both informal and formal ways, having a unit that is inclusive and equitable is vital for learning about diverse family structures and experiences (National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2013; Tschida & Buchanan, 2017).

I taught the 12-day unit myself in a first-grade classroom in the state of Michigan. This school and class had a predominantly white population, mid-high socioeconomic status, and high-test scores in mathematics and English language arts. I had a prior connection to this school

district, school principal, and classroom teacher as I had taught at the school before beginning my doctoral studies, and I discuss the limitations of this setting in Chapter 5. The project gave the children an opportunity to engage in interdisciplinary learning (social studies, literacy, and social justice) that built their awareness of family diversity and inclusivity to families. After participating in the project-based unit on families, children showed a more expanded understanding of family structures and experiences.

The interdisciplinary project addressed national and state standards including *College, Career & Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (NCSS, 2013), *Common Core State Standards* (English Language Arts) (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), *Social Justice Standards* (Learning for Justice, 2014) as well as *Michigan K-12 Standards Social Studies* (Michigan Department of Education [MDE], 2018). Project-based learning allows for teachers to integrate learning experiences rather than siloing subject areas (Strachan, 2015). This integration supports the teaching of social studies because often social studies is neglected in classrooms where literacy and math take precedence (Rock et al., 2006; Strachan, 2015).

This unit focused on teaching children about diverse family structures and experiences with the goal of learning to be inclusive to families who are different from their own. The children focused on answering the driving question: How can we be inclusive to families who are different from our own? They went through the different phases of project-based learning to produce their final products which included: 1. Informational class book on being inclusive to families at school and 2. Personal narrative on family history (Duke, 2014). The audience included the children's families as well as the school principal and other school community members.

Children engaged in whole group and small group learning opportunities. For example, in whole group children participated in interactive Google Slides presentations that introduced key content and vocabulary about families and interactive read alouds that focused on teaching about diverse family structures and experiences past and present (Strachan, 2015; Whitford, 2021). For small groups, children participated in centers where they had opportunities to write their project products with me, listen to read alouds, engage in inquiry where they could ask questions about families past and present, and engage in art and sociodramatic play to support learning about family diversity and inclusivity (Duke, 2014).

This project aimed to understand how project-based learning can drive the learning about diverse families and expand children's preconceptions. In the long-term, this project aims to develop a more inclusive and engaging family unit for early elementary students. My hope is that this unit will be utilized to replace outdated and marginalizing curriculum materials on families to dismantle traditional and narrow understandings of families.

Summary

This study utilizes Design-Based Research (Reinking & Watkins, 1996) to understand if a project-based unit on diverse family structures and experiences can shift children's preconceptions of families and what components of project-based learning can support the building of children's awareness of diverse families. Design-Based Research allowed me to design, develop and test the curriculum materials (Wright & Gotwals, 2017). I was also able to include voices (e.g., teachers, caregivers) to develop this curriculum in culturally sustaining ways (McCormick, 2022).

In this dissertation, I specifically answered two research questions:

1. In what ways do children's preconceptions of families change after participating in a project-based learning unit on families?

2. What aspects of the instruction helped build children's awareness of diverse families?

In this dissertation, I provide answers to these research questions through Design-Based Research (Reinking & Watkins, 1996) and qualitative analysis (Miles et al., 2014). I conducted two previous studies on the teaching and learning about families in early elementary schools. These studies led me to define a problem, and I chose Design-Based Research to begin understanding ways we can improve the teaching and learning of families in elementary classrooms. Next, I will explain what I will describe in each of the chapters.

In Chapter 2, I review the theoretical framework that grounds this dissertation, the history of families in the United States, the previous research that previous scholars and I conducted around the teaching and learning of families in early elementary social studies and the literature on project-based learning as an interdisciplinary approach in social studies and literacy.

In Chapter 3, I describe the methodology I used in this study, including data sources and my approach to analysis for each step of Design-Based Research (Reinking & Watkins, 1996). I also state my researcher positionality as this closely connects to what led me to this work and research as well as the importance of this work from my perspective.

In Chapter 4, I describe and analyze the findings in my research related to the two research questions. I explain findings from the different data sources, particularly the various questions and activities (questions with oral answers, drawing families, and picture sort activity) I asked children to complete during the pre- and post-interviews.

In Chapter 5, I discuss how the findings for both research questions are situated in the literature. I explain implications for teaching and teacher education, limitations, and suggestions

for future research. I conclude this dissertation with the educational significance of this line of work on teaching families in schools.

CHAPTER TWO

LEARNING ABOUT DIVERSE FAMILY STRUCTURES AND EXPERIENCES IN THE

EARLY ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM

Theoretical Framework

This project is informed by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014), and Crenshaw's (1989) framework of intersectionality. These theories and framework are used for this study because families are connected to culture, and different identities within a family intersect to impact children's experiences. In this section, I describe these theories and how they connect to children learning about families.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's (1974; 1979) ecological systems theory describes how environments impact a child and their development (Paat, 2013). This theory is based on ecology and is concerned with the interrelationship of organisms and their environments" (Guavain & Cole, 2005, p.3). The ecological systems theory also "describes the social and cultural aspects of the human environment" (Guavain & Cole, 2005, p. 3).

The child is at the center of this framework and framed by the environments or systems that the child connects with (microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems) (Darling, 2007). The microsystem includes individuals and immediate settings (e.g., family, school, peer group), the mesosystem includes interrelations among the microsystems (e.g., effects of family engagement or communication from school to home), the exosystem includes the environments or settings that do not directly influence the individual (e.g., a child's relation between the home and parent or guardian's workplace), the macrosystem which includes the

cultural patterns (e.g., belief systems), and the chronosystems include change over time of the person and the environment in which they live (e.g., socioeconomic status, changes over life course in family structure) (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Guavain & Cole, 2005; Hong et al., 2021).

These systems all impact the child in various, interconnected ways. For example, family and school would be part of the microsystem and are connected and both impact the child (Darling, 2007). The child can respond to the different systems or environments in different ways (Darling, 2007). Each child has their own experiences within their environments and systems. For example, one child may not experience the same school setting in the same ways as another child because their identities are diverse (e.g., racial, socioeconomic status, gender, parent/caregiver) (Darling, 2007). Hong et al. (2021) explains how school-level experiences greatly impact a child's development into adolescence. For example, school-level experiences such as bullying or teacher support impact how a child develops and functions in the future (Hong et al., 2021). The same experiences in the home also impact children in developing into adolescents and home experiences are the most influential on child development (Hong et al., 2021).

Based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory the child is influenced by many aspects of their environment, including family and school. There is a bi-directional relationship between the child and their environment (Lin & Bates, 2010). The ecological systems theory views the child influencing and contributing to the environmental contexts, while the child's family structure and experiences or second-order effects (e.g., parental employment) are acknowledged and addressed in understanding developmental change of the child (Sontag, 1996, p. 321). Because family has a critical impact on the human development of children (Despain et

al., 2015), schools must cultivate strong connections with children's families to support children's sense of belonging and achievement.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

Culturally sustaining pedagogy expands Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014). Culturally sustaining teaching addresses the needs of all children and "allows for a fluid understanding of culture, and a teacher practice that explicitly engages questions of equity and justice" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, pp. 74, 81). Culturally sustaining pedagogy also "disrupts dominant narratives that superficially affirm differences and diversities while maintaining the status quo" (Kinloch, 2017, p. 28). When teachers utilize culturally sustaining pedagogy they address and acknowledge the funds of cultural knowledge that children bring to the classroom and they use asset-based practices rather than deficit-based practices (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014). Teachers must appreciate and utilize the funds of knowledge (Moll & Gonzalez, 1994) that children bring to the classroom (Muhammad, 2020). Children bring many knowledges based on their multiple identities (e.g., racial, ethnic), and family structure and experiences are part of those identities. For example, teachers can invite children to collaborate and engage families in learning about families who may mirror their own or may be different from their own. Then, the learning community can have the powerful opportunity to work together to learn from each other (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Culturally sustaining pedagogy supports the inclusive and equitable teaching of families in early elementary classroom. "Culturally sustaining pedagogy exists wherever education sustains the lifeways of communities who have been and continue to be damaged and erased through schooling" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 1). When traditional family structures are highlighted

through curriculum and instruction, children who come from families who do not follow the traditional structure can be erased. Culturally sustaining pedagogy allows for teachers to foster "positive social transformation" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 1). Teachers can reimagine how they teach about families through embracing different types of family structures and experiences, as well as highlighting the cultural and racial knowledges that families bring to school communities. Children can learn about marginalized family structures, pushing beyond the standard curriculum and instruction on families. There can be opportunities for young children to take action themselves and "improve themselves as individuals and the communities in which they live" (Paris & Alim, 2017, p. 93). Through culturally sustaining pedagogy children can learn about being inclusive to families, especially in their school and local communities. This learning can support children's understanding of how to fight against injustice and the silencing of peoples from marginalized groups.

Culturally sustaining pedagogy also applies to how children engage in interdisciplinary (e.g., literacy and social studies) practices. For example, Muhammad's (2020) Historically Responsive Literacy Framework "addresses students' Identities, Skills, Intellect, and Criticality" (p. 13). This framework "responds to the limitations of traditional school curricula" (Muhammad, 2020, p. 13). For example, children can engage in individual and collaborative literacy acts that support their growth with literacy skills while also engaging children in social action, providing opportunities to shape ideas, critique, and evaluate (Muhammad, 2020). Teachers can go beyond the traditional stories of families that are told through curricula and provide opportunities for children to have agency to learn about diverse families through reading diverse children's literature, writing projects, as well as family engagement opportunities. Through this framework, children can also cultivate joy through feeling represented, learning

about families who are different from their own, as well as learning about the truth around the injustices families have faced throughout history (Muhammad, 2023). Joy is "the embodiment of, learning or, and practice of love of self and humanity, and care for and help for humanity" (Muhammad, 2023, p. 70). Providing children with the opportunity to cultivate joy is important to engagement and motivation in the classroom.

Through culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014), teachers can foster collaborative, collective, loving environments to support the cultural identities of children and critique the centering of white middle-class peoples, such as traditional family structures and experiences that depict white families, when using culturally sustaining pedagogy (Kinloch, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2017). For example, children who do not identify as white or in a traditional family structure may feel silenced when only white, traditional families are represented through children's literature and curriculum materials. Culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014) critiques whiteness and provides children with the opportunity to learn about diverse identities that are often marginalized. Children have diverse cultural backgrounds, and the families that they are part of are also diverse. For example, the assumption that all children have a mother and father and celebrate Mother's and Father's Day is not encompassing of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Educators must be able to address diversity and families and disrupt the idea of a "traditional" family structure or experience to ensure the equity, justice, and inclusivity of all children as well as preserve cultural identities. All children need to be represented, especially while learning about families, to ensure the justice, equity, and inclusivity of their educational experiences.

Intersectionality

  This study also draws from Crenshaw's (1991) framework of intersectionality. Crenshaw (1991) argues that the United States legal system was created by and continuously supports White, middle-class, able-bodied, straight, Christian males and when someone does not fit this norm then they are marginalized (Jiménez, 2021). Not only does this standard work in the U.S. legal system but other societal systems such as education (Jiménez, 2021; Tefera et al., 2018). Through previous research, I interviewed five caregivers about how they teach their children about families and how they understand families are taught at school (McCormick, 2022). The results of that study suggested that families experience their family identities intersectionally with their other identities, particularly racial, religious, and ethnic identities (McCormick, 2022). Participants expressed that their race and ethnicity did impact their experiences as families (McCormick, 2022). For example, one caregiver expressed, "So much of what is part of my family composition is our race." She then explained how she utilized books at home to teach about family structures and race because she said, "They're so intertwined."

  The framework of intersectionality provides understanding for how different identities can have multiplying impacts on a person's life (Gutierrez & Hopkins, 2015). For example, the intersection of diverse identities can impact the experiences of oppression that a person may face (e.g., race, gender, socioeconomic status) (Santos & Toomey, 2018). Intersectionality also impacts identities in families. For example, families have racial and ethnic identities, gender identities, sexual orientation identities, and other identities (e.g., adoptee) that impact their family experiences. Because families have diverse family identities and experiences, it is challenging to separate the different identities, such as racial and ethnic identities, from family experiences and structures.

Part of intersectionality is intersectional social justice, which requires people to "learn to recognize, appreciate, and celebrate identities that are different from their own across multiple matrices of race, ethnicity, language, gender, sexuality, religion, and class, and so on" (Jiménez, 2021, p. 157). For teachers to incorporate intersectional social justice in their classrooms, they can utilize Bishop's (1990) metaphor of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors (Jiménez, 2021). For example, children can "bring their identities and life experiences into their transactions with texts, a book can be a window for one reader and a mirror for another" (Jiménez, 2021, p. 157) and children can make connections across diverse identities through texts. Teachers can provide "authentic representation that shows marginalized individuals as whole people, living complex lives that do not adhere to the dominant white narrative" (Jiménez, 2021, p. 158). This representation can push against the traditional narratives or centering of whiteness that can occur when teaching children about families. Through intersectional social justice, teachers can be inclusive of the family structures and experiences present in the classroom, providing relevant learning opportunities, and provide opportunities for children to engage in criticality (Hawkman, 2018; Jiménez, 2021; Muhammed, 2020; Muhammad, 2023).

Review of the Literature

In this section, I describe the prior literature that frames this study. First, I provide a brief history of families in the United States. Then, I explain my previous two studies in this line of research: 1. *Understanding and Teaching About Families in the Early Elementary Schools* and 2. *Through the Eyes of Family: Understanding Marginalized Families' Experiences and Representation* that led me to this study. I conclude by discussing project-based learning and teaching a family unit in project-based ways.

The History of Families- What is a Family?

Throughout history, the perception of what a family is or who should be in a family has changed. There also has been a history of controlling family life and structure, impacting what family structures and experiences are centered in society. Outside of the United States, there are examples of control of what family structure can look like. For example, China has a policy that couples can have up to three children (Wee, 2021). This policy has changed from a one-child policy to a two-child policy, and now a three-child policy (Wee, 2021). This policy has been utilized to control the growing population, but this policy also shows the control that the Chinese government tries exert over the structure of families. Throughout history there are examples of laws against multiracial marriages, which also show control of what families should look like in society, but for the purposes of this study, I focus on the United States context.

In the United States there have been examples of injustice and oppression that families have faced throughout history. For example, during slavery, enslaved peoples could not legally marry in American colonies or states because they were considered property (Williams, n.d.). Enslaved peoples were always at risk of being separated from family members (Williams, n.d.). White people also used family formation to keep slavery in place because they "reasoned that having families made it much less likely that a man or woman would run away, thus depriving the owner of valuable property" (Williams, n.d., paragraph 7). This control over families during slavery shows the injustice that Black people went through that harmfully impacted family structures and experiences, and the intersectionality of race and control over family structure in the U.S context.

Another example of injustice that has impacted families is the control over same-sex marriages. It was not until June 26, 2015, that the Supreme Court made marriage equality

become a reality in the United States. There are still United States citizens, including people in government, who continue to try to fight against marriage equality, showing how they want to control what family structure can look like. Laws or policies that strip families of the agency to choose what their family structures can be like are oppressive and unjust. These examples show how negative impacts families face are not only about the structure, but also the experiences they endure. Identities (e.g., racial, ethnic) that families hold also impact their structure and experiences. Historical understanding of family structures, experiences, as well as the historical control of what families should look like are important to better understand how to teach and learn about families.

Families are diverse in structure and experiences and all families have their own strengths and vulnerabilities (Erera, 2002). Throughout history the definition of family has changed and evolved. The "traditional" family structure of heterogeneous, first married (never being married previously) couples continues to persist in our society today and hold privileged status, despite the fact that the idea of a "traditional" family in the United States has derived from recent history in western contexts and has continued to change over time. The U.S. Census Bureau's yearly data is often used to study family structures. In 1940, family was described as family and nonfamily households then divided into married couples, male householder, and female householder (Despain et al., 2015). In the 1950s, three-fifths of United States households had a nuclear family structure (Erera, 2002), consisting of a biologically related mother, father, and children. In the 1960s, people started to get married later and fertility rates were declining. Marginalized family structures or experiences (e.g., LGBTQ+, people of Color) suffered from less social assistance (Coontz, 1997). In the 1960s to the late 1970s, there was an increase in family diversity. More women had the opportunity to work, divorce was increasing, the amount

of single parent households was increasing, LGBTQ+ families were emerging, and adoption also

increased (Erera, 2002). Erera (2002) explains that families are not just social institutions, but

they are an ideological construct that consist of a history and politics of their own.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there were "contending visions of what a family ought to be"

(Erera, 2002, p. 7). For example, in the mid-1990s, cohabitation was looked at as an alternate

path to marriage, and 40 percent of women expressed that they had cohabited at some point in

their lives, mostly before their first marriage although the ultimate goal was still traditional

marriage between a straight male and female in most cases (Lee & Smith, 2000). There was an

increase in family diversity during these decades, but there was also pushback from society about

the increase in diversity and tolerance for diversity was low (Erera, 2002). For example, there

was disapproval by white middle-class society heaped on single mothers during this time and

fathers were viewed as less responsible for family challenges such as poverty or divorce (Erera,

2002). These changes to family structures also made changes in the legal system (Lee & Smith,

2000). For example, the state of Michigan created a Family Division of Circuit Court to hear all

cases that involved family matters, which could impact family experiences (e.g., divorce,

custody, child welfare) (Lee & Smith, 2000).

In the 2000s, there was an increase in adoption for older parents and single parents,

especially adoptions of children with disabilities (Lee & Smith, 2000). There was also an

increase in children in foster care during this time (Lee & Smith, 2000). For example, children in

foster care increased by over 60 percent from 1990 to 2000 (Lee & Smith, 2000). In 2010, family

structures were described as married living with spouse, married but separated, widowed,

divorced, living together but not married, multiracial couples, children under 18, grandparents,

and adults living at home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). This shift shows how the view on family

structures have made a shift over time (Despain et al., 2015). Children today come from increasingly diverse family structures or experiences and "face many different experiences, struggles, triumphs, prejudices, and perceptions than their peers from the past" (Despain et al., 2015, p. 317).

Marginalized family structures and experiences are common although the traditional narrative of family is still often referred to when discussing families in 2022. The traditional structure of family continues to be centered in curriculum and children's literature, which impacts how children view what a family is or who is part of a family (McCormick, 2021). Continuing to center the traditional structure of family can lead to children having misconceptions about family life in the past and other cultures, and lack an understanding of their personal, historical family stories (e.g., Brophy & Alleman, 2006).

Western ways of thinking about what families are dominate classroom spaces, but there are also other perspectives to consider about families. For example, many Indigenous families focus on how family members communicate and relate to each other as well as the maintaining of relationships, especially when challenges are faced together (Silburn et al., 2006; Walker & Shepherd, 2008). Families are "the hub of wellbeing" (Walker & Shepherd, 2008, p. 1) in many Indigenous cultures, especially for Aboriginal families. Aboriginal families can also consider a child having several grandparents or one person being the "nanna" to many other children (Walker & Shepherd, 2008). Not all cultures may think of family in the same ways, which is important to acknowledge for the inclusive teaching of diverse families.

Brophy and Alleman's (2006) study implied the need for more detailed teaching of families in culturally sustaining and inclusive ways. Families are unique and diverse, and it is impossible for every teacher or every child to know and understand every family structure and

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experience (Freire, 1998; Souto-Manning, 2013). Children benefit from exposure to many types of family structures and experiences versus solely a "traditional" family structure or "traditional" family experiences. Teachers must be trained to teach about diverse family structures and experiences so that children can feel included in their classrooms, and the dominant narrative of family can be replaced with a variety of more flexible, appropriate, and representative narratives or experiences.

Family Units in the Early Elementary Classroom

In early elementary school, the topic of family is taught formally and informally. The concept of family is taught in early childhood and elementary social studies curricula across the nation (NCSS, 2010; NCSS, 2013; Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). For example, in the state of Michigan family units are taught in first grade (Michigan Department of Education, 2019). There is little research on how teachers and curriculum materials teach about families in classrooms (Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). This gap in research has led the traditional definitions of families such as, "a social unit consisting of parents and their children or a group of people closely related by blood" (Dictionary.com, n.d, Definition 4), continuing to be taught in elementary classrooms, leaving out families who do not follow that narrative (Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). This situation leaves teachers challenged with how to supplement family units or just teaching the units that do not transcend these narrow definitions of families.

Tschida and Buchanan (2015) first conducted a study to develop a kindergarten, thematic text set about families for teachers to utilize to teach about families in authentic and meaningful ways. Then, Tschida and Buchanan (2017) completed a three-day pilot of lessons about families in an elementary classroom with a kindergarten teacher. Through this pilot of lessons and observational data, they learned how to teach children about families in more inclusive ways and

found that children shared diverse family experiences after read alouds. This research also found traditional ways of teaching about families still occur in classrooms (Tschida & Buchanan, 2015; Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). Through Tschida and Buchanan's ongoing research about teaching about families, they found that traditional ways of teaching family (e.g., family trees, Mother's and Father's Day celebrations, star student, or all about me presentations) can be marginalizing and harmful projects to many children (McCormick, 2021). One teacher described completing family trees as a "disaster" (Tschida & Buchanan, 2017, p. 4) because not all families could be fairly represented. Many children are part of families that transcend narrow, traditional definitions, and these children can be marginalized in school if the curriculum excludes them and their personal identities (Gold, 2015).

Curriculum materials that are often utilized in classrooms lack representation of diverse families (McCormick, 2021; Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). For example, many curriculum materials explained the culture of families through food, language, religion, and traditions rather than the different types of diverse compositions or experiences families can experience (McCormick, 2021). Many curriculum materials also lack the explicit instruction or resources for teachers to teach about marginalized families, and some resources were outdated (e.g., books out of print), which leaves teachers to find materials to supplement curriculum materials with (McCormick, 2021). For example, teachers often had to replace out of print books with other children's literature but lacked the guidance or resources to choose rich children's literature (McCormick, 2021).

This lack of research led me to conduct two different studies to learn more about how teachers teach about families, how children learn about families, and how caregivers teach their

children about families as well as how they understand their child learns about families at school. In this next section, I describe the studies and their findings.

My Previous Research on How Children Learn About Families

I conducted two previous studies on the topic of teaching children about families that have created a line of research that led to this study. I explain some key findings from these studies and how they connect to this study.

Understanding and Teaching About Families in the Early Elementary School

I conducted a study in which I interviewed four first-grade teachers in the state of Michigan to better understand how they teach about diverse family structures and experiences in their classrooms. I also conducted a content analysis of popular social studies curriculum materials that are utilized often in elementary classrooms to teach about families.

Teacher interviews indicated that there was inconsistency in how family units were taught in classrooms (McCormick, 2021). The teachers all expressed teaching about marginalized family compositions and experiences that were present in their classrooms (e.g., divorce, adoption, incarceration) or based on their own family experiences (McCormick, 2021). For example, one teacher expressed how she taught about incarcerated parents because one of her children had a classroom parent who was incarcerated, and she wanted the child to feel represented (McCormick, 2021). Then, another teacher explained her own parents divorced when she was a child and she explained that to her children to make connections with this unit (McCormick, 2021). Other teachers explained how they taught about different races, ethnicities, or cultures through family units. For example, one teacher explained how she taught about holidays around the world to teach more about family diversity (McCormick, 2021). The only marginalized structure or experience all four teachers expressed teaching was same-sex parents

(McCormick, 2021). All teachers brought up discussing families that had two moms or two dads, butut they did not get more explicit about other LGBTQIA+ families (McCormick, 2021). Overall, analysis of data showed there was a lack of consistency in how teachers taught about diverse family structures and experiences.

All four teachers also expressed a lack of training or professional development to teach social studies in general, and specifically family units (McCormick, 2021). They explained that they had to supplement curriculum materials with other resources when teaching the unit, which they did not have training on how to find supplemental resources or materials (McCormick, 2021). This lack of training could lead to problematic and harmful teachings of this unit and about families in general in classrooms.

In addition to teacher interviews, I analyzed five curriculum units that focused on families including: *Michigan Open Book Project* (2017), *New York State Social Studies curriculum* (n.d.), *Michigan Citizen Collaborative Curriculum* (2009), *Welcoming Schools* (n.d.), and *Social Studies Alive* (2010). These curriculum materials were chosen because the teachers were used by the participating teachers (e.g., *New York State Social Studies* curriculum and *Michigan Citizen Collaborative Curriculum*) or I found that other schools in the state of Michigan taught these materials based on information from the district websites.

Content analysis of these materials showed that many curriculum materials explained the culture of families through food, language, religion, and traditions rather than the different types of diverse family structures or experiences (McCormick, 2021). Some curriculum materials also represented family diversity through racial or ethnic diversity. For example, a photograph would show a Black traditional family (McCormick, 2021). Overall, teachers lacked resources and guidance for explicit instruction to teach about diverse family experiences and structures

(McCormick). Many curriculum materials such as the Michigan Citizen Collaboration Curriculum (2009) called for books that were out of print, which left teachers needing to find supplemental materials to teach the unit (McCormick, 2021).

This study showed how there is a need for: 1. Improvement of curriculum materials on the families in elementary social studies; and 2. Professional development or training for teachers to teach about families. This study aimed to support the future development of a more inclusive family unit for elementary children.

Through the Eyes of Family: Understanding Marginalized Families' Experiences and Representation

I conducted a study in which I interviewed five families (caregivers and children) to understand how families teach their children about diverse family structures and experiences, how families understand how schools teach about families, and how children understand diverse family structures and experiences.

Caregiver interviews indicated that families did not explicitly teach a wide array of marginalized family structures or experiences. Families were more open to discussing structures or experiences that children either asked directly about or that they encountered. For example, three caregivers described discussing same-sex parents with their children when their children inquired at home. Caregivers also had different perspectives on what they were comfortable or uncomfortable explaining to their children on their own. For example, one caregiver described how same-sex parents could adopt children when her child inquired, another caregiver discussed families who have children before marriage. The caregivers did not specifically name teaching about many marginalized family structures or experiences (e.g., incarceration, displacement, poverty, single parents) nor did they express discussing their own family structures with their

children. Some caregivers also indicated drawing connections to children's books or movies/television shows (e.g., Disney movies, Christopher Paul Curtis books, *Where the Red Fern Grows, Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry, The Name Jar)* to teach about families.

Caregiver interviews also indicated how the representation of traditional families continues to perpetuate in school spaces and how marginalized families were not being represented or understood. For example, two caregivers expressed that her children come home with Mother's Day and Father's Day gifts each year, which they felt was limiting to families who did not fit into those structures or experiences (e.g., same sex parents, single parent). Allyson also expressed how her children bring home Mother's and Father's Day gifts each year. Another caregiver expressed how she felt like her family structure of mother, father, and children was represented too much at school. All caregivers indicated not having a clear understanding of how their children learn about families at school. They believed that there was a basic understanding of families at school. For example, one caregiver expressed, "the message has also been conveyed that all families are equal." Another caregiver expressed that children learn to be grateful for their families and love their families. The adult interviews also indicated there was a lack of understanding of what their children were learning about families at school and how they learn about families. All five caregivers expressed they were unsure, which showed a lack of family communication from school to home.

Caregivers from historically marginalized racial populations all expressed that race connected to their family experiences and how their children learn about families at school. They were drawing connections to how race connects to their family's experiences and how they continue to have experiences in society and in educational spaces. The families from historically marginalized racial populations felt that there was a lack of representation of their racial

identities. One caregiver who identified as Asian American expressed that she did not know if Asian families were represented or not in what the children learn at school. Another caregiver who identified as Black felt that she felt her family's race (Black) "is unvoiced." She said, "I think it's probably represented in maybe images, but I still think it's unvoiced because I'm not exactly sure what background familiarity comfort level teachers have in sharing that voice or that perspective." Two white caregivers felt like there was a need for more exposure to diverse racial identities. Based on the participants' responses, there is a connection between family experiences and racial identity, and there is also a lack of diversity or lack of communication of the racial diversity that is taught in schools in connection to families. Families from historically marginalized racial identities felt like they were not being represented in family units or in general while a white family felt like white families were overrepresented. Overall, caregivers hoped for schools to teach about diverse families and how family is more than a traditional structure and families are also about love and care.

In interviews, children demonstrated a narrow understanding of what families are and who is part of a family, and they continue to perpetuate the traditional structure of families. When children were asked, "Who is in a family?" all five children showed understandings of families that centered with the traditional structure of families, and they differentiated family structure by the number of children present in a family.

This study also found that caregivers made connections to personal experiences from their childhood or experiences from their adulthood to connect to discussing family with their children or impacted the decisions they made as parents (e.g., where they choose to live). They also expressed that racial identity of their family was of importance to the families from historically marginalized populations and connected their experiences and discussions with their

children. Parents also made connections between personal family experiences and racial and ethnic identities. Caregivers brought up how racial and ethnic identity was part of their family experiences and had impacts on their lives. Some caregivers chose to not describe certain experiences to their children, while others decided to discuss the experiences with their children. The findings indicate that classroom instruction may be too removed from children's real-life experiences to address the ways that children may feel excluded or silenced due to their family structure or experience. These findings cannot say whether children are feeling silenced due to their family experiences, just that these interviews did not elicit those responses from the participants.

This study showed how there is a need for: 1. Diversification of how children are taught about families; 2. Family communication and engagement from school to home about how families are being taught; and 3. Understanding of how there is intersectionality of experiences and identities with family structures and experiences. Below, I highlight how project-based learning can improve family units in elementary social studies.

Powerful Social Studies

The National Council for the Social Studies (2010; 2016) developed principles and a vision for powerful social studies education. Social studies is often neglected in elementary classrooms, but social studies is vital to teaching children about the world around them (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013). For example, children learn about the social world such as the ways in which people interact in the past and present, which can support them in learning how to make decisions for the "public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society" (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013, p. 5).

Project-Based Learning as an Interdisciplinary Approach

Social studies is an often neglected subject-area in elementary school (Rock et al., 2006; Strachan, 2015). Rock et al. (2006) found that teachers felt they did not have enough time to teach social studies due to the instructional time that needed to be for reading and mathematics in connection to state testing. However, teachers can integrate social studies and literacy to increase the amount of time they devote to social studies instruction (Rock et al., 2006). Interdisciplinary social studies and literacy can support and improve engagement and learning of social studies content and literacy skills in classrooms (Heafner, 2018; Pace, 2012; Strachan, 2015). An interdisciplinary approach integrates both social studies and literacy standards and goals into one lesson. There are many ways to approach interdisciplinary social studies and literacy teaching, such as project-based learning. Project-based learning is just one approach interdisciplinary social studies and literacy teaching, which can support just, equitable, and inclusive learning opportunities for children.

NCSS (2016) expresses that, "social studies teaching and learning are powerful when they are integrative" (p. 181). An example of the integration is "the use of a variety of primary and secondary sources [that] should encompass a wide range of reading abilities" (p. 181). NCSS' (2010) Principles for Learning state, "being literate is at the heart of learning in every subject area" (p. 1). To learn social studies content, children must have opportunities to engage with social studies content through reading and writing (NCSS, 2010).

Agarwal-Rangnath (2013) explains how social studies and social justice education can be integrated with literacy, even in regimented literacy programs (e.g., interactive read-aloud, shared reading, independent reading workshop, guided reading, independent writing workshop, word study, and literature circle). Duke (2014) argues that project-based learning is not "extra"

but would support learning of social studies and literacy throughout the year. By adjusting traditional teaching of social studies and literacy, teachers can achieve meeting literacy and social studies standards alike through project-based learning. Social studies and literacy are often siloed in classrooms, but teaching social studies through literacy such as reading and writing allows children to build understanding of complex social studies topics (Strachan, 2015). Project-based learning has shown positive effects on children's learning (e.g., positive effect on argumentative writing) (Duke et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021).

In this subsection, I will describe the history of project-based learning, high-quality project-based learning and the different interdisciplinary ways of teaching through project-based learning including utilization of children's literature and interactive read alouds, writing, as well as interdisciplinary centers, the impacts of project-based learning, and common misconceptions of project-based learning.

Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning builds off Renzulli's (1977) Type III Enrichment and the project approach (Katz & Chard, 2000). Renzulli's (1977) Type III Enrichment was built for "gifted and talented" students, where project-based learning is for all children (Duke 2014; Duke et al., 2021; Halvorsen et al., 2012) The project approach has children answer questions (including their own) using firsthand resources, then analyze and interpret their data and share out with an audience (Hertzog, 2007; Katz & Chard, 2000). Hertzog (2007) conducted a project approach study in two first grade classrooms and found that children were engaged and motivated, while teachers were supportive and found that children did exhibit "interest, motivation, engagement, and curiosity" (p. 561). Again, Hertzog's (2007) study focused on a "gifted and talented"

program, and project-based learning has shown promising results for all students Duke 2014; Duke et al., 2021; Halvorsen et al., 2012).

Project-based learning shows promise of for building content knowledge in social studies and literacy in elementary classrooms (Duke et al., 2021). This interdisciplinary and child-centered approach allows for children to achieve their goals as well as provide teachers with a guide to follow (McDowell, 2017). Project-based learning can support children in sensemaking (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018) as well as support children in collaborating to learn through authentic experiences (Duke et al., 2021). Project-based learning has many different strengths which include meeting individual child-needs, addressing standards across domains, developing skills and strategies beyond content learning (e.g., problem solving, criticality), culturally sustaining pedagogy, and family engagement (Duke, 2014).

Project-based learning can support the teaching and learning of diverse families in early elementary. Integration of literacy and social studies curriculum and instruction can focus on multiple perspectives of families so that all children can feel a sense of belonging, agency, and shape their identities in authentic ways (Au et al., 2016). Family is a topic that is of utmost importance because all children can personally connect, and children can develop a sense of their own identity and belonging in a classroom and the world. A strong bi-directional relationship between home and family will improve facilitation of child learning, inclusivity, and equity (Lin & Bates, 2010). Family units have many opportunities for teaching in interdisciplinary ways.

In this section, I explain the qualities of high-quality project-based learning, the phases and structure of project-based learning, project-based learning as an interdisciplinary approach, the impacts of project-based learning, misconceptions behind project-based learning, and conclude with project-based learning and family units.

High Quality Project-Based Learning

The Buck Institute for Education (2018) developed *A Framework for High Quality Project Based Learning* (p. 2). This framework has six criteria which include: "1. Intellectual challenge and accomplishment; 2. Authenticity; 3. Public product; 4. Collaboration; 5. Project management; and 6. Reflection" (p. 3). This framework was developed to support teachers in implementing project-based learning in their classrooms (High Quality Project Based Learning, 2018). Project-based learning should support children in thinking deeply about meaningful and relevant topics while promoting collaborative learning and reflection (High Quality Project Based Learning, 2018). This supports the engagement in rich learning opportunities for children, even in early elementary school (Bandura, 1986). This framework also calls for support and commitment from teachers, school leaders, education policy makers, and curriculum designers to support equitable and inclusive learning for children (High Quality Project Based Learning, 2018).

Children's Literature About Families

One way to support the teaching and learning about diverse families is through the utilization of children's literature in project-based learning. Children can be exposed to children's literature during whole-group learning (e.g., interactive read alouds) and small-group and independent learning (e.g., listening center).

Representation of all children's family structures is vital for success in the classroom. When children can see themselves in literature, they can increase confidence and motivation (Hampton et al., 1997). Bishop's (1990) metaphor of books serving as a mirror to reflect the reader, windows to see the lives of others, and sliding glass doors to allow readers to transverse between diverse groups connect with why children's literature should be utilized to teach about

families (Ness, 2006). Children must be able to see themselves (e.g., their family structures and experiences) not only in literature but in the curriculum that is taught to them but also learn about other families that may not mirror their own. Teachers can utilize children's literature and modify curricula to increase representation and inclusivity of diverse family structures and experiences. By teaching children about different types of family structures and experiences, children can also learn to respect and appreciate differences through diversity education (Miller & Sessions, 2005). Literacy and social studies instruction utilizing books that include diverse family structures and experiences can allow all children to see themselves reflected in characters as well as see children who are different from themselves (Tschida et al., 2014).

Reading about diverse family structures shows that children who are part of these families are valued and important (Hampton et al., 1997). Diverse family literature also offers opportunities to discuss issues regarding families. (Leland & Harste, 1999). Although there are many more books that represent marginalized family structures and experiences than there used to be, children's literature is still lacking diversity. For example, in the 2000s there have only been 13 Newbery Medal books out of 87 total qualifying books that include diverse family structures (Despain et al., 2015, p. 319). This content analysis indicated that "society may or may not be reflected in children's books" (Despain et al., 2015, p. 321).

Although there continues to be a lack of children's literature that highlights all the family diversity that is apparent in society, there are resources that teachers can use to find diverse literature on families to support inclusive teaching of families. For example, Welcoming School's (2022) *Embracing All Families Booklist for Elementary* has books that feature different family structures and experiences (e.g., multiracial families, LGBTQIA+ families, immigrant parents, adoption, single-parent families, incarceration, homelessness). These types of resources

can be utilized to support teachers in choosing texts that mirror children's family identities or to teach about identities they may not be familiar with. Teachers can utilize these resources to choose diverse children's literature on families for interactive read alouds, listening centers, as well as mentor texts for writing in project-based learning. Children's literature can drive content learning on families for social studies (Strachan, 2015; Whitford, 2021).

Interactive Read Alouds

Teachers often use interactive read alouds of children's literature in their classrooms to support children's literacy learning (Wright, 2019). In project-based learning, teachers can utilize interactive read alouds during whole-group lessons to provide students with "exposure to content, syntax, and vocabulary that they simply can't grapple with entirely on their own" (Duke, 2014, p. 101). Teachers can support the reading and research as well as the writing and research phases of projects through interactive read alouds.

Interactive read-alouds also allow for the teacher to "read text to children and facilitate discussion of the text" (Wright, 2019, p. 4). Research shows how interactive read alouds also can drive the learning of social studies content (Strachan, 2015; Whitford, 2021). Read-alouds have different key features which include: 1. "The teacher and students are actively involved in thinking and talking about the read-aloud text" (Wright, 2019, p. 4); 2. "Most effective read-aloud techniques are purposeful and planned" (Wright, 2019, p. 4); and 3. "Effective interactive read-alouds can and should occur across the school day, in a broad range of content areas, and not just during language arts" (Wright, 2019, p. 5).

Research has shown benefits for students' learning when connected to content (Wright, 2019). To drive learning for the reading and research phase of a project, teachers can utilize interactive read alouds of informational text to: "1. Explicitly teach or review specific knowledge

and/or strategy/ies; 2. Model use of knowledge or strategy/ies and/or engage students in modeling for one another" (Duke, 2014, p. 101). Read alouds of informational text also allows teachers to 1. Set a purpose; 2. Read with expressions; 3. Ask questions; 4. Give students opportunities to turn and talk; 5. Encourage critique; 6. Encourage note-taking; and 7. Teach vocabulary (Duke, 2014, p. 101). Interactive read alouds of informational text can support teachers in teaching both literacy and social studies content and skills. For example, interactive read-alouds "can provide critical opportunities to support children in building knowledge about the world, and this knowledge can in turn support students' comprehension of new texts" (Wright, 2019, p. 5).

Interactive read alouds also support the writing and research phase of project-based learning. "Interactive read-alouds that focus on how texts work can also support children as writers" (Wright, 2019, p. 5). For example, teachers can teach children "how paying close attention contributes to the final product of the project" (Duke, 2014, p. 101) during an interactive read aloud. Teachers can teach about various genre features through mentor texts during an interactive read aloud so that the children have a model or mentor text to learn from to support their writing of the final project product.

Interactive read alouds can also drive the learning of vocabulary (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013; Boss & Larmer, 2018; Duke, 2014; Nagy, 2004; Reed et al., 2020). Vocabulary that is content related in social studies can be taught explicitly during interactive read alouds and teachers can draw connections between words as well as compare and contrast words (Reed et al., 2020). Through interactive read alouds, teachers can use dialogic reading, extending, paraphrasing and pre-teaching to drive vocabulary instruction (Reed et al., 2020). For example, a teacher may ask questions and create brief dialogue between children about a word (Reed et al.,

2020). This dialogue can foster rich discussions so children can think about words and draw connections. Interactive read alouds are one of the best ways to "expose students to new words" (Reed et al., 2020, p. 215).

Through utilizing diverse children's literature that represents different family structures and experiences, teachers can utilize interactive read alouds to drive interdisciplinary social studies and literacy. Interactive read alouds can provide opportunities for teachers to improve how they teach about families in classrooms. Interactive read alouds can provide opportunities for children to build on their background knowledge, content knowledge, and listening comprehension (Strachan, 2015; Whitford, 2021; Wright, 2019) and "provide opportunity for children to respond to literature in a way that builds on their strengths and extends their knowledge" (Wiseman, 2010, p. 431). Children must be able to see themselves as well as other types of family structures in read alouds taught to them to best understand diverse families as well as preserve their own cultural identities (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). Children can often "perceive themselves as inferior to the dominant group" (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010, p. 270) or lose their own cultural identities when taught by a teacher who has a different cultural identity as them. Teachers must be prepared to choose and utilize diverse children's literature to ensure that children are seeing themselves as well as gaining diverse perspectives when learning about families.

Writing and Project-Based Learning

Writing products are a main outcome of project-based learning. In project-based learning, children create a writing product that supports the answering of the driving question. This writing product is purposeful and has an authentic audience that the children present to at a project's celebration (Boss & Larmer, 2018; Duke, 2014; Duke et al., 2012). In the writing and

research and revision and editing phases of project-based learning, children will focus on "drafting the product of the project and conducting additional research as needed" (Duke, 2014, p. 22) and will make improvements or revisions to their final product. When the children finish their final products, they can present their product to their audience and celebrate finishing the project (Duke, 2014).

Writing in project-based learning is purposeful and deliberate (Duke, 2014; Duke et al., 2012; Duke et al., 2021; Halvorsen et al., 2012; Halvorsen et al., 2019). During the writing and research phase of project-based learning, teachers can utilize modeled writing, interactive and scaffolded writing, as well as independent writing (Duke, 2014). Using these three practices, teachers can support children in writing about the social studies content they are learning about in their project. During the revision and editing phase of the project, children work to improve the draft of their writing product. Duke (2014) explains how it can be challenging for early elementary children to engage in revising, so using different strategies such as: "1. Remind students of their purpose and audience frequently; 2. Model and explicitly teach revision and editing; 3. Be specific; 4. Don't have students revise and edit everything at once; 5. Construct whole-class lessons to focus on areas in which many students need to revise; 6. Consider pulling small groups together to address specific writing issues; and 7. Use peers" (p. 158) can support revising of writing products. Teacher, peer, and personal reflection on the writing is important to this revision process as well as editing (e.g., spelling, capitalization, and punctuation) (Duke, 2014).

Some children may need more writing support than others and through project-based learning, teachers will have the opportunity to meet with needs-based groups or with individual children to meet their writing needs (Duke, 2014). Teachers can assess writing skills before a

project, so they can know how to group children based on their target instruction (e.g., needs support naming topic and providing sense of closure in informational text). Small-group writing can support children in reaching their writing goals but can also support students in becoming "more thoughtful and 'meta-' about their writing in the presence of fellow students who are reflecting on their own writing than they are in just a one-on-one situation with the teacher" (Duke, 2014, p. 151). If necessary, teachers can still coach children independently to work on their writing that connects to the project.

Interdisciplinary Centers

For the small-group time in first grade, Duke (2014) explains how centers can support teachers in pulling small groups of children to support their needs. Centers can support students in working on the project and learning more about the content to complete the project (Duke, 2014).

Centers must be authentic and meaningful for the children so that they are not just doing random tasks that are not connected to the project. An example center could be a listening center where students listen to audiobooks or watch read alouds on their tablet or computers. Children can "read texts to deepen knowledge or understanding of content related to the project" (Duke, 2014, p. 153). At a listening center, children can listen to mentor texts again or they can learn new content through narrative and informational texts (Duke, 2014). Children can also participate in a reading center to read texts based on the project. Teachers must choose books that are at their approximate reading level so that children can engage in the text (Duke, 2014).

Centers are a way that teachers can manage the small group time while also providing students with the opportunity to gain understanding, deepen knowledge, and practice different skills (e.g., listening, writing, reading, inquiry) (Duke, 2014). Centers can support the

interdisciplinary nature of project-based learning. Centers must be connected enough to the project so that children do not get distracted from the project's goals (Duke, 2014). For example, having children listen to books that are not connected to project content would be distracting (e.g., learning about the seasons when the project is about families).

Impacts of Project-Based Learning

Teachers can utilize project-based learning to drive interdisciplinary learning in social studies and literacy. Through project-based learning teachers can address standards in more than one specific domain (e.g., literacy, social studies, social justice) (Duke, 2014). For example, a teacher can drive both *Common Core State Standards* for writing in tandem with the *C3 Framework* social studies standards during a project rather than just focusing on the *C3 Framework* standards. Children have opportunities to present information based on social studies content through literacy related tasks, which makes this a truly interdisciplinary approach (Duke, 2014).

Teachers can drive interdisciplinary learning but through project-based learning, but teachers can also understand class and individual child-learning through the ongoing learning opportunities (Boss & Larmer, 2018). Teachers can also provide the "necessary instructional supports to access content (e.g., social studies), skills, and resources" (Boss & Larmer, 2018, p. 130). Through project-based learning, teachers can foster authentic learning experiences for children that transcend the traditional teaching of different content, such as family units (Halvorsen et al., 2012).

Project-based learning also allows teachers to take a culturally sustaining and culturally responsive approach to teaching (Boss & Larmer, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014). Boss and Larmer (2018) argue that learning environments must be inclusive, encourage

all learners, and "cultivate diversity as a resource" (p. 37). To create a climate and culture for critical thinking, problem solving, and working together, teachers can use a culturally sustaining and responsive approach when using project-based learning. Teachers can highlight the cultural knowledges that children and their families bring to the classroom and school community, especially when learning about topics like diverse family structures and experiences.

Misconceptions Associated with Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning can seem daunting for educators but there are many misconceptions behind this type of teaching and learning. Some educators believe that "project-based learning is for older or gifted students or not for students in high poverty districts" (Duke, 2014, p. 17). Project-based learning is appropriate for all children. Teachers need to believe that project-based learning can yield positive results because with this belief implementation can be successful (Condliffe et al., 2017). Teachers can use an asset-based approach to learn about children and families' interests and funds of knowledge to better understand how to meet child needs and capitalize on their interests but also increase achievement (Duke, 2014).

Project-based learning requires scaffolding and reflection from teachers but can effectively support child learning (Barron et al., 1998; Thomas, 2000). Project-based learning also has shown promise in increasing content area knowledge (e.g., reading, writing, and social studies) (Halvorsen et al., 2012) as well as engagement (Hertzog, 2007) for elementary aged children. Children engage in discussions that are child-led using various thinking routines (e.g., think-pair-share, see-think-wonder), and opportunities for collaboration (e.g., writing products together, seeking peer feedback) (Boss & Larmer, 2018). Children have opportunities to reflect on what they are learning through ongoing assessment and clear, child-friendly criteria for success (Boss & Larmer, 2018).

It is vital that teachers have the appropriate training and time to plan for this type of integrated instruction (Heafner, 2018). Without the appropriate training and time, teachers can get frustrated with how to integrate social studies and literacy (Heafner, 2018). For example, Heafner's (2018) study showed how teachers had a lack of connection to curriculum resources that connected the science and social studies content in cohesive ways, which left teachers feeling frustrated and like barriers were in place to successfully teach in interdisciplinary ways. Teachers find it challenging to teach both social studies content and literacy skills when the curriculum is siloed. Teachers can feel like they are first teaching literacy skills and then social studies during a block that is meant to be interdisciplinary between both subject areas which then can complicate teaching schedules (Heafner, 2018). There is a need for interdisciplinary curricula and professional development opportunities that can support teachers in teaching in interdisciplinary ways because there are many benefits to teaching in these integrated ways.

Lastly, teachers need to have the time daily, weekly, and yearly to teach in this type of way. Duke (2014) suggests having "a block that makes most sense in terms of topic" (p. 18). Teachers can also have specific days a week or times to dedicate to project-based learning. Duke (2014) advises to make sure that if a teacher wants to replace a content area time slot in a schedule to make sure that "it really foregrounds the discipline- otherwise the danger is that it is supplanted the important work you need to be doing in that content area" (p. 18). Teachers can choose what works best for their students and their learning schedules, but it is vital that enough time is dedicated to a project so that participation can be thoughtful, deliberate, and critical. Rushing through a project will not allow children to get full access to practicing skills (e.g., writing) as well as learning content (e.g., families).

Summary

Project-based learning presents an opportunity to drive the learning about families in social studies through opportunities to use and develop literacy skills (e.g., reading, writing, listening, speaking). A project-based learning unit on families can support early elementary students in learning about diverse families in authentic and purposeful ways that are also representative of many family identities, structures, and experiences. There is a need for more inclusive learning of families in elementary social studies, and a project-based approach can be supportive of inclusive learning opportunities. In the next chapter, I discuss the methods and data analysis I utilized for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This study examined how children in a first-grade classroom understand and learn about diverse family structures and experiences through a project-based learning unit. The goal of this Design-Based Research (Reinking & Watkins, 1996) study was to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways do children's preconceptions of families change after participating in a project-based learning unit on families?

2. What components of a project-based learning unit on families help build children's awareness of diverse families?

Design

Previous research, including my own, indicates that family units as currently taught in elementary social studies and informally throughout elementary school do not address the diversity of family structure and experiences. In this project, I sought to address this need by designing and testing a new family unit to encompass family demographics that are present in classrooms, using project-based learning as an instructional approach. I designed a culturally sustaining and responsive family unit to highlight the diversity of families, including different identities (structural, cultural, and racial) that impact students and their experiences both in and outside of schools. The goal was to teach first-grade students a nuanced, inclusive, and flexible definition of family and support a more welcoming and inclusive classroom culture for all children, regardless of family background.

This study uses Design-Based Research (Reinking & Watkins, 1996). Design-Based Research was chosen for this project because it is an "iterative development of solutions to a practical and complex educational problem and provides the context for empirical investigation,

which yields theoretical understanding that can inform the work of others" (McKenney & Reeves, 2012, p. 7). Design-Based Research is also concerned with developing usable knowledge, "thus rendering the products of research relevant for educational practice" (McKenney & Reeves, 2012, p. 7). I chose Design-Based Research for this study because there is a problem with how families are being taught to early elementary students. I address the lack of inclusivity in how children learn about families through the creation of a new project-based learning unit on families that focuses on family diversity and inclusivity.

Reinking and Watkins' (1996) Design-Based Research framework includes six steps: 1. Identify and justify a pedagogical goal; 2. Specify an instructional intervention and provide an explanation about its potential effectiveness; 3. Collect data to determine which factors in the classroom enhance or inhibit the specified intervention's effectiveness; 4. Use data to make revisions to the intervention in order to achieve the pedagogical goal in more efficient and effective manners; 5. Consider what positive or negative effects the intervention is producing beyond the pedagogical goal; and 6. Consider how the educational environment has changed as a result of the intervention. Design-Based Research allowed me to meet the goal of designing a project-based learning unit for teachers to utilize in their classrooms in the future.

Throughout the project, I reflected on what aspects of the project met these goals and how the piloted project-based learning lessons could be modified to be more inclusive, engaging, and culturally sustaining. Since I taught the lessons myself, the teacher in the classroom supported the lessons with technological or other needs children had with the independent learning centers.

Participants

The study was conducted in a first-grade classroom in a school in a large, high-performing district in a university town. I taught kindergarten and first grade in this district from

2014 to 2019 and was still connected to many teachers and administrators. I chose Willow Tree Elementary because a former colleague was the principal and another former colleague was a first-grade teacher there, and both fully supported the project. This school district has been trying to improve social studies curriculum materials, and they aim to create inclusive and equitable learning environments. The principal and former colleague I worked with want improved social studies curriculum that is interdisciplinary, so we approached the project with shared goals.

This Design-Based Research involved teachers, caregivers, and children as participants. In this section, I describe the participants and the settings of the Design-Based Research project. The names of all participants and the school in this study are pseudonyms.

Teachers and Caregivers

Two teachers and two caregivers participated in interviews to review the draft unit in step one (pedagogical goal) of this study, which was completed in summer 2022. All four had previously participated in research projects with me. I relied on a convenience sample, especially for caregivers, because some of the questions about family identity are personal and could be difficult to answer without a personal connection and a history of trust.

The two teachers (Mallory and Bridget) taught first-grade in the state of Michigan during the 2021-2022 school year. Mallory had taught for six years, and Bridget had taught for 21 years prior to participating. Mallory teaches in a suburban school with a predominantly white population. Bridget teaches in a rural school with a predominantly white population. They both had experience teaching about families in their classrooms to meet *Michigan K-12 Standards Social Studies* (MDE, 2018). They both also had experiences teaching students from diverse family structures and experiences (e.g., adoption, LGTBQIA+, incarceration). Mallory and Bridget both expressed concerns that family units in their regular curricula/materials were not

inclusive. They also expressed concerns about a lack of training to teach elementary social studies in general and a lack of access to resources to teach about families in their classrooms.

The two caregivers (Amanda and Molly) lived in the state of Michigan and had children who learned about families in first grade. Amanda identified as a first-generation immigrant from Slovakia and as a white woman. She had two children (ages seven and ten at the time of the interview) and was married to another first-generation immigrant from Serbia. Her husband identified as a cisgender male. Her children identified as a cisgender male and a cisgender female. They were a multilingual family speaking Slovak and Serbian. Amanda expressed that traditional family structures were highlighted too much in classrooms and that she would prefer that children learned in more inclusive ways about families. Molly identified as a white cisgender woman and worked as a first-grade teacher in Michigan. She had two children (ages seven and nine at the time of the interview) and was married to a cisgender male. Her children identified as a cisgender male and cisgender female. She did not have a full understanding of what her own children learned about families in schools but was familiar with the curriculum and standards related to families from a teacher perspective. She expressed a desire for more inclusive instruction about families for her own children.

Students

Student participants included 18 children in one first-grade classroom. Students ranged from six to seven years old. This classroom's participants were a predominantly white population (11 white, four multi-racial, two Asian, and one Black student). Student participants participated in pre-interviews and post-interviews before and after the unit, and their work during the unit (drawings, writing samples, centers activities) was collected for analysis as well. The district gave permission to teach the unit to the whole class, which included 20 children total in the classroom. Interviews allowed me to understand the "views of the problem and firsthand

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understandings" (McKenney & Reeves, 2012, p. 97). Videoing and observations of lessons with observational notes allowed me to "see the problem or its content" (McKenney & Reeves, 2012, p. 97) and reflect on the lessons and what children were learning. Collection and analysis of children's work allowed me to understand and document their learning (McKenney & Reeves, 2012).

Setting

In this sub-section, I describe the setting for this study.

Willow Tree Elementary

Willow Tree Elementary is located in Michigan and enrolls 445 students in Young Fives through fifth grade. There are 19 general education classrooms in the school and four first-grade classrooms at the school.

Table 1

Demographics of Willow Tree Elementary

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage of School	Number of Students
Asian	10.88%	53
Black or African American	10.06%	49
Hispanic of Any Race	11.09%	54
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.21%	1
Two or More Races	11.5%	56
White	56.26%	274

MI School Data (2021)

This school has 16% students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch, 10% students with Individualized Education Plans, and 10% students who are multilingual. This school tests

above the state average in mathematics and English language arts. The school had 64% proficiency on state tests (Mathematics and English Language Arts) in 2021-2022 in comparison to 60.9% proficiency in the district and 41.6% proficiency in the state (MI School Data, 2021). In 2020-2021 the school retained 86% of staff and there is a 15:1 ratio of students to instructional staff (MI School Data, 2021).

The school was going through construction, so there was the main building and a modular building. The modular building housed all four first-grade classrooms and Reading Intervention. The main building of the school had all other classrooms, including specials classrooms (physical education, art, music). The first-grade classroom that I worked in had a large space. There was a rug where the children did most of their whole group learning. The class had one-to-one technology (Chromebooks) and each child had their own table spot. There were about three to four children at each table. The classroom had a library, access to art supplies, and access to math manipulatives, but lacked sociodramatic play materials in the classroom. When the children engage in play for indoor recess, Molly borrows materials from the kindergarten or Young Fives classrooms.

The principal described the school as a strong community with high family engagement and involvement. This school is located in a single-family residential neighborhood and is connected to a large public park. Many students walk to school because of the proximity of the school to their homes. The school hosts many events (e.g., movie/game night and family picnic) to engage families. The principal and Molly also described the caregivers as highly involved (e.g., attending conferences, volunteering at lunch, attending after school events). Molly described strong patterns of communication with the families in her classroom (e.g., email,

conferences, phone calls). Molly described the principal as a strong presence in the building who was highly involved in working with students, teachers, and families.

Data Sources

Data sources of this Design-Based Research study included: 1. Teacher semi-structured interviews; 2. Caregiver semi-structured interviews; 3. Child semi-structured pre-interviews; 4. Child semi-structured post-interviews; 5. Observational data from classroom; 6. Collection of child work artifacts; and 7. Video recordings of whole group lessons and some small group centers. In this section, I explain each data source in more detail.

I analyzed the teacher and caregiver interviews to revise the unit plan before implementation. The child semi-structured pre- and post-interviews, observational data from the classroom, and collection of child work artifacts were analyzed to answer the research questions.

I analyzed the children's semi-structured pre- and post-interviews using an interpretivist approach (Miles et al., 2014) so that the participants' voices were at the forefront of this study. I wanted the participants to be able to tell their stories, connect to their experiences, and share their full thinking through the interviews.

Teacher Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews with two teachers were completed in summer 2022. I previously interviewed these teachers for my initial research on understanding how children learn about families. Before the interview, I provided each participant with an overview of the project. Then, I conducted the interviews on Zoom and video/audio recorded. I took analytic notes during the interviews. The 45-minute interviews aimed to explore how the teachers' feedback on the unit, particularly how well the lessons provided support for teaching and learning of diverse family experiences and structures (see Appendix A).

Caregiver Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews with two caregivers were completed in summer 2022. I previously interviewed these caregivers for my initial research on understanding how children learn about families. Before the interview, I provided each participant with an overview of the project. Then, I conducted the interviews on Zoom and video/audio recorded. I took analytic notes during the interviews. The 45-minute interviews aimed to explore how the caregivers' feedback on the unit particularly, how well the lessons provided support for teaching and learning of diverse family experiences and structures (see Appendix B).

Child Semi-Structured Pre- and Post-Interviews

Data sources include pre-and post-child interviews. I pre-interviewed all children who assented and whose parents gave consent in the classroom. The interviews were video, and audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. The 15-minute pre-interviews asked children to describe what families are, who is part of families, and identify whether photos of diverse groups of people are families or not and explain why. Then, I asked the child to draw two families (not their own) and asked who is in the families they drew (see Appendix C). The 15-minute post-interviews were completed in late November 2022 and asked children to complete the same tasks featuring different photos and answer the same questions as the pre-interview as well as describe what they learned and their favorite activities in the project (See Appendix D). Pre- and post-interviews allowed me to compare and contrast their answers to the tasks and questions to answer research question one and to identify effective parts of the unit to answer research question two.

Observational Data

I taught the unit myself from the end of October through mid-November 2022 in the classroom during the regular school day. After I taught, I recorded observational notes to reflect

on what I thought went well, when engagement was high and why, challenges I came across while teaching, challenges that the children had during the project, or notes on parts of lessons to revise in the future. These observational notes were utilized for findings as well as for the list of revisions to the project.

Child Work Artifacts

I collected children's work as artifacts of their learning throughout the project. Some artifacts included writing samples, drawing samples, photos of anchor charts, and photos of interactive charts. I collected samples of children's work for analysis throughout the project. These data helped me understand the results of the unit and how children's understanding of the social studies content about families developed over the course of the unit to answer research question two.

Video Recordings of Lessons

Every whole group lesson was videotaped, and some centers were also videotaped (e.g., play center, art center, and teacher writing center). These videos were utilized to remember what happened during lessons and to add to my observational data from the classroom after teaching.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

In this section, I explain data collection and analysis for the different steps of my Design-Based Research project (Reinking & Watkins, 1996). I utilized Design-Based Research for curriculum development to draw on voices and perspectives from teachers as well as caregivers (McKenney & Reeves, 2018). Design-Based Research allows for the design, development and testing (Wright & Gotwals, 2017). Including voices in the curriculum development that are often silenced or not considered allows for more culturally responsive and sustaining instruction (Paris & Alim, 2014)

Step One: Pedagogical Goal

Design-Based Research is iterative (Kelly, 2006) and flexible (Reinking & Bradley, 2008), including problem analysis; solution development; iterative refinement; and reflection (McKenney & Reeves, 2018, p. 79). Through two previous research studies, I identified that family units need to be revised for elementary social studies to be more equitable and inclusive. This project was designed to "make a needed contribution to both problem resolution and scientific understanding" (McKenney & Reeves, 2018, p. 85).

In the previous studies and preliminary investigation in this project, I found that teachers did not have access to curriculum materials to teach about families that are diverse in structure or have diverse experiences outside the "traditional" learning of families (McCormick, 2021). Teachers were given outdated curriculum materials and had a lack of training to teach about families in their classrooms (McCormick, 2021). Through these studies, I gained a better understanding of the problem and was able to define what changes needed to be made to curriculum materials to reach the goal of teaching about families in more inclusive ways in elementary classrooms (McKenney & Reeves, 2018).

Step Two: The Intervention

First, I developed an outline and sample lessons to address this problem.

I followed Duke's (2014) phases and structure of project-based learning to develop this unit. Project-based learning has different phases to its structure, which include: 1. Project launch; 2. Reading and research; 3. Writing and research; 4. Revision and editing; and 5. Presentation and celebration (Duke, 2014). These five phases develop the entire unit or project. For example, Duke (2014) explains the project launch can last one to two sessions. The reading and research, writing and research, and writing and revision and editing can last five to seven sessions. Then, the presentation and celebration can last one to two sessions. Projects vary in length depending

on the goals, but overall, these are the phases that children participate in to accomplish learning content while also producing writing products.

In project-based learning, children participate in whole-group, small-group, and independent learning (Boss & Larmer, 2018; Duke, 2014). For example, Duke (2014) recommends a three-part structure that includes: 1. Whole-class lesson; 2. Small group, partner, and/or individual work; and 3. Whole-class wrap-up. The whole class component will "provide explicit instruction about one more teaching point aligned with the standards and related to the unit project, often reading aloud a text" (Duke, 2014, p. 23). The small-group, partner, and/or individual work includes, "instruction and support for needs-based small groups and/or circulates throughout the classroom coaching students" (Duke, 2014, p. 23). Then, the whole-class wrap-up is when "the teacher pulls the class back together as a whole, reviews key instructional points from the whole-class lesson and leads the sharing of student work" (Duke, 2014, p. 23).

To initially develop the outline of the project-based learning unit, I utilized findings from my previous two studies that focused on the teaching and learning about families to develop the unit. I found there needed to be curriculum materials that highlighted diverse family structures and experiences through read alouds and discussions because often only traditional families appeared in children's literature or curriculum materials. This lack of curriculum materials also did not support children learning in engaging ways. Often there were read alouds followed by worksheets or exit tickets where children answer a question about families or draw a family. The curriculum materials did not show different types of learning modalities (e.g., small group opportunities). Many curriculum materials lacked opportunities for children to draw connections to their own families and investigate or learn about diverse families through engaging learning experiences (e.g., play, art, read alouds, inquiry). Curriculum materials did not provide children with opportunities for engagement and agency or space for inquiry and critical thinking.

Curriculum materials also lacked cultural responsiveness. Sometimes those traditional families showed different racial identities like all Asian family members or all Black family members, but still mirrored the traditional family structure. Materials did not support teachers to be responsive to the different family identities and backgrounds in their classrooms.

I also utilized previous research on project-based learning and interdisciplinary learning to develop the outline and lessons (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013; Duke, 2014; Duke et al., 2017; Strachan, 2014; Whitford, 2021). Project-based learning allows for students to learn both social studies content on families and literacy skills because previous research has shown that project-based learning can have positive impacts on content area learning. The project followed Duke's (2014) five steps for project-based learning and aligned with the *College, Career & Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (NCSS, 2013), *Common Core State Standards* (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), *Social Justice Standards* (Learning for Justice, 2014) as well as *Michigan K-12 Standards Social Studies* (MDE, 2018).

Each lesson had a literacy component, either an interactive read aloud or writing activity. I selected books from professional lists such as Tshchida and Buchanan's (2017) pull-out on inclusive texts and Welcoming Schools (2021) *Embracing All Families Booklist for Elementary*. I analyzed the books before choosing them to check for inclusivity, developmental appropriateness, as well as criticality (Muhmmad, 2020). Muhammad (2020) explains how *Historically Responsive Literacy* calls for knowledge of culture and identity, historical and current social times, our own ideologies, and our students' lives (p. 56). I wanted to choose books that allowed the children to connect personally but also learn about people who have different families and family experiences than them. Because I did not know the demographics

of the classroom I was going to teach during the development, I tried to highlight many different family structures and experiences through the initial book options for the lessons.

After developing an outline and five sample lessons, I interviewed participants (teachers and caregivers) to seek their opinions and feedback on the initial project and lessons, which allowed me to refine the lessons to be inclusive, innovative, and address issues of equity and diversity before teaching. Participants for the teacher and caregiver interviews were from previous research studies (McKenney & Reeves, 2018).

I analyzed the participants' responses through qualitative analysis (Miles et al., 2014). I transcribed each of the teacher and caregiver interviews and allowed teacher and caregiver participants to add notes to the lessons I shared on Google Documents. Then, I analyzed the transcripts and Google Documents for different feedback connected to revising the lessons and feedback connected to what teachers and caregivers liked about the initial lessons. I created a list of the revisions that teachers and caregivers suggested I make as well as a list of the different parts they liked about the initial lessons. This list then informed the decisions I made around the first round of revisions and expansion of the unit (from five to 12 lessons) to be taught during the data collection. For example, I added more about multigenerational families and language diversity based on participant responses. I also decided to keep specific books (*Families* by Shelley Rotner and Sheila M. Kelly, *Our Subway Baby: The True Story of How One Baby Found His Home* by Peter Mercurio, *The Family Book* by Todd Parr, and *Visiting Day* by Jacqueline Woodson) based on teacher and caregiver feedback. I decided to provide other book options for the revised and additional lessons in case a child in the classroom was experiencing family trauma and a different book choice could be more supportive of that child's needs.

Seeking teacher and caregiver feedback is an asset-based approach to utilize the knowledges of teachers and caregivers in the development process (Muhammad, 2020; Paris &

Alim, 2014). It was important to seek both teacher and family feedback because they provided

different perspectives and expertise that are both vital to teaching this unit in equitable and

inclusive ways.

Step Three: Collect Data

First, I conducted pre-interviews with all consenting children in the classroom for one

week. I videotaped every interview and conducted them in the hallway outside of the classroom.

I began by asking each child two questions that they answered orally. Then, I asked each child to

draw a picture of a family that is different from their own. Then, we did an activity where I

showed them different photographs of groups of people and asked them to choose if they were

family or not a family and explain why. Last, I asked the children to draw another picture of a

family that was different from their own. Each interview took about 10-15 minutes. During the

interviews, I also took notes to refer to in case the videotape did not pick up all audio since some

children were speaking with a low tone or other children or adults would come into the hallway.

After the pre-interviews, I implemented the lessons in a first-grade classroom in the state

of Michigan. This project was 12 total sessions that were 60-minutes long (30-minutes whole

group, 30-minutes small-group centers) (see Appendix F). It took me three weeks to complete

teaching the lessons. I taught the lessons myself and collected as much observational data during

the lessons as possible. I video/audio recorded the lessons to collect more data on discussions

and children's thinking that I could watch later and refer to. I also took photographs of some

student work such as anchor charts or interactive charts to utilize for analysis later. After

teaching, I wrote observational notes each day to note down any observations that I felt like

could inform revisions to the future lessons. For example, I noted times when I felt like teaching

something was awkward or did not feel planned out enough (e.g., vocabulary). I also noted times

I thought that children were engaged or different questions that they asked or comments they made.

After teaching the lessons, I conducted post-interviews with all consenting children in the classroom for one week. The post-interviews asked the same questions and had the same activities (drawing two pictures of families and sorting photographs) as the pre-interviews. The only difference was that I asked the children two extra questions at the end of the interviews. I asked them what they learned about families and what their favorite part of the project was. I wanted to hear from their perspectives what stood out to them and what they enjoyed, so I could utilize that data when I revised the unit.

Step Four: Revisions

I used all these data collected from teaching the unit to revise the project-based learning unit on families to create a more inclusive and equitable learning unit for children. These data that I used to make revisions included pre-interview data, observational notes, children's work artifacts, and post-interview data. In this next subsection, I will describe how I analyzed these data.

Data Analysis First and Second Cycles. I analyzed the findings from the pre- and post-child interviews through an interpretivist approach (Miles et al., 2014). Using this approach, there are two major stages of the coding: the First Cycle and the Second Cycle. The First Cycle uses coding methods to code data chunks or summarizes segments of data from the interviews. The Second Cycle works with the First Cycle codes themselves and groups those summaries from the First Cycle into a smaller number of categories, themes, or constructs (Miles et al., 2014).

In the initial or First Cycle, I used audio/video recordings of the pre- and post-interviews to make codes. Codes "are labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive of inferential

information" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 72). These codes were attached to data chunks and coding is a data condensation that enables for the retrieval of "the most meaningful material, to assemble chunks of data that go together, and to further condense into readily analyzable units" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 73).

To make codes, I used deductive coding to create a start list of codes prior to the interviews that address the research questions, hypotheses, problem areas, and/or key variables. First, I created descriptive, process, emotion, values, holistic, and causation codes. Then, I used inductive coding or used the codes that emerged during the data collection.

In the Second Cycle, these lists of codes were revised over time since codes change over time and definitions will be created for the list of codes. Then, pattern codes were generated so that data could be tied together. I created a matrix that listed each code and read the transcripts again to continue to add responses from the interviews into the matrix. The pattern codes from this process created a smaller number of categories and can help develop higher-level analytical meanings. I also confirmed these codes with my advisor, Dr. Tortorelli.

I used this process for the different parts of the interview: 1. Oral interview questions; 2. Two drawings of families who are not your own; and 3. Picture sort activity (family vs. not a family). I chose to do this process for the different parts of the interview because they were asking different questions that would not all be coded in the same exact way. Coding and finding the themes for each of the parts of the interview allowed me to use all the themes to draw conclusions to answer the research questions as well as find emergent themes from the project.

Analysis of Oral Interview Questions. In the pre-interviews, for the first question (Who is part of a family?), I began with the codes: *traditional family (e.g., references to mom and dad with kids, references to mom and dad having biological kids), multigenerational (e.g., references to grandma and grandpa), no children (e.g., references to a mom and dad not having kids),*

differences with children within a family (e.g., references to different aged children, references to different gender children with words like brother, sister), pets (e.g., references to having a cat, references to having a dog), extended family (e.g., references to having cousins, aunts, or uncles), and other diverse structures (e.g., references to adoption or other diverse structures) to

for the pre-interviews. For this question in the post-interviews, I began with the same initial codes as I started with for the pre-interviews. But added the codes: *two moms, two dads, and single parent.* Then, in the Second Cycle, I saw patterns emerge around who the children thought was part of a family. Based on the pre-interviews and post-interviews, I developed themes based on how children differentiate families by *traditional family structures and diverse family structures.* Children named traditional family structures, diverse family structures, and diverse experiences (including LGBTQ+ families, single parents, multigenerational, adoption, no children, having pets, and extended family). An emergent theme that came up from this question was *how the children differentiate children who are part of a family* by age (e.g., younger brother, older sister, baby) and by gender (brother, sister, baby).

Table 2

Sample Codes Related to Family Structures

Coded Child Responses Related to Family Structures		
Code	Description	Example
Traditional family structure	Child describes a family consisting of the members: mom, dad, and children	*Your mom, dad, sister, or brother.*

Table 2 (cont'd)

Extended family	Child describes a family including cousins, aunts, or uncles	*Grandma, grandpa. But also aunts.*
Multigenerational family structure	Child describes a family with grandparents	*Your sisters and your brothers. Your mom and dad. Your grandma and grandpa.*

In the pre-interviews, for the second question (what is a family?), I began with the codes: *traditional family structure (e.g., references mom, dad, and kids), love (e.g., references to love or loving acts), care (e.g., references to taking care of people), people you live with (e.g., references to living together or doing activities together), and support (e.g., references to family members helping each other out).* For this question in the post-interviews, I began with the same codes from the pre-interviews. In the Second Cycle, I saw patterns emerge around differentiating between traditional and diverse family structures, things that families do together, as well as people being together. Based on both the pre-interviews and post-interviews for this question (what is a family?), I developed themes based on how children differentiate their definition of what a family is. Those themes included: *traditional family structure, people who love/care about you, and togetherness.*

Table 3

Sample Codes Related to Defining Families

Coded Child Responses Related to Defining Families

Code	Description	Example
Love/Care	Child names love or care or describes a loving or caring action	*It's people who love each other and who care for each other.*
Traditional Family Structure	Child describes a family consisting of the members: mom, dad, and children	*Either your mom, dad, parent or sister or brother.*
Support	Child names helping or a supportive action	*It's some people who can help you when you get hot or you need food.*

In the post-interviews, I asked children what they learned from the project. I began with the codes: *diverse family structures (e.g., references a family structure that is different than the traditional family structure), inclusive/welcome (e.g., references being inclusive or welcoming to families) and love (e.g., references love in families).* Then, based on these data, I added *race (e.g., references racial identity of family members) and vocabulary (e.g., references key vocabulary taught in the project like unjust or inclusive).* In the Second Cycle, I saw patterns emerge around children learning vocabulary and children learning about different types of family

structures or experiences. This led me to develop the themes: *learning vocabulary and learning content knowledge.*

Table 4

Sample Codes Related to Learning from Project

Coded Child Responses Related to Learning from Project

Code	Description	Example
Diverse family structures	Child names a diverse family structure outside of the traditional family structure	*That they could be two dads and two moms.*
Vocabulary	Child names or expresses a key vocabulary term from the project on families	*That families don't have to have the same race to be a family.*
Inclusive	Child names being inclusive to families or welcoming to families	*I learned that you could be welcoming in a lot of different ways: saying hi, giving them a high five, and asking for a hug.*

In the post-interviews, I also asked children what their favorite part of the project was. I began with the codes: *art center (e.g., references an activity from the art center), play center (e.g., references an activity from the play center), listening center (e.g., references an activity or book from the listening center), writing center (e.g., expresses an activity from the teacher writing center like the narrative or class book), social studies center (e.g., references an activity from the social studies center), read alouds (e.g., references an interactive read aloud text), and whole group learning (e.g., references an activity or learning from the whole group part of the lessons).* I saw patterns emerge around what types of learning and activities the children enjoyed. This led me to the following themes: *small group instruction and whole group instruction.*

Table 5

Sample Codes Related to Engagement in Project

Coded Child Responses Related to Engagement in Project		
Code	Description	Example
Art Center	Child names an activity from the art center in small group	*Family portrait. I liked it because I got a drawing. Drawing is one of my talents.*
Writing Center	Child names an activity from the teacher writing center in small group	*The teacher center because I like writing about stories. I like us working all together and making it into a book.*

Table 5 (cont'd)

Read Aloud	Child expresses or names a book	*I think reading the stories.*
	read during an interactive read	*The Subway Baby.*
	aloud with the whole group	

Analysis of Drawing Families Who Are Not Your Own. In the pre-interviews and post-interviews, I asked the children to draw a family that was not their own family twice. I asked the children to share who they drew. After they drew the second picture, I asked them to share how the two families were different. I coded for traditional and diverse family structures. This allowed me to compare the pre-interviews to the post-interviews to learn which children drew traditional families and which children drew diverse family structures. I coded their oral answers about how the two families they drew were different. I learned what differentiated the families that they drew (e.g., age, family members, physical characteristics).

For the pre-interviews, the initial codes included: *traditional family structure (e.g., references a family with a mom, dad, and children), multigenerational (e.g., references a family with grandparents), LGBTQIA+ family (e.g., references a family with two moms or two dads), extended family (e.g., references a family with cousins, aunts, or uncles), and pets (e.g., references pets as family members).* Then, in the Second Cycle, I saw patterns emerge around the pets the children drew, who is part of the family, the number of people in the family, and the ages of the people in the family. For the post-interviews, I kept the initial codes from the pre-interviews. Then, in the Second Cycle, I found patterns that led me to the themes of: *traditional*

family structure and diverse family structure. I also found the following emergent themes: *pets*

as family members.

Table 6

Sample Codes Related to Family Drawings

Coded Child Responses Related to Family Drawings

Code	Description	Example
Traditional Family Structure	Child describes a family consisting of the members: mom, dad, and children	*Mom, dad, brother, sister, baby*
Multigenerational Family Structure	Child describes a family with grandparents	*Grandpa, dad, brother*
LGBTQIA+ Family Structure	Child describes a family with two moms or two dads	*Mom, mom, kid*

Analysis of Picture Sort Activity (Family vs. Not a Family). In the pre- and post-

interviews, I asked children to look at 12 photographs of groups of people and name if they

thought they were a family or not a family and explain their thinking. I first noted their responses

about whether they chose family or not a family in a table. Then, I transcribed and coded their

responses that shared their thinking. For the pre-interviews, the initial codes included: *traditional*

family (e.g., references mom, dad, and kids), same race (e.g., references people with the same

skin color), multiracial (e.g., references people with different skin color), number of people (e.g.,

references to how many people are in the photograph and how that number impacts whether they

are a family or not), gender of adults (e.g., references to the gender of the adults in the

photograph), and friends (e.g., references to people being friends or neighbors but not family

members). Then, in the Second Cycle, I narrowed down the codes to: *traditional family, friends,*

race of family members, gender of family members, togetherness, and the number of people in a

family.

For the post-interviews, I began with the same codes from the pre-interviews. Then, in

the Second Cycle, I narrowed down the codes to: t*raditional family, diverse family structure,*

number of people in a family, age of the people in a family, and friends. I saw patterns emerge

around different diverse family structures (two moms, two dads, single parent, adoption,

multigenerational, multiracial), traditional family structures, and groups of people who are

together but not related/family. These patterns led me to the following themes: *racial identity in*

families, caregivers/adults in families, and children in families.

Table 7

Sample Codes Related to Picture Sort Activity

Coded Child Responses Related to Picture Sort Activity		
Code	Description	Example
Traditional Family Structure	Child describes a family consisting of the members: mom, dad, and children	*It looks like they're in a house and there's a baby and a bunch of childs and a mom and dad.*

Table 7 (cont'd)

Number of People	Child describes how many people are in the photograph and how that number relates to family or not	*I don't think a mom can have that many kids.*
Same Race	Child describes people sharing the same race or reference skin color	*They all look like they have the same skin color.*
Multiracial	Child describes people having different races	*There's one Brown kid and two light guys.*

Final Steps of Data Analysis. From these patterns and themes, I obtained results, drew conclusions, and wrote my final report of data. This report of data helped inform decisions on answering the two research questions as well as how to make final revisions to the project. The revisions focused on addition and taking away of content, revision of making current different content more explicit, and improving small group instruction based on children's feedback.

Steps Five and Six: Positive and Negative Effects and Environmental Change

After the implementation of the project, I reflected on children's data and compared children's work and interview data to suggestions that teachers and caregivers gave for revisions on the initial unit. I used the findings from interview data, observational notes, and child work artifacts for both research questions to make a list of final revisions to the project-based learning unit to be utilized in classrooms throughout the United States (See Appendix E). For example, I

found what was impactful based on what the children shared they learned in addition to from how their preconceptions changed or did not change to revise the final unit on families. I considered what I taught in the project that was not taken up by children (e.g., specific family structures or experiences). Triangulation allowed me to better understand how these multiple data sources could describe the implementation of the lessons as well as the children's responses to the project-based learning lessons. I understood how children's preconceptions of families changed after participating in the project (research question one) and how the project-based unit on families helped build children's awareness of diverse families and how it did not build awareness (research question two).

From the drawing of conclusions from both research questions, I considered all the positive and negative effects that the intervention produced beyond the initial goals of the project. For example, I considered how much and what specifically children learned about diverse families and what types of diverse families they learned the most about (e.g., LGBTQIA+ families, children in families, adoption, multiracial families, multigenerational families). I also reflected on what they did not learn from the content about families that were present in the lessons (e.g., incarceration, deployment) as well as any problematic understandings that stemmed from the project. I also reflected on the different ways that children engaged or disengaged in the project and how project-based learning could drive the instruction on diverse families. I reflected on the ways that the project could be improved based on children's responses about what they enjoyed and what they learned from the project, which led me to developing future revisions for specific parts of the project's lessons. I considered how the educational environment changed as a result of the intervention, meaning I utilized these data to understand if and how the children shifted mindsets on families throughout the project and in what ways (e.g., shifts heard through oral responses, shifts in drawings).

My next goal is to revise all the lessons based on these data from this study and open source this project-based learning unit for teachers to hopefully replace their current curriculum materials to provide a richer learning experience about families in elementary classrooms. I can open-source the curriculum materials on a website such as *Teachers Pay Teachers*. Although there are many issues with *Teachers Pay Teachers* (e.g., curriculum materials that do not align with best practice and research or problematic curriculum materials) it is a space that many teachers find accessible. Therefore, utilizing a site that many teachers use daily could be a promising option. I can also utilize social media to advertise and guide teachers to the materials. Design-Based Research allowed me to develop a project that can be used in practice while also making a contribution to others who are interested in this specific topic and problem that has been established around how children learn about diverse families in early elementary school (McKenney & Reeves, 2012).

Researcher Positionality

My own family experiences and identities have driven me to conduct this research around the topic of families. I am a transnational/racial adoptee from Seoul, South Korea. I was born in Seoul in a clinic on October 28, 1991. My birth mother left the clinic that day and asked for me to be put up for adoption in the United States so I could have a better life. I lived in a foster family until March 25, 1992, when I flew to Detroit Metropolitan Airport with a caregiver where my family was there to greet me and take me home to Grand Blanc, Michigan. I grew up in a white family with my uncle, aunt, and cousins next door, my grandparents two houses down, and my great grandparents three houses down. We all connected property through the woods, and I grew up going to family dinners every single Sunday.

My parents are both first-generation college students. My dad also went on to get a juris doctorate degree. I grew up in a small town that leaned conservative. My immediate family is

liberal while my extended family is conservative, which has led to various controversies in our family dynamic. My family also has gone through physical and mental health challenges, which has taught me a lot about the impacts of health on family experiences as well. Many children and families also face these challenges.

I grew up attending predominantly white schools, being the only Korean child in my preschool-eighth grade classes. I was also the only adoptee in my grade, and it stood out significantly. I have memories of teachers asking me to present about my adoption or present about South Korea, when I did not have the cultural knowledge to do so, making me (a very conscientious student) feel embarrassed. I remember in first grade, the secretary announced that I got my citizenship over the loudspeaker when she was announcing my birthday. I became a United States citizen on October 27th and my birthday is the 28th. I wanted to keep that news quiet because I remember thinking people wouldn't understand, but then everyone found out since the secretary decided to announce it to the entire school. I still remember people asking me all sorts of questions that week and feeling so uncomfortable.

My parents tried to offer me cultural experiences growing up, but I refused them, which is not uncommon for adoptees (Kim, 2010). I remember getting extremely upset and even crying when they would bring anything up around learning about Korea because I just did not want to feel different. My parents consulted social workers and adoption experts and were advised to just not push me to discomfort. It was not until I taught in a school with many Korean children that I started to think about my identity as an Asian American. I do remember feeling embarrassed that I could not speak Korean when parents would assume that I could due to how I looked. I also experienced racism at this school. For example, the school psychologist, school librarian, as well as many parents would call me by my colleague's name because they thought I was the other

Korean teacher at the school even though we look nothing alike from height to hair color. These instances of racism made me really think about the changes I wanted to make in my work in curriculum and my own academic work.

In 2019, I found out from a *23 and Me* test that I have a biological half-sister, Madie, who was also adopted from Korea. She is seven years older than I and grew up in Washington State. She has two children. She and her children were the first people I have met that I could see my own personal physical looks in, which was a surreal experience. She and I talk almost every day and we have maintained a close relationship. We often talk about adoption, and it is helpful being able to process things with her.

Then in 2021, I found out that I have a biological full-sister, Erica, who also grew up in Michigan. She is one year younger than I. She attended the University of Michigan for undergraduate studies at the same time as me. We also had mutual friends, one of whom would tell me I reminded her of her friend Erica, and I would just dismiss her, and Erica did the same. I saw photographs of Erica on Facebook back in high school and had no idea that was my sister.

I found out through Erica that our biological mother was married and had three more children. She is now a widow living on welfare. From finding sisters, I have found how different every adoptee's experience and story is even when you share genetics. All our views on finding biological family are drastically different. I have learned a lot about my own identity as an adoptee through this process as well as adoption as a family experience.

As a result of all these experiences, I found myself wanting to teach children about families in inclusive ways because, in my experience as an elementary student, I often felt silenced or like I just wanted to assimilate in school spaces due to my identities. Most families do not follow the traditional narrative that we often see in the media, and it is important that

children and their families feel represented in schools, especially when learning about families. I am very passionate about this work and line of research because I feel a deep personal connection to it and can deeply relate to the harm that can occur when this topic of families is taught in superficial ways and when assumptions are made about backgrounds.

In the next chapter, I describe and analyze the findings in my research related to the two research questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

In this section, I report on findings from both research questions: 1. In what ways do children's preconceptions of families change after participating in a project-based learning unit on families? and 2. What aspects of the instruction helped build children's awareness of diverse families? To answer both questions, I report findings from the pre- and post-interviews. Each interview asked children to answer some questions orally, to draw two pictures of families who are not their own, and to participate in a picture sort activity. I also report findings from my observational notes and collection of children's work. I explain each of the different types of questions and activities in this subsection.

Types of Questions and Activities

Oral Interview Questions

In the pre- and post-interviews, I asked the children: 1. What is a family? and 2. Who is part of a family? In the post-interviews, I asked two more questions: 1. What are some things that you learned from this project? and 2. What was your favorite thing we did during this project?

Drawing Families Who Are Not Your Own

In the pre- and post-interviews, I asked the children to draw two families that were not their own family and to name who they drew in each picture (e.g., father, mother, child, baby, grandparent, cousin, uncle).

Picture Sort Activity (Family vs. Not a Family)

In the interviews, I asked the children to look at 12 photographs of groups of people and choose whether they thought the group was a family or not a family and explain their thinking.

There were photographs that appeared to mirror families (e.g., family photograph) and others that did not (e.g., soccer team, children in a classroom, people in line at the grocery store). There were no right or wrong answers. See Table 8 for descriptions of each photograph.

Table 8

Picture Sort Photograph Descriptions

Photograph	Description of Photograph
One	Depicts a child appearing to be male, two adults appearing to be male and female, and two elders appearing to be male and female. All people appear to share Asian backgrounds.
Two	Depicts a team appearing to be older teenagers or young adults and appearing to be female. The team appears to be a soccer team wearing soccer jerseys.
Three	Depicts two adults appearing to be female and male. The female appears to be white, and the male appears to be Black.
Four	Depicts two adults appearing male and female and four children appearing to be three females and a baby (cannot tell the gender). All people appear to white.
Five	Depicts an adult appearing to be male and teenage-aged child appearing to be male. The adult male appears to be Black, and the child appears to be white.

Table 8 (cont'd)

Six	Depicts a group of young children appearing to be in a classroom appearing to sit on a rug. The children appear to be different genders and races.
Seven	Depicts two adults appearing to be male and a child appearing to be female. The two adults appear to be white, and the child appears to be Black.
Eight	Depicts two adults appearing male and female and three children appearing to be male and two females. The adult male appeared to be Black, and the adult female appeared to be white while the children appeared to be multiracial.
Nine	Depicts five adults in line at the grocery store. The adults appear to be different genders and races.
Ten	Depicts a large group of people appearing to be at an event tighter. There were mixed age groups, but everyone appears to be the same race.
Eleven	Depicts an adult appearing to be female and a child appearing to be female. The adult and child appear to be Latina and the child is sitting in a wheelchair.
Twelve	Depicts two adults appearing to be women. The two adults appear to be white.

Research Question One: Children's Preconceptions Shifting

In this section, I report on findings from research question one: In what ways do children's preconceptions of families change after participating in a project-based learning unit on families? First, I explain broadly how children's preconceptions shifted from pre- to post-interviews and how students demonstrated a more expanded understanding of diverse family structures in the post-interviews. Then I identify the major themes that emerged from these interviews related to how children understood children in families, how children understood caregivers or adults as family members, and how children understood family racial identity/identities.

Traditional Family Structure vs. Diverse Family Structures

From pre- to post-interviews, children showed a more expanded understanding of the structures that families can take. In pre-interviews, the traditional family structure dominated children's responses to the question, "Who is part of a family?": mother, father, and children. In contrast, in post-interviews children showed expanded understanding and explained different people who could be part of a family or different structures that families could take. These shifts from pre- to post-interviews were evidenced by responses to 1. The interview question, "Who is part of a family?"; 2. Drawing families who are not your own activity; 3. Response to the picture sort activity; and 4. The interview question, "What did you learn from this project on families?"

Who is Part of a Family?

In the pre- and post-interviews, children were asked, "Who is part of a family?" In the pre-interviews, 17 out of 18 children responded with the traditional family structure (mother, father, and children). For example, Louie made a typical statement "A sister, dad, mom."

Another example was Chad, "Your mom, dad, sister, or brother." Only one student, Ishan replied to this question focused on extended family, naming, "cousins," only.

Post-interviews revealed a shift toward more diverse conceptualizations of families after participating in the unit. Thirteen out of 18 children continued to include the traditional family structure in their responses, but 11 out of 18 children expanded their response by including at least one other kind of family structure. For example, Allie said, "A mom, a dad, sometimes kids, and sometimes just a mom or sometimes just a dad, or sometimes just adults." By utilizing the word, "sometimes," Allie showed that she understood that not all families are the same and can take on different structures. Chrissy said, "Grandma, mom, a dad, sometimes a sister or a brother, and a kid." This response showed Chrissy's understanding of grandparents being members of families as well (e.g., multigenerational families). Gale said, "A brother, and a dog, and a sister, and a mom and a dad or two moms and two dads." Her response showed her understanding of same-sex parents as well as pets being family members.

Children also showed shifts in understanding how different family members can be part of a family. For example, some children added extended family members to their answers, some children expressed how some families have children and some families do not, and some children showed shifts in thinking about caregivers or adults in families. These findings are be discussed in later subsections in further detail.

Six children responded to this question with the traditional family structure and did not show a shift in their preconceptions from pre- to post-interviews. Although the six children did not show shifts in this particular interview question, some children did show shifts in other parts of the post-interviews. For example, Louie responded, "A mom, a dad, kids." However, in the

drawing a family task she drew a family with two moms and a baby. This showed her expanded understanding of same-sex parents.

Drawing Families Who Are Not Your Own

In the pre- and post-interviews, I asked the children to draw two pictures of families that were not their own. For the first picture of the pre-interviews, 14 out of 18 children drew traditional family structures. Only one child, Caden, drew a non-traditional family structure (single mom), and three children did not understand the task and drew their own families. For the second picture, 11 out of 18 children drew traditional family structures, four children drew other family structures (single parent, multigenerational, no children), and three children did not understand the task and drew their own families.

In the post-interviews for the first picture, eight children drew traditional family structures, eight children drew other family structures (single parent, two moms, multigenerational, extended family), and two children did not understand the task and drew their own families. For the second picture, three children drew traditional family structures, 13 children drew other family structures (single parent, extended family, multigenerational, two moms, no children, two dads), and two children did not understand the task and drew their own families.

In both the pre- and post-interviews, I followed up with the children who did not understand the task. I told them to draw a family that was not their own again, but they ended up drawing their own family and naming that the picture showed their family and themselves. The lack of understanding of the question may have shown a lack of understanding of different structures of families other than their own or just unfamiliarity with the task.

There were three children who did not show a shift in their preconceptions to a more expanded understanding of diverse family structures from pre- to post-interview through this activity in the interviews. For example, Lilly drew a family with two moms in the pre-interview but traditional families in the post-interviews for both pictures. Zane drew a single parent in the pre-interview but drew two traditional families in the post-interview. Andrea drew traditional families for both the pre- and post-interviews.

Children's drawings demonstrated expanded understanding of how they viewed children as family members and adults/caregivers as family members after participating in the project. For example, in the pre-interviews zero children drew families without children in comparison to six children in the post-interviews. Only two children in the pre-interviews drew pictures of a family with same-sex parents and in the post-interviews four children drew families with same-sex parents. Table 9 shows examples of children's shifted responses to this drawing activity.

Table 9

Drawing Families Who Are Not Your Own

Pre- and Post-Interview Drawing Answers				
Child	Family 1 Pre-Interview	Family 2 Pre-Interview	Family 1 Post-Interview	Family 2 Post-Interview
Allie	Mom, dad, sister, brother	Mom, dad	Mom, mom, kid	Dad, dad

Table 9 (cont'd)

Chad	Mom, dad, big sister, little sister	Mom, dad, older sister, younger sister, older brother	Mom, dad, younger brother, sister, older sister	Mom, older sister, younger brother, baby
Caden	Mom, dad, big brother, little sister	Mom, dad, big sister, little brother, little-little brother	Mom, son	Mom, dad
Chrissy	Mom, dad, sister, sister, fluffy cat	Mom, sister, big sister, cat	Mom, dad, sister, twin sister, cat	Mom, mom, kid, cat
Devin	Mom, dad, child (boy)	Mom, dad, child, baby	Dad, child, dog	Together family (grown-ups), cat
Gale	Dad, mom, little sister, big brother	Grandma, grandpa, big brother, little sister	Grandpa, dad, brother	Mom, sister

Table 9 (cont'd)

Lilly	Mom, dad, brother, sister, baby	Mom, dad, kid, kid	Mom, mom, daughter, son, daughter, dog	Mom, dad, daughter, son, baby
Louie	Mom, dad, brother, sister	Mom, dad, brother, sister	Mom, dad, two kids	Mom, two kids
Veronica	Mom, son, cat	Mom, dad, sister, dog	Mom, dad, kid, dog	Mom, mom, baby
Victor	Mom, dad, brother, sister, child	Mom, dad, sister, brother	Mom, dad, uncle, sister, child	Mom, dad, uncle, aunt, grandma, grandpa
Zane	Mom, dad, oldest kid, youngest kid	Mom, dad, kid	Dad, kid (Jasper)	Mom, dad, kid

Overall, in this activity, many students showed a shift in their preconceptions of family from pre- to post-interviews.

Picture Sort Activity (Family vs. Not a Family)

In the pre- and post-interviews, I asked children to participate in the picture sort activity of twelve photographs. I share student responses to the pictures that children sorted and give

some examples of child explanations on whether they felt the picture showed a family or not a family.

Photograph One. Photograph one depicts a child who appears to be male, two middle-aged adults who appear to be male and female, and two older adults who appear to be male and female. All people appear to share Asian backgrounds. As described in Table 10 most (15) children identified this group as a family in both pre- and post-interviews, but all eighteen students identified this group as a family in post-interviews, showing a shift in thinking for these students, like Zane, who originally seemed unfamiliar with multigenerational families.

Table 10

Picture Sort Activity, Photograph One

Pre- and Post-Interview Picture Sort Answers

Interview	Family	Not a Family	Example Response
Pre-Interview	*15*	*3*	*Zane (not a family)- Because there's two people who look really old and then like other people who look younger.*
Post-Interview	*18*	*0*	*Zane (family)- Because there's a grown up, there's two grownups and one kid.*

Photograph Two. Photograph two depicts a soccer team appearing to be older teenagers or young adults, all about the same age, and who appear to be female. All children in both pre- and post-interviews did not think this photograph showed a family. As shown in Table 11 all children in pre- and post-interviews described this photograph not showing a family.

Table 11

Picture Sort Activity, Photograph Two

Pre- and Post-Interview Picture Sort Answers

Interview	Family	Not a Family	Example Response
Pre-Interview	0	18	Devin (not a family)- *Because it looks like a bunch of the same people together and they look like just on a soccer team, not a bunch of family.*
Post-Interview	0	18	Devin (not a family)- *It looks like they're on a soccer team or doing some kind of sport together.*

Photograph Three. Photograph three depicts two adults appearing to be female and male. The female appears to be white, and the male appears to be Black. Table 12 shows that two children identified this group as a family in both pre- and post-interviews, but two students showed a shift from pre- to post-interview, like Josh, who originally thought this was not a family because they did not have a son.

Table 12

Picture Sort Activity, Photograph Three

Pre- and Post-Interview Picture Sort Answers

Interview	Family	Not a Family	Example Response
Pre-Interview	12	6	Josh (not a family)- *Because they didn't have a son.*
Post-Interview	14	4	Josh (family)- *There's a mom and dad, and sometimes if they don't have a kid, that's okay. It's also like family.*

Other children also showed shifts in preconceptions. In the pre-interviews, Violet did not think this photograph depicted a family. She said, "Because there's only two, like, only two people." This showed her thinking that two people (adults) could not be considered a family. Then, in the post-interviews, she thought that they were a family. She said, "Because there's two people." It is interesting that she interpreted the description, "two people," as to not a family in the pre-interview but a family in the post-interview.

In the pre-interviews, Wesley also said this photograph did not show a family but could not articulate why. He said, "That one was a tricky one. Because I don't know really, but just for me, I can't really talk about it being tricky, but it is tricky." Then, in the post-interviews he thought this photograph showed a family. He said, "Because they look like they live together."

In the pre-interviews, Zane also did not think that the photograph showed a family. He said, "Because this person's older than this person." Then, in the post-interview he shifted his thinking and thought they were a family, "Because it looks like they're grandparents," which demonstrated an understanding of extended family.

Photograph Four. Photograph four depicts two adults appearing male and female and four children appearing to be three females and a baby (cannot tell the gender). All people appear to white. As shown in Table 13 all children in pre- and post-interviews described this photograph showing a family.

Table 13

Picture Sort Activity, Photograph Four

Pre- and Post-Interview Picture Sort Answers

Interview	Family	Not a Family	Example Response
Pre-Interview	18	0	Gale (family)- *Because there's a mom, a dad, and a bunch of kids.*
Post-Interview	18	0	Gale (family)- *Because there's a mom and a dad and a bunch of kids.*

Photograph Five. Photograph five depicts an adult appearing to be male and teenage-aged child appearing to be male. The adult male appears to be Black and the child appears to be white. As described in Table 14 most (11) children in the pre-interview did not think this photograph showed a family. In the post-interviews, two-thirds (12) of children believed that this

photograph did show a family, like Caden. Chad, Victor and Zane also shifted their

preconceptions, which is further explained in the section about caregivers/adults in families.

Table 14

Picture Sort Activity, Photograph Five

Pre- and Post-Interview Picture Sort Answers

Interview	Family	Not a Family	Example Response
Pre-Interview	7	11	Caden (not a family)- *Cause I bet they're just friends.*
Post-Interview	12	6	Caden (family)- *Cause it looks like that's the dad and that's the son.*

Photograph Six. Photograph six depicts a group of young children in what appears to be

a classroom sitting on a rug. The children appear to be different genders and races. As described

in Table 15, all children in pre- and post-interviews described this photograph not showing a

family. Most described this as showed a classroom or school, like Chrissy.

Table 15

Picture Sort Activity, Photograph Six

Pre- and Post-Interview Picture Sort Answers

Interview	Family	Not a Family	Example Response
Pre-Interview	0	18	Chrissy (not a family)- *It looks like at the school and not a family.*
Post-Interview	0	18	Chrissy (family)- This is not a family because it looks like it's in school.

Photograph Seven. Photograph seven depicts two adults appearing to be male and a child appearing to be female. The two adults appear to be white, and the child appears to be Black. As described in Table 16, the majority of children (11) believed that this photograph showed a family in pre-interviews, rising to fourteen in the post-interviews. For example, Ryan originally thought that this photograph did not show a family and described the child in the photograph as a friend and not a daughter. Allie, Josh and Wesley also shifted their preconceptions, which is further explained in the section about caregivers/adults in families.

Table 16

Picture Sort Activity, Photograph Seven

Pre- and Post-Interview Picture Sort Answers

Interview	Family	Not a Family	Example Response
Pre-Interview	*11*	*7*	*Ryan (not a family)- There's like two big boys. And we're supposed to have like a boy and a girl, and there is a girl. But that's why like maybe they're like a friend because I didn't wanna say daughter because well oh it's not.*
Post-Interview	*14*	*4*	*Ryan (family)- Because it looks like it's like two dads and a little girl. I mean, that might be like the rarest type of family because two dads might normally have like a son. But two dads having a girl, that's a little rare. So it's a rare family, but it still can happen.*

Photograph Eight. Photograph eight depicts two adults appearing male and female and three children appearing to be male and two children appearing to be female. The adult male appears to be Black, and the adult female appears to be white while the children appeared to be

multiracial. As described in Table 17, most children (16) identified this group as a family in both pre- and post-interviews. One child identified this group as not a family. Ishan thought this photograph showed both family and friends in the pre-interviews. He first thought that the male adult was connected to the children because they had Brown skin and the white adult woman was not connected because she had white skin. Then, in the post-interview he believed this photograph showed a family. This shift in thinking demonstrated a shifting conception of racial identity within families, showing expanded understanding of multiracial families.

Table 17

Picture Sort Activity, Photograph Eight

Pre- and Post-Interview Picture Sort Answers

Interview	Family	Not a Family	Both	Example Response
Pre-Interview	16	1	1	Ishan (both)- *Because it looks like he's brown.* (Referred to the male adult and thought the children were family with him)
Post-Interview	17	1	0	Ishan (family)- *Looks the same, so it looks like family. Because the brown skin is almost white, so I think it's family.*

Note: There is category for both in this table because a child thought the photograph showed both a family and not a family, naming the not a family as friends.

      Photograph Nine. Photograph nine depicts five adults in line at the grocery store. The adults appear to be different genders and races. As described in Table 18, all children in pre- and post-interviews believed this photograph did not show a family, like Andrea.

Table 18

Picture Sort Activity, Photograph Nine

Pre- and Post-Interview Picture Sort Answers

Interview	Family	Not a Family	Example Response
Pre-Interview	0	18	Andrea (not a family)- *Because they're at the store.*
Post-Interview	0	18	Andrea (not a family)- *It looks like they're at the store.*

      Photograph Ten. Photograph ten depicts a large group of people appearing to be at an event together. There were mixed age groups, but everyone appears to be the same race. As shown in Table 19 the majority of children (11) believed this photo showed a family. One child, Ryan, shifted from thinking this was not a family to a family because she felt they were at a reunion, which represented extended and multigenerational family.

Table 19

Picture Sort Activity, Photograph Ten

Pre- and Post-Interview Picture Sort Answers

Interview	Family	Not a Family	Both	Example Response
Pre-Interview	11	7	0	Ryan (not a family)- *There's too many people and if this was a family, they would have so many babies there to all these people.*
Post-Interview	11	6	1	Chad (family)- I*t looks like they're maybe like in a reunion. And so like maybe the entire family got together to make this a big bunch.*

Note: There is category for both in this table because a child thought the photograph showed both a family and not a family, naming the not a family as friends.

Photograph Eleven. Photograph eleven depicts an adult appearing to be female and a child appearing to be female. The adult and child appear to be Latina and the child is sitting in a wheelchair. As shown in Table 20, the majority (17) of children believed in both pre- and post-interviews that this photograph showed a family. One child, Lilly, did not think this photograph showed a family in both pre- and post-interviews. The pre-interview audio was so faded that I

could not understand what she said. In the post-interview she said, "because there was only two people" to explain her thinking.

Table 20

Picture Sort Activity, Photograph Eleven

Pre- and Post-Interview Picture Sort Answers

Interview	Family	Not a Family	Example Response
Pre-Interview	17	1	Teresa (family)- That's her daughter.
Post-Interview	17	1	Teresa (family)- Cause that mom and daughter are taking a picture at the hospital.

Photograph Twelve. Photograph twelve depicts two adults appearing to be women. The two adults appear to be white. As shown in Table 21, the majority of children (11-12) thought that this photograph showed a family versus not a family. Josh originally thought this was not a family but then shifted to thinking this photograph did show a family, including LGBTQIA+ couples in his definition of family. Two children (Chrissy and Louie) shifted original preconceptions of thinking this photograph showed a family to showing friends from pre- to post-interviews.

Table 21

Picture Sort Activity, Photograph Twelve

Pre- and Post-Interview Picture Sort Answers

Interview	Family	Not a Family	Example Response
Pre-Interview	12	6	Josh (not a family)- *Because they don't have a son.*
Post-Interview	11	7	Josh (family)- *Because there's women in a world, even though there's no dads, they're still a family.*

Summary. Overall, this picture sort activity showed different shifts in children's understandings of family structures. There were photographs that explicitly tried to not show a family structure (e.g., soccer team in photograph two, children in a classroom in photograph six, people at a grocery store in photograph nine) while other photographs showed groups of people appearing to be a traditional family structure (sharing racial identity with mother, father, and children like in photograph four). Some photographs were more challenging for children to decide based on their understandings of diverse families (e.g., a male and female adult together in photograph three and two male adults who are white with a Black child or the appearing multiracial family in photograph eight). In this activity, children shifted their answers from not a family to family for six out of the twelve pictures. The children also explained thinking that

related to adoption, not having children, and racial identity, as well as overall size of a family in post-interviews. These answers show expanded understanding of families.

What Did You Learn from This Project on Families?

In the post-interview, I asked the children to share what they learned from this project on families. Students articulated shifts in their own thinking related to caregivers/adults and children as family members as well as the racial identities of family members. For example, Caden and Teresa said they learned that some families may not have children. Andrea said she learned about grandparents living with families. Josh, Lilly, and Louie said they learned about families with two moms or two dads. Lilly and Ryan also said they learned about families with single parents (either mom or dad). Devin and Wesley said they learned about multiracial families. These responses are elaborated on in the next sections.

All these shifts in responses from the different pre- and post-interview questions and activities show how children's thinking changed about who is included in a family. Some of their responses showed new thinking around LGBTQIA+ families, families who adopt children, multiracial families (e.g., Ishan's pre- and post-interview picture sort activity response), and families without children. These shifts show their personal definitions of families getting more inclusive following the project. Children identified more groups of people as families from pre- to post-interview and were able to reflect on and articulate these new understandings in post-interviews. In the next sections, I elaborate on specific themes that emerged from children's post-interviews. These themes include: 1. Children in families; 2. Caregivers/Adults in families; and 3. Family racial identity and identities.

Children in Families

A major shift in children's preconceptions about families was how they thought about children in families before and after the unit. In pre-interviews, many children expressed the belief that, to be considered a family, adults had to have children. They expressed their thinking in oral interview questions, drawing pictures of families, as well as the picture sort activity. In the post-interviews, many children understood that adults can be considered a family without children.

In the pre-interviews, when children were asked to draw pictures of families, all but one of the family pictures included at least one child. In the post-interviews, Allie, Caden, Devin, and Wesley drew pictures of families without children. Allie drew two men. Caden and Wesley drew a man and a woman. Devin drew two grownups and a cat. It was interesting to note that in both the pre- and post-interviews, children used language such as brother, sister, son, baby, kid, and child to describe the children they were drawing in their pictures. Many children differentiated between siblings by describing their relative ages (e.g., older brother, big sister/brother, little sister/brother, younger sister/brother, middle sister/brother, and twins). If they drew a baby, they would just name baby rather than assigning a gender to the baby. One child, Ryan, named a person they drew as "they" in the second post-interview drawing. Although the children did not learn about pronouns in the project, this child brought up how some people like her sibling use "they" pronouns during a session. Then, she drew someone she named as "they" in her post-interview picture.

During the picture sort activity, Veronica shifted from saying that picture three, which showed two adults was not a family, because it was "only" two people, to saying that it was a family, because there were two people. As previously mentioned, in the pre-interview, Josh

expressed that this was not a family, "Because they didn't have a son." Then, in the post-interview he said that they were a family because, "There's a mom and dad, and sometimes if they don't have a kid, that's okay." Both responses show a shift in students' preconceptions and understanding that some families may not have children.

When asked to share what they learned from this project, both Caden and Teresa expressed understanding that some families may not have children. Caden said, "That all families all always, sometimes don't have kids." Teresa said, "And some families don't have kids." These two explanations show the children expressing what they thought they learned about families after the project-based learning unit on families. They showed an expansion of their initial thoughts on families having to have children.

Summary. All these shifts in responses from pre- to post-interview show how children's thinking changed when thinking about children in family structures. Many children first thought that to be considered a family, children must be present in the structure. In post-interviews, they showed thinking shifting to adults not having to have children to be considered a family. These shifts show their personal definitions of families getting more inclusive over time.

Caregivers/Adults in Families

Another way that children shifted their preconceptions about families was how they thought about caregivers or adults in families. Many children expressed the belief that a mother and father must be present to be considered a family. In the post-interviews they showed thinking shifting to two dads, two moms, single parents, and grandparents as members of a family.

In the pre-interviews, when asked, "Who is part of a family?," 17 out of 18 children included a mother and father. These answers showed how children assigned the two adults to

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families as a mother and father. They did not discuss how all families may not have a mother and father and that sometimes adults or caregivers in families may be different.

From pre- to post-interviews, children showed shifts in their preconceptions about the adults or caregivers in families by naming different structures that families could have when asked, "Who is part of a family?" In the pre-interview, Chad said, "My mom, my dad, and my brother." In the post-interview he said, "A mom, sister, brother, younger brother, older sister, younger sister, or a younger brother." This response showed a shift to understanding that a dad may not be present in a family structure. In the pre-interview, Caden said, "A dad, mom, maybe kids." Then, in the post-interview he said, "Sometimes a mom, sometimes a dad, sometimes kids, sometimes a baby." His use of "sometimes" shows his understanding that families can have different structures and sometimes families may have a mom and sometimes families may have a dad, but families do not have to have a mom and dad to be considered a family.

In the pre-interview, Gale said, "A dog, cat, sister or brother, mom and dad." In the post-interview, she said, "A brother, a dog, a sister, a brother, and a dog and a sister and a mom and a dad. Or two moms and two dads." Her post-interview response showed a shift in learning about two moms and two dads in a family structure versus just a mom and dad.

In the pre-interview, Wesley expressed, "Mom and dad and sisters and brothers." Then, in the post-interview, he said, "Sometimes a mom, sometimes a dad, sometimes brothers, sometimes sisters, sometimes babies, and sometimes dogs and cats, sometimes pets." His post-interview response showed that use of "sometimes" like Caden's response. This use of "sometimes" shows an understanding of how families can have different structures and sometimes some families may have a mom or sometimes they may have a dad but not always.

In the pre-interviews, only three children mentioned that grandparents could be part of a family. In the post-interviews, five children mentioned grandparents as being part of a family. Josh and Ryan kept their original understanding of grandparents as adults in families. Chrissy, Ishan, and Teresa showed their preconceptions shifting from pre- to post-interview.

These shifts in responses to this question, "Who is part of a family?" shows how some children understood that adults or caregivers in families did not have to just be a mom and dad. There could be other structures such as single parents or two moms or two dads in families as well as grandparents being adults or caregivers who are part of families.

When asked to draw pictures of families who were not their own, in the pre-interviews, 14 out of 18 children drew families with a mother and father for their first drawing and then for the second drawing 11 out of 18 children drew a mother and father in their pictures. In the post-interviews, children showed shifts in who they drew as adults or caregivers in the families. Table 9 shows the shifts in responses for children's pictures for both pre- and post-interviews. For example, in the pre-interview, Allie drew a mom, dad, sister and brother in her first picture and a mom and dad in her second picture. In the post-interview, Allie drew two moms and a kid in her first picture and two dads in her second picture. This showed a shift in her understanding of the caregivers in a family. In the pre-interview, Chad drew a mom, dad, big sister, and little sister in his first picture and a mom, dad, older sister, younger sister, and older brother in his second picture. In the post-interview, his first picture showed the traditional structure with a mom, dad, younger brother, sister, and older sister. His second picture, however, showed a mom, older sister, younger brother, and baby. This second picture showed his understanding of a single parent. In the pre-interview, Chrissy drew a mom, dad, sister, sister, and fluffy cat for her first picture and a mom, sister, big sister, and cat for her second picture. The second picture showed

understanding of a single mom. In the post-interview, she drew a traditional family for her first picture (mom, dad, sister, twin sister, and cat), but her second picture showed two moms, kid, and a cat. The second picture showed new understanding of families with two moms. Caden, Devin, Gale, Lilly, Louie, Veronica, Victor, and Zane also all showed shift in preconceptions from pre- to post-interviews, which can be seen in Table 9.

During the picture sorting activity, children showed shifted preconceptions on children being members of families. For example, Andrea did not think that photograph one showed a family in the pre-interview because "It looks like there are two dads and two moms." Her response showed how she felt like a family structure could not have two moms and two dads. In the post-interview, she shifted her thinking and thought that this photograph did show a family because "they look similar." Although her response did not connect to her first response of why she thought they were or were not a family, she shifted her thinking to thinking the photograph did depict a family.

For photograph two, in the pre-interviews and post-interviews Ryan expressed that "That's like too many grownups" when describing why she thought a picture did not depict a family. This response shows how this child was thinking about how many adults could be present to be considered a family. She also noted in the post-interview, "They're all girls." This response showed her thinking around the gender of the adults and her thinking of too many women together to be considered a family.

For photograph five, Chad did not think this photograph showed a family and thought they were friends. Then, in the post-interview he shifted his response to thinking they were a family showing, "The dad and the kid." He showed a shift in his preconception that they were friends to being a family.

Victor and Zane also shifted their thinking from pre- to post-interview. Initially, they both did not think that the photograph showed a family. Then in the post-interview, Victor thought the photograph showed a son and grandpa and Zane thought the photograph showed a dad and kid.

In the pre- and post-interviews, Devin did not think this photograph showed a family. In the pre-interview, she said, "They look way different, and it doesn't look like there's any mom. Only a dad and the boy in the back doesn't look like him." This response showed how she was thinking a mom had to be present to be considered a family since there was a dad present. Then, in the post-interview, she first said this photograph showed a family but changed her mind to no. She said, "They look like they're friends or something." Her post-interview response did not show her previous thinking that a mom needed to be present. Overall, these shifts in children's responses showed new learning around families.

For photograph seven, in the pre-interview, Ryan did not think this photograph showed a family in the pre-interview. She said, "There's like two big boys. And we're supposed to have like a boy and a girl, and there is a girl. But that's why like maybe they're like a friend because I didn't wanna say daughter because well oh it's not." Then, in the post-interview she shifted her response to thinking this was a family. She said, "Because it looks like it's like two dads and a little girl. I mean, that might be like the rarest type of family because two dads might normally have like a son. But two dads having a girl, that's a little rare. So, it's a rare family, but it still can happen." This example shows how Ryan thought that two dads should have a son and not a daughter. I did not follow-up with her on why she thought that but can assume she felt that two males should be also raising a male or son.

In the pre-interview, Wesley did not think this photograph showed a family. He said, "Because I think they're just really good friends. Like this kid is a, is a friend of one, of one of their kids maybe. I think they're dads of other kids that this girl has friends of." This response showed how he did not think any of the people in this photograph were related. Then, in the post-interview, he thought this photograph showed a family. He said, "Because sometimes they'll only two dads and one baby." This response showed how he then thought this photograph was showing two dads and a child, which shows a shift in his understanding of adults or caregivers in a family.

For photograph ten, Chad said he did not think this photograph showed a family in the pre-interview. He said, "Because there's too many people to be a family. Then, in the post-interview he shifted to thinking this photograph showed a family. He said, "Because it kind of looks like friends and fam…well, just family. Like when they come together like a big family, aunts and uncles." This response shows a shift in his initial thinking and how this photograph does depict a large family gathering with different adults or caregivers (e.g., aunts and uncles).

For photograph twelve, Andrea thought this photograph depicted a family in both the pre- and post-interview. In the pre-interview she expressed, "They look the same." Then, in the post-interview she expressed, "Two moms," when explaining her thinking. This shift in her response showed her understanding a new family structure to provide justification for her reasoning of why she thought the photograph showed a family.

In the post-interview, I asked the children to share what they learned from this project on families. Andrea showed new understanding about the adults or caregivers in a family. She said, "That they can live with you. Like families like grandparent can live with you." This response

showed her understanding expanding around the adults or caregivers present in a family structure.

Summary. All these shifts in children's responses from pre- to post-interview show how children's thinking changed when thinking about adults or caregivers in families. They showed some dismantling of the perception that families must have a mom and dad (traditional structure) to be considered a family. They showed more inclusive personal definitions and understanding of families (e.g., including single parents, grandparents, two moms, two dads, and extended family as adults or caregivers present in a family structure). Children also showed expansion of understanding of the adults or caregivers through their responses about families having two moms or two dads or single parents, which dismantles the traditional understanding that all families must have a mom and dad to be considered a family.

Josh, Lilly, and Louie expressed learning about families with two moms or two dads. Josh said, "Like you could take care two dads, two moms." Lilly said, "So some families can have two moms." And Louie said, "That they could be two dads and two moms." Then, Lilly and Ryan expressed learning about families with single parents (either mom or dad). Lilly said, "Some families can have one mom." Ryan said, "Just because a family doesn't have one mom, it still makes a family." Lilly and Ryan's responses showed understanding of single parents and understanding that families did not have to have a mom and dad present in the structure to be considered a family. The children's responses showed expansion of their understanding of adults or caregivers in families after participating in the project-based learning unit.

Family Racial Identity and Identities

Children showed shifts in their preconceptions about families when thinking about racial identity of family members. This thinking was present in the picture sort activity, the post-

interview question, "What did you learn from this project on families?" and the art center. In the other activities (asking what is a family and who is part of a family and drawing two families), children did not discuss racial identity. In this sub-section, I explain how children's preconceptions about family racial identities shifted based on their answers to the picture sort activity and post-interview question.

During the picture sorting task, for photograph one, Allie expressed how she did not think this photograph showed a family. She said, "They don't really have the same skin color as them. These three don't have the same skin color as these two." Then, in the post-interview, she thought that this photograph did show a family (mom, dad, kid, grandpa and grandma). Her response in the pre-interview showed her preconceptions about people in families having to have the same skin color.

For photograph four, Andrea, Caden, and Ishan expressed that they thought this photograph showed a family because they had similar skin color in the pre-interviews. Andrea said, "Cause it looks like they all live together and they all have the same skin color." Caden said, "They all look like they have the same skin color." He also noted, "Even though sometimes families don't have the same skin." This showed his thinking around some families having the same race but not having to have the same race. Then, Ishan said, "Because they're all light." In the post-interviews, Ishan maintained his thinking about this photograph showing a family "because they're all white skin." Then, Trish said she thought this photograph showed a family "cause they the same skin color." These two responses showed justification for this being a family because they were all the same race.

For photograph five, In the pre-interview, Andrea did not think this photograph showed a family. She said, "They just don't look the same." Then, in the post-interview, she thought the

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photograph did show a family. Her explanation was, "They look the same." Although her explanation was a bit confusing, it seemed like she was trying to express that they looked like family to her shifting her previous thinking.

For photograph seven, In the pre-interview, Allie said this photograph did not show a family. She said, "Cause it looks like these might be like friend of her mom and dad." Then, in the post-interview, she thought that this photograph showed a family. She said, "It looks like they adopted her." This response shows a shift in Allie's preconceptions. She expressed understanding adoption, which can relate to parents having a different racial identity than a child.

For photograph eight, In the pre- and post-interview, Trish thought that this photograph did show a family. Her justification in the pre-interview was, "See that is the family cause they all got the same skin." Then, in the post-interview she said," Cause they all look the same. They is the same color. They the same skin color." Both of her responses showed that she thinks about racial identity when considering if people are a family or not. Ishan also showed shifts in thinking related to racial identity and thinking in more inclusive ways (explained on page 11).

For photograph ten, in the pre-interview, Gale thought that this showed a family, "Cause there's a bunch of people with a lot like color hair that looks the same." This statement shows how she related looks to similar hair color. This photograph did show people who appeared to be the same race, which connects to her thinking and justification.

For photograph eleven, in the pre-interview, Gale justified her thinking by saying, "Because they have dark hair and they look a lot alike," (pre-interview) and "Cause the mom and the kid look related" (post-interview). Her responses also showed how she thought about families as being people who shared physical characteristics.

In both the pre- and post-interview, Andrea thought this photograph showed a family because "their hair looks the same" (pre-interview) and "they look similar" (post-interview). This showed her thinking around how families look similar. Wesley thought this photograph showed a family in both the pre- and post-interviews. In the pre-interview, he said, "They both have black hair." In the post-interview, he said, "Because I think they both have the same-colored hair and they look related to each other." Andrea and Wesley had similar responses as Gale. Although these responses did not show a shift in preconceptions, they showed how children related skin color or appearance to people being family or not. In this photograph, the child and adult do appear the same race, so this is why they drew these connections for their responses.

Allie expressed she thought this showed a family because "it looks like they both have the same skin color." In the post-interview she maintained her thinking that this photograph showed a family. She did not discuss skin color in her response, but she just thought, "it looks like this is a mom, this is a kid." Her pre-interview response showed her thinking about how families have the same skin color.

For photograph twelve, in both the pre- and post-interview, Ishan thought this photograph showed a family. In the pre-interview he explained, "Because they're both white." In the post-interview, he explained, "Because they're both white skin." For this photograph, both people did appear the same race. He justified why he thought they were family by talking about skin color or racial identity.

Overall, children showed how they connected racial identity to their thinking around families. Some justified their thinking by bringing racial identity (e.g., skin color, hair color, looking similar) into their responses. Some children showed an expanded understanding of racial

identity in families (e.g., transracial adoption and multiracial families) through this picture sort activity.

In lessons nine through 12, the children participated in an art center where they could create their own family. They could choose to cut out adults and children. They also had multicultural crayons that they could utilize for the skin color of the different people in their families. Throughout the project, children connected skin color to the term race. We had to discuss how race did not just mean skin color during the identity wheel activity. For example, Ryan thought she was Asian because she had a similar skin color as me. So, I utilized that moment as a teachable moment about race with the children. Some children continued to believe that skin color meant race and they would use "skin color" and "race" interchangeably.

Andrea, Lilly, Louie, and Zane all created families with different skin colors. Although I did not ask the children to tell me about their pictures and who was in the family, from looking at their artwork, I could see that they used different skin color crayons to create the skin color of their families. For example, Andrea's family had three adults and two children. Two of the adults had the same skin color while the third adult did not. The two children had different skin colors. Lilly's family had two adults and one child. Each of the people had different skin colors. Louie's family had two adults and one child. One adult had the same skin color as the child and the other adult had a different skin color. Then, Zachary's family had one adult and three children. The three children had the same skin color, but the adult had a different skin color.

These examples showed how these four children used different crayons to color the skin of the people in the families they created. They did not use the same color crayon for every family member, which shows thinking around skin color.

In the post-interview, when asked what they learned throughout the project, Devin expressed, "That families don't have to have the same race to be a family." Wesley expressed, "That they can have different skin." These two responses showed how both Devin and Wesley learned about some families having different racial identities.

Summary. Children showed connections to thinking about family racial identity when thinking about families. Some children showed more inclusive understandings around racial identity in families (e.g., transracial adoption and multiracial families). Some children also continued to draw connections to some families having the same racial identity and looking similar to justifying why groups of people look like a family or not. The different activities showed how children draw connections to racial identity when thinking about family structures and experiences.

Research Question Two: The Impacts of Instruction

In this section, I report on findings from research question two: What aspects of the instruction helped build children's awareness of diverse families? I explain how different aspects of project-based learning supported children's learning about diverse families throughout the project.

Types of Interdisciplinary Instruction

Overall, children showed how they learned about diverse families through this project-based unit in many different ways. As seen in the section above answering the first research question, children showed an expanded and more inclusive understanding of diverse family structures and experiences from pre- to post-interviews, after participating in the project, including expanded understanding of families with two moms or two dads, single parents, multigenerational families, extended family, and multiracial families.

This project included whole group and small group instruction. Whole group instruction included interactive read alouds, discussions and interactive Google Slides presentations, interactive anchor charts, class census activity, and an identity wheel activity. The school principal, Luanne, was going to join as the guest speaker, but she had to attend to an issue that arose and could not come to the classroom. Small group instruction was center-based. Each day after the whole group lesson, the children participated in small group centers. They had four centers a week through which they rotated. They visited each center twice in the week. The center choices included: teacher writing center, play center, listening center, social studies center, and art center. Each week there was a teacher writing center where the children worked on the writing products for the project with my support. This was the only center that had teacher support. The other three centers were meant to be independent for the children. The other centers rotated depending on the week (e.g., some weeks had an art center or a play center).

Whole Group Instruction

Whole group and small group instruction supported the learning of content as well as the creation of their project products. In this sub-section, I explain how the project-based learning unit helped build children's awareness of diverse families in the sub-sections below. I discuss parts of the whole group instruction.

Interactive Read Alouds

Interactive read-alouds appeared to be a powerful aspect of the unit. During the sessions, I utilized interactive read alouds to drive content learning on families. I read different nonfiction and narrative texts to the whole class. The read alouds taught about different family structures or experiences, connecting to the project. Some of the books mirrored families in the classroom and some of the books served as windows to other family structures or experiences. According to my

observational notes, the read alouds went well overall. The children were engaged and drew connections to the texts. For example, during an interactive read aloud of *My Brother Charlie* by Ryan Elizabeth Peete, Holly Robinson Peete, and Denene Millner, Victor raised his hand and said that his brother also had autism, showing the direct connection he made with the book.

Some children made references to the interactive read aloud texts in the post-interviews as well as throughout the teaching of the sessions as noted from my observational notes. For example, in the picture sort activity, Ryan made a connection to the text *Visiting Day* by Jacqueline Woodson. When explaining why she thought the first photograph showed a family she said, "Because there's like a mom, a dad, a grandpa and grandma, and a little son. And I know that grandma and grandpa and like in cartoons they don't normally live, but they can live together. It's just a little rare, but it can happen. It just be [like] *Visiting Day*." In the book *Visiting Day*, the main character lives with her grandmother while her father is incarcerated. Ryan was showing that she was drawing some connections to that text.

In the post-interview, I asked children, "What was your favorite thing we did during this project?" Chad expressed that his favorite thing was reading books. He said, "I think reading the stories. *The Subway Baby*." In session three, the children engaged in a read aloud of *Our Subway Baby: The True Story of How One Baby Found His Home* by Peter Mercurio. According to my observational notes, this book had a lot of engagement from the children, especially when they realized it was a true story. They demonstrated engagement by excited reactions as well as asking many questions. They liked how the end of the book shared information about the family, including real pictures of them.

According to my observational notes, the favorite text read was *The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* by Selina Alko in sessions 9 and 10. The children followed up by

asking many questions about the injustice that the Loving family went through when they could not marry due to having different racial identities. One child, Devin, kept asking if I could reread the book to the class days after the session was taught as well as after the unit was over. Devin also drew a connection to my own family structure. She drew a connection that my husband and I are a different race and expressed that without the Loving family, him and I would not have been able to get married. This showed how this child was drawing connections from the text to what she was learning from the project (e.g., my identity wheel, photographs I included of my family in the slideshow). In session 10, I reviewed what the children learned in the previous session from the read aloud of *The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* by Selina Alko. Ryan expressed, "They changed the law and I think that is good of them that they stood up for people." Gale and Allie also made comments about how the Loving family was imprisoned for getting married. They showed continued understanding of the text that carried over to the next session. The interactive read alouds reinforced learning about diverse family structures and experiences and provided children the opportunity to learn about families who may be different from their own or similar to their own as well as provided opportunities to learn about injustice to families in history.

Interactive Google Slides Presentations

Interactive Google Slides presentations were utilized to support the teaching of content and add informational text into the unit. Each session, I prepared slideshows to project on the whiteboard. These slideshows included content that I wanted to teach about. I added in photographs of families to show the children examples of diverse family structures and experiences (e.g., two moms, two dads, deployment, homelessness). I also included some informational videos in the slideshows to further their learning around diverse family structures

and experiences. According to my observational notes, the children were highly engaged in the video *Kids Show and Tell- Family and Culture* from YouTube (Hiho Kids). They laughed and watched the screen with minimal redirection to look at the screen or engage in the video. Videos can be a way to incorporate informational text in an engaging way for children.

In the slideshows, I also added photographs from my own family to share with the children. These photographs helped the children understand my own family identities (e.g., adoptee, multiracial couple, no children) while also allowing the children to learn more about me. When I showed a family photograph from when I was a child, many children asked questions. Trish pointed out, "You are the little one in the middle" and another child said, "You look five". They also learned that I was the youngest in my family and two children yelled out, "I'm the youngest too." When I explained that I was adopted, one child asked, "Who is your real family?" In that moment, I explained that rather than real family I call them my birth family or biological family. Then, I went on to my next slide to show how I met biological sisters. Ryan said, "Your actual sisters?" Then, I explained how we shared a birth mom and that my sister Erica had the same birth dad. They noticed how I looked more like my biological sister than my family.

I found that many children's shifted preconceptions connected to my personal family structure and experiences. For example, most all children thought that children must be present as family members when naming who is part of a family. During the sessions, children asked if I had children and I told them no, but I had a pet cat with my husband. In session one, I showed a photograph of my husband, our pets (two dogs and a cat) and me. Allie said, "I have two dogs too." Then, another child yelled out, "I also have two dogs." This showed them drawing a connection to my family. According to my observational notes, children were very invested in

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learning about my own family structure. They also drew connections to my husband being white and me being Asian. They learned about my racial identity throughout the project, but I really addressed it in session eight when we completed the identity wheels as a group. I modeled creating my own identity wheel before the children completed their own. Many of children's preconceptions about families appeared to shift when they learned about my family structure, as demonstrated by expanded understanding of families with different racial identities and families who do not have children, like my own in the post-interviews.

Whole Group Activities

During the whole group learning, I incorporated different activities for the children to engage in to continue learning about families. The children created anchor charts. In session one, they completed a class census together. I created a chart that had the number of people they live with and gave them two different colored sticky notes. One color referenced adults and the other color referenced children. They added to the census graph to show how many people they regularly live with.

Throughout the project, children helped make anchor charts to show their learning and understandings about families. In session two, children helped make an anchor chart about what is important to families. This anchor chart showed prior knowledge children had about families. For example, they said: keeping people safe, being nice, protecting their children, making sure people have food, playing together, and following rules to be safe. They first made this anchor chart before participating in a read aloud of *Families Through Time* by Jeanne Dustman. Then, after the read aloud, they wanted to add to the anchor chart. Allie said to add, "Making sure people go to school" because the book referenced families learning together. In sessions two and three they created a list of expectations and questions for their guest speaker (who unfortunately

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was not able to come after all). These anchor charts also showed learning from the project. For example, the expectations anchor chart explained ways to welcome her to the classroom, which connects to being welcoming or inclusive (e.g., greet her, ask to hug her). The questions for the guest speaker also connected to the project learning. Children used vocabulary such as siblings, grandparents, and traditions in their questions. In session 12, the children created an anchor chart that showed ways to be inclusive to people who may not be like them. Their understanding of inclusivity related to learning throughout the project. They connected to ideas they added to their informational class book (e.g., greet people, be helpful) but also connected to learning of vocabulary and content about activism. They said, "Take action by speaking up if something is unjust."

The children also did an identity wheel activity in session eight. According to my observational notes, it went better than I initially anticipated. I was worried that children did not have enough background knowledge to successfully complete this activity, but wanted to try it to see how it would go. Each child filled out an identity wheel with the categories: age, grade, language, part of family, and race or ethnicity. The children easily filled out which age or grade they were in and noticed that they all were in the same grade. Many of the children yelled out, "first" or "I'm going to write first" or "I wrote a one" when I asked them what to write in that part of their identity wheel. Then, asked "what grade are you in?" to me and I had to explain that I was in graduate school so I don't have a number that I can write in my identity wheel. When the children wrote about who they were in part of the family, Trish expressed, "I am an aunt." She was the only child in the classroom who was an aunt. When we got to the race/ethnicity part of the wheel, only one child was confused on her race. She is white and thought she was Asian because she had similar skin tone as me. The children had a preconceived understanding of race

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meaning skin color. During the sessions, I tried to explain race as not only meaning skin color. The children did well with this activity and each child filled out the entire wheel either independently or with some support from me.

Figure 1

Example Identity Wheel One
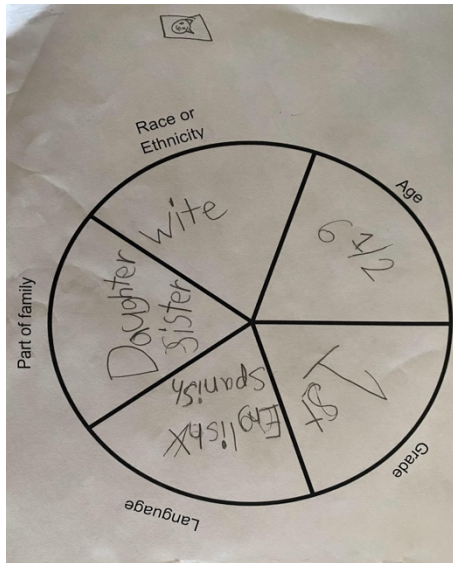
Figure 2

Example Identity Wheel Two
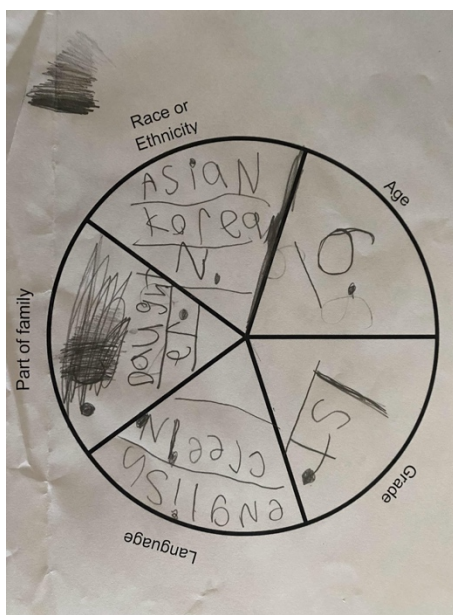
This identity wheel activity was meant to have children start to understand their own personal identity and think about their family identities as well. They were learning about intersectionality at this point in the project. This understanding of intersectionality related to how some of my own identities were not the same as my family's identities to build understanding that some families may have different racial identities or different languages they speak. I aimed to teach the children about different types of diversity that families can have member to member. Some of that learning was seen with children who changed preconceptions around families having to be the same race in pre-interviews and shifting their ideas in the post-interviews.

Summary. Overall, the whole group learning activities supported building children's awareness of diverse families. The different content that was learned from interactive read alouds, interactive Google Slides presentations that featured content, as well as the whole group activities (e.g., anchor charts, identity wheel) supported this more inclusive and expanded learning on families.

Small Group Instruction in Project-Based Learning

Whole group and small group instruction supported the learning of content as well as the creation of their project products. In this sub-section, I continue to explain how the project-based learning unit helped build children's awareness of diverse families in the sub-sections below. I discuss parts of the small group instruction and draw connections between the learning from whole and small group instruction.

Small Group Learning Centers

When I asked the children to share what their favorite thing we did during the project was, 17 children listed a centers activity as a favorite activity (some children naming more than one center as their favorite). Five children mentioned liking the art center, seven children

mentioned liking the play center, two children mentioned liking the listening center, and four children mentioned liking the teacher writing center. Nobody mentioned enjoying the social studies center, which was the only other center choice that they could have chosen.

The small group centers were deliberately planned to address different learning standards (*Social Justice Standards, Common Core English Language Arts*, and C3 Framework). They were also planned for children to learn the background knowledge and content needed to complete the project on families. For example, according to my observational notes, children asked when they would get a turn at the play center (where the children played family). This asking showed how the children were motivated to go to that center. There was an art center in sessions nine through 12 where the children cut out adults and children and they chose how many people made up the family, who was part of the family, and how the family looked.

The art centers had a lot of engagement. For example, when asked to share their favorite activity of the project, Gale said, "Drawing the families. When we were cutting the paper and cutting them out." In this response "them" refers to the adults and children cut out to create a family in sessions 9 through 12. In sessions one through four the children drew a family portrait. In sessions nine through 12 they created diverse families through cutting out adults and children and creating a family. The art center for sessions nine through 12 showed children's learning around diversity in families. For example, Andrea, Lilly, Louie created a multiracial family. Allie, Wesley, and Zane created a single parent family. Zane actually created two families and both families showed single parents. Gale created a family with two dads. Chrissy created a family with two moms. Ryan created a family with three adult females. Ishan created a family with two adults. This center showed how children showed understanding of diverse family structures in the third week of the project. Children who did not finish their family portraits or

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the families that they created by cutting out adults and children asked if they could finish it at a later time. The classroom teacher gave them time later to finish their art and expressed that the children liked these activities a lot.
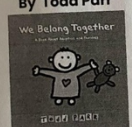
Caden explained that he liked the play center the most. He said, "Cause there were some disagreements with and that happens a lot in families. So, I like that how that it was kind of realistic." The play center was chosen because I wanted to see how children would choose being members of families based on what they were learning in the whole group lessons. In the first round for many of the groups, I noted that children were engaging in parallel play. But as they got more comfortable with the play center, they were engaging more with each other and playing together versus independently. Before this project, children did not engage in sociodramatic play in the classroom according to the classroom teacher. I also noticed that children were highly interested in being the teenagers or older siblings of the families. One group of children created a family with two dads. Other groups of children had some children act as pets in families as well. Some of their families did not have adults or caregivers. Ryan explained how nobody wanted to be the mom in her group and she said she loved being the mom because there were many babies that she could play with too. She said, "Well, I really liked the play. I especially loved of what I get to be a mom and nobody apparently wanted to be a mom for some reason." Logan named that he was "a gaming person and a building person" at the play center. Rather than naming which member of the family he was he expressed his jobs in the family. The play center showed how the children were thinking about the different family members making up a family.

The listening center reinforced learning about diverse family structures and experiences through introducing new books on these topics. Andrea said that she liked "the blue book" from the listening center. The book she was mentioning was *Henry's Freedom Box: A True Story from*

the Underground Railroad by Ellen Levine. This was a text that was mentioned in session nine

because the children were learning about injustice that has happened to families throughout

history. I explained how during slavery, some enslaved peoples were separated from their

families, and I used Henry Box Brown as an example. This text was Andrea's favorite during the

project's listening center. Andrea's choice shows a connection to the whole group learning about

families. Chrissy explained that she liked the listening center best. She said, "I like doing the

read aloud books." I asked her if she was talking about the read alouds from the whole group or

the listening center and she clarified she meant the listening center. At the listening center, after

they listened to a text, they checked their checklist so that I could track which books they

listened to and did not listen to.

Figure 3

Listening Center Checklist

The exploration centers focused on children inquiring about family artifacts, historical

photographs of families as well as developing signs to put up in the school that showed

inclusivity and welcoming. At the exploration centers, children developed many questions about the family artifacts that their teacher, their peers, and I brought in. They were interested in pets in photographs, the ages of people in photographs, as well as the jewelry (family heirloom) that their teacher brought in. They wrote their questions on sticky notes and posted it to a poster. At the end of day four, we answered their questions in the whole group. When the children developed posters to make their school an inclusive space, they utilized their understandings of inclusivity by using the word, "welcome". Some drew illustrations and other children wrote. For example, one child wrote "be kind and be welcoming" on his poster. They used their own phonetic spelling to develop their signs/posters.

Figure 4

Sign One to Promote Family Inclusivity at School
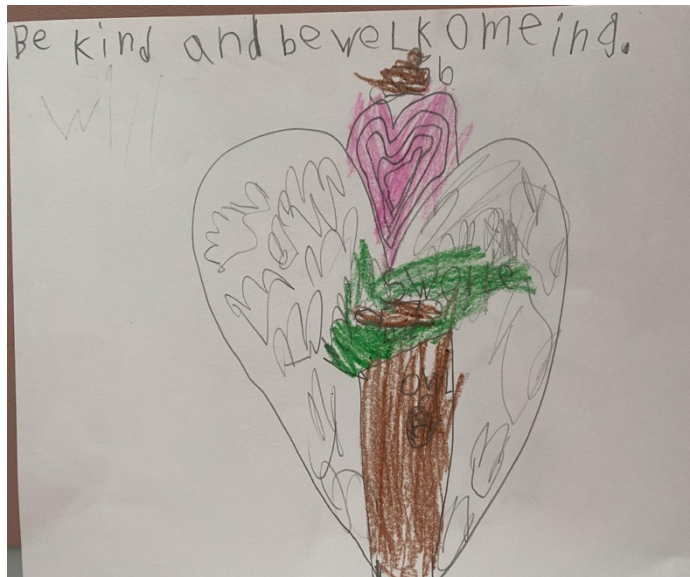
Figure 5

Sign Two to Promote Family Inclusivity at School

Figure 6

Sign Three to Promote Family Inclusivity at School

The teacher writing center is where the children worked on the two project writing products: 1. Personal narrative about their family and 2. Informational class book about how to be inclusive to families at the school. Allie explained she liked this center, "Because you write and it's fun. You got to learn more." She then said she liked writing her own story (personal

narrative) better. Josh said, "The teacher center, when we wrote the book and wrote our own stories. Because the teacher center has a lot of learning things." Josh liked writing both products and felt like he was learning new things at this center, which he earlier explained, "My favorite thing was that I liked to learn about things that I never learned before." The children were not accustomed to centers or social studies and literacy instruction, which may have contributed to the feeling of learning. Trish explained, "Doing, working with you. Cause I liked making books." Trish needed extra support with her writing during this center. I was able to support her writing needs and she seemed to feel accomplished at the end of writing her personal narrative and adding to the class book according to my observational notes. Victor explained he liked the teacher center too "because I like writing about stories. I like us working all together and making it into a book," Highlighting the collaborative nature of the effort to write the class book at the teacher center.

The writing center was an opportunity for me to reinforce learning about the content while also supporting writing needs of the children. I was able to differentiate my instruction for writing at this center. For example, I provided one child, Trish, an alphabet chart to help her write basic sentences to tell her story. She wrote one sentence per page (three pages in total) with my support. I also asked Victor to add more details to his story because he finished early, and writing was not as challenging for him.

At the writing center, the children also wrote about what they wanted in their personal narratives. They chose a family memory or history that they wanted to share with their family members. Each child came up with their own family memory or history to share about without my support. They then planned out the different parts and details of their stories. For example, Gale wrote about a family vacation that she went on and retold her favorite parts of the trip.

Figure 7

Gale's Personal Narrative, Page One
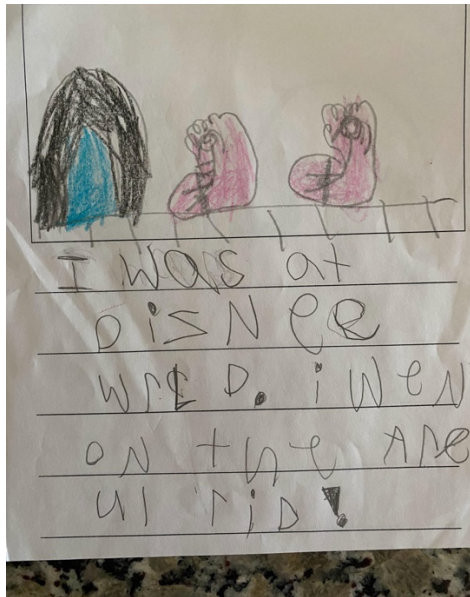
Figure 8

Gale's Personal Narrative, Page Two
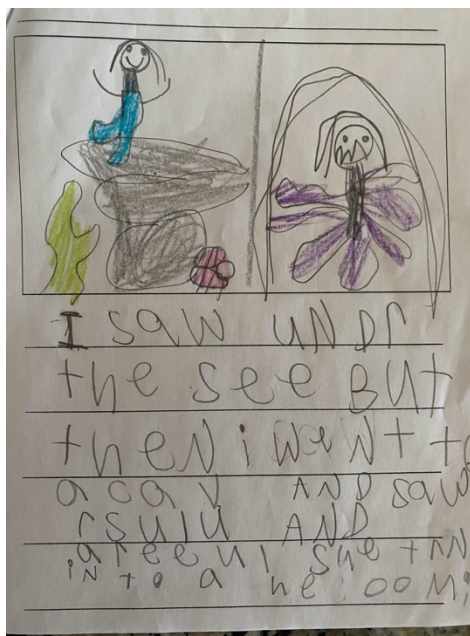
Figure 9

Gale's Personal Narrative, Page Three

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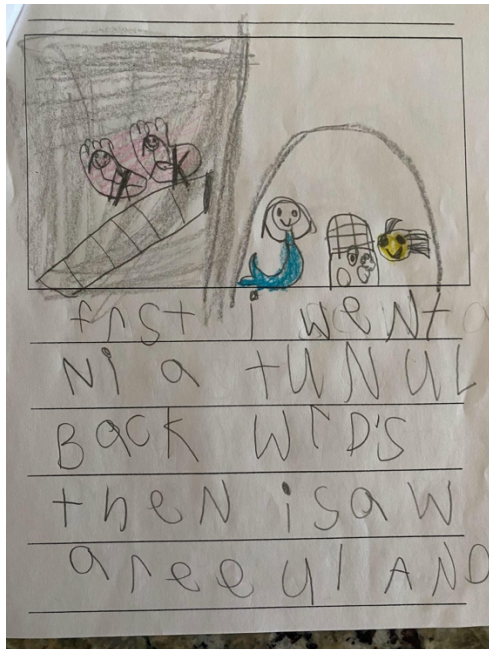
Figure 10

Gale's Personal Narrative, Page Four

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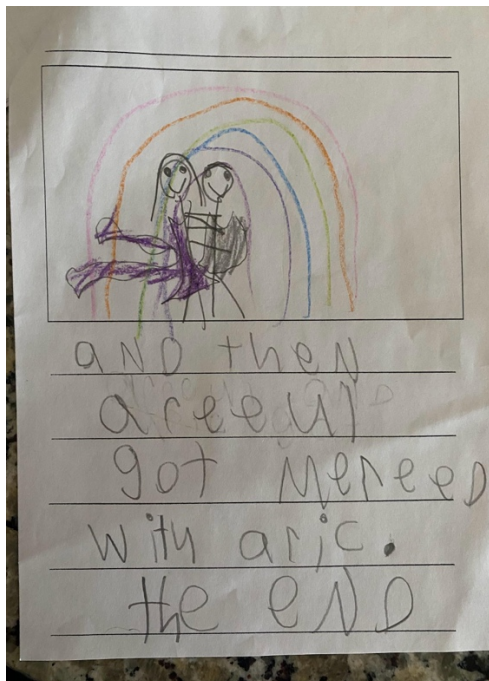
At the writing center, children also reinforced language around the sessions and driving question such as, "inclusive" and "welcoming". Their final product (informational class book) showed their learning throughout the project. The children collaborated to come up with ideas on how to be inclusive to new families at their school. They discussed ways to welcome and help new families. They discussed events to invite new families to so that they were not left out and how they could give tours to new families, so that they knew how to get around the school. Their reasons showed their understandings of being inclusive as first graders.

Figure 11

Class Informational Book, Page One
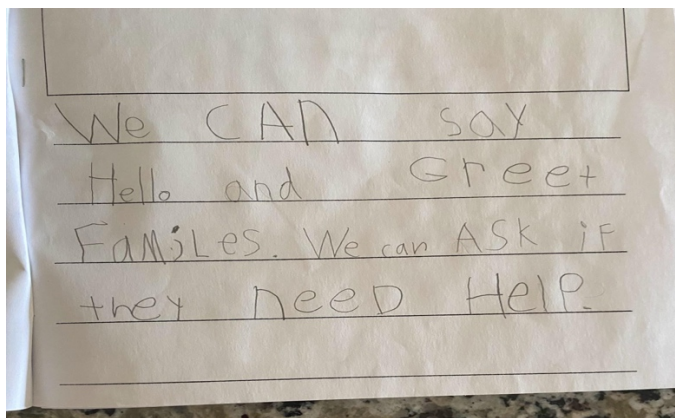
Figure 12

Class Informational Book, Page Two

Figure 13

Class Informational Book, Page Three
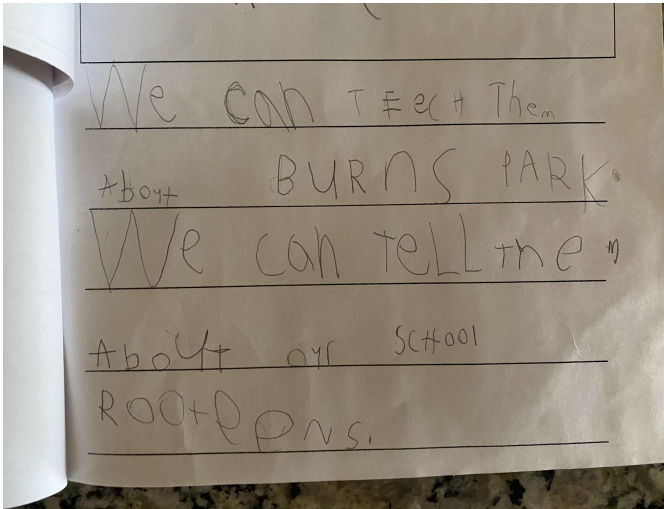
Figure 14

Class Informational Book, Page Four
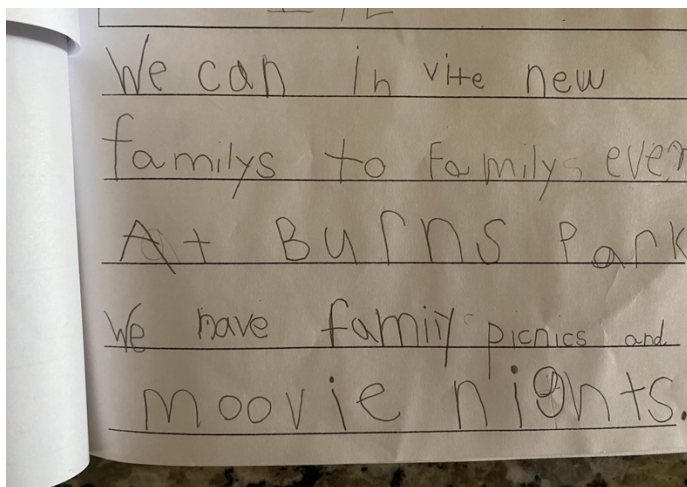
Summary. The children were not accustomed to centers-based instruction before this project, but they quickly caught onto the routine of centers with very little need for redirection. I did aim to pick activities that I thought would be developmentally appropriate to be independent tasks and worked with the classroom teacher to develop the groups of children, which supported the independence. The classroom teacher's support with technology was also helpful because it

allowed me to continue working with the writing center group. Overall, the centers were a favorite part of the project for the children, which shows how engaging small group work can be for children in first grade. Many children named different centers as their favorite activity that they participated in throughout the project. During the project many children would ask if they could visit the center again or if they would have time later to complete their artwork. This high engagement can lead to motivation to learn in a project (Bandura, 1986). The different centers drove different learning that led to a more inclusive and expanded understanding of families.

Connections from Whole and Small Group Learning

In this project, children drew connections between the whole group and small group learning. Children participated in both whole group and small group instruction to drive their learning around the driving question: How can we be inclusive to families who are different from our own? Some of the learning from both whole group and small group instruction led to building children's awareness of diverse families. For example, children showed understanding of key vocabulary that was introduced in whole group and reinforced during small group centers. I explain how children showed their awareness and understanding around key vocabulary.

Learning Vocabulary Through Project-Based Learning

Children showed how they learned different key vocabulary through the project-based learning unit. This learning came out through the post-interviews question, "What did you learn from this project on families?" Allie and Gale utilized the term, "welcome" or "welcoming" in their responses. Allie said, "I learned that you could be welcoming in a lot of different ways." Gale said, "Can welcome a family." Welcome or welcoming was a key vocabulary term that was introduced and discussed throughout the project. The children also connected this vocabulary term with their class book project product.

Trish and Victor utilized the term, "inclusive" in their responses. Trish said, "We was always say how we be inclusive to others." Victor said, "That families can be inclusive." The word inclusive was introduced and discussed throughout the project. This term was also utilized in the driving question of the project.

Chrissy utilized the term, "unjust." She said, "I learned some family words, like unjust." Although unjust is not a family word, what I believe she was meaning was that she learned new words like unjust during the project. We discussed how some things have been unjust that diverse families have faced throughout history (e.g., multiracial families, LGBTQIA+ families) in the project. In the anchor chart from session 12's whole group discussion, the children came up with the idea of "take action by speaking up if something is unjust." This addition to the anchor chart showed use of the term, "unjust."

Devin and Wesley utilized the term, "race." Devin said, "That families don't have to have the same race to be a family." Wesley said, "They don't have the same race and stuff." Throughout the project, we discussed racial identity through an activity with an identity wheel as well as the read aloud, *The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* by Selina Alko.

These terms (welcome/welcoming, inclusive, unjust, and race) were vocabulary terms that were discussed throughout the project through whole group and small group activities (e.g., read alouds, writing products, and listening center texts). These children demonstrated understanding of these terms through sharing what they felt they learned in the project.

The learning of vocabulary also showed through the children's work on their informational class book during the writing center, the social studies center where they made signs to welcome families, as well as through class discussions. While working on their class book during the teacher writing center, children understood what it meant to be inclusive and that

understanding showed up through the examples they wrote for the book (e.g., welcoming new families and showing them around the school). In the social studies center where they made signs to be inclusive to families, many of the signs said, "Welcome." Other signs said, "Be welcoming." This showed understanding of the discussions around being inclusive and welcoming. In the class discussions, I noted down children using vocabulary such as inclusive, welcoming, unjust, and race as well. Also, in the class discussion in session three, children created an anchor chart to develop questions for their guest speaker. One question said, "Do you have any family traditions?" The children learned about traditions in session two. This question showed understanding and use of that vocabulary term.

Summary. Overall, not all key vocabulary was utilized as much (e.g., adoption) but some of the vocabulary (e.g., welcome, inclusive, race) was shown to be learned and utilized throughout the project in different ways. The vocabulary understanding was developed from both whole group and small group learning opportunities. Moving forward, there needs to be more explicit teaching of vocabulary and connections made through whole and small group learning centers. For example, Google Slides presentations could remind children of definitions and could provide examples through visuals for the children to connect to the vocabulary word. Then, in the interactive read aloud lesson plans, vocabulary words that could build background knowledge or can provide extended teaching can be noted.

What was Missing from This Project

Children who participated in the project-based learning unit on families did shift many preconceptions around families and children appeared engaged and indicated in post-interviews that they enjoyed the unit as a whole, however, there were also parts from the sessions that did not seem to connect with children based on their post-interview answers. In this sub-section, I

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explain how some areas in which children did not connect to the understanding and learning of some diverse family structures and the diverse family experiences that were introduced to them during the project.

Lack of Understanding About Diverse Structures and Experiences

Throughout the project, I taught the children about many diverse family structures and experiences. I taught about single parents, families with two moms, families with two dads, families without children, families with children, multigenerational families, multiracial families, adoption, divorce, stepfamilies, foster families, deployment, international students, loss of a family member, homelessness, family sickness, family members with disabilities, and incarceration. Some of these family structures or experiences were understood more than others at the end of the project. For example, when I read *Visiting Day* by Jacqueline Woodson, the children understood that the child was living with her grandma while her dad was away, and they prepared to go visit him. They did not draw the connection to incarceration.

The children also did not connect to some of the identities that they learned about in the interactive Google Slides presentations. For example, they learned about language and religion but outside of filling out what language(s) they spoke in the identity wheel, this learning did not seem to show up again through discussions, children's work, or the post-interview answers.

As mentioned before, some of the key vocabulary that I taught did not get taken up as clearly as other vocabulary. For example, children did not draw many connections around adoption. We read a book about adoption, and I discussed my personal experiences being adopted. I thought that more children would explain how the photograph of the two adult males who appeared to be white and the child who appeared to be Black showed adoption. None of the children made that connection around adoption. Many children explained they thought the

photograph showed two dads and a child, but they did not go further to explain adoption,

drawing connections to *Our Subway Baby: The True Story of How One Baby Found His Home*

by Peter Mercurio. The children also learned about the vocabulary term activism. They showed

their understanding through discussing taking action, but they did not explicitly use the term

activism like we used in the sessions.

Integration with Writing

After teaching the project, I realized that I needed more deliberate planning of writing

instruction in the whole group as well as the small-group writing center with the teacher. For

example, during the whole group instruction with the interactive Google Slides presentations,

children should have had more opportunities to learn about the writing products through mentor

texts, interactive writing opportunities, as well as modeling (Boss & Larmer, 2018; Duke, 2014;

High Quality Project Based Learning, 2018). This type of learning during the whole group would

have supported children in developing their writing products in a more deliberate and purposeful

way.

In the small groups there was a need for more deliberate writing instruction. The children

were able to successfully create a writing product of their own (personal narrative) as well as a

group writing product (class book), but there could have been more deliberate instruction

planned in the session plans themselves. For example, there could have been explicit steps to

follow in the teacher-led writing center to make sure the children were going through the writing

and research as well as revision phases of project-based learning (Duke, 2014). In other centers,

there could have also been opportunities for more writing. For example, there could have been

response options for children at the listening center. They could have listened to a read aloud and

then followed up with a writing prompt to ask questions or write notes about what they learned.

The sessions need to be revised based on this lack of deliberate and explicit instruction to be clear for other teachers to follow. This more explicit session planning also supports teachers in understanding how to group children based on needs as well as how to assess them in writing standards (Duke, 2014).

Time Constraints

While teaching this project, I realized that I needed more time than 12 sessions. The writing and research and well as revision and editing phases of project-based learning were too short. For example, I had to rush with a few children who had some challenges with writing. I was not able to provide them the support that they really needed because I only had 12 days to work with them. I also missed the peer editing portion of project-based learning due to time constraints. This project needs more than 12 sessions to be effective if both project products are kept. To make sure children are getting enough time for an authentic and thoughtful writing process, 15 to 20 sessions would be more effective than 12 (Duke, 2014).

Summary

Overall, I taught about too many different family structures or experiences, which is probably why so many were not discussed in the post-interviews. For children to draw deeper connections, more time is needed to be spent on each structure or experience. I also needed to be more deliberate with how many key vocabulary terms I choose for the final project. There were too many vocabulary terms to explain and for the children to learn. There was also a need for more explicit and deliberate planning of writing instruction. With better writing instruction, children's needs could be met and standards for writing could be more aligned to the project. Lastly, this project needed to be longer than 12 sessions because the writing and research as well as revising and editing phases of the project were rushed. This timeframe did not allow me to

meet all the writing needs for children as well as missing parts like peer editing. With more time, this project could improve in meeting writing standards and goals while also learning about diverse families (social studies content).

Emergent Findings Regarding Children's Conceptions of Families

In this section, I report on information that emerged throughout the data analysis. These findings do not connect directly with any of the research questions, but the analysis showed importance of how children understand families. I report on these findings because although they were not anticipated, they were important to understanding how families think about family structures and experiences.

Defining Family

In the pre- and post-interviews, I asked the children, "What is a family?" Their definitions of family did not show much of a shift after participating in the project-based learning unit on families. Many of the children explained that families love each other, care for each other, live together, are important, and help each other. For example, in the pre-interview Allie said, "People who love each other and who care for each other." Then, in the post-interview she said, "It's people who love each other and who care for each other." Her explanations mirror each other from pre- to post-interview. In the pre-interview, Teresa said, "It's someone you live with." In the post-interview she said, "Someone you live with. Someone that takes care of you." Her response shows a little expansion to understanding that families can care for each other, but her definition does not show understanding of diverse family structures or experiences.

To explain what a family is, some children named the different people in families (e.g., kids, parents, grandparents, adults, babies). For example, in the pre-interview Zane said, "Like kids and then parents." Then, in the post-interview he said, "A group of people." His

understanding of what a family is was to explain how people are part of a family. His explanation did not shift too much from pre- to post-interview to show expansion of learning about diverse family structures and experiences.

As I planned the project's sessions, I struggled to come up with a firm definition of family to explain to the children because I could not find a way to have one sentence that was inclusive of all families. I also did not want to follow the problematic pattern of repeating definitions like Merriam Webster's (2019) definition of family. When I taught the lessons, I said, "It can be challenging to explain what a family is because families are diverse or different. Some families live together, others may not. Some families may look alike, while others do not. Families can be groups of people who are united together or connected together by some common bond." I found myself struggling on how to define family with one encompassing definition because not everyone has the same feelings about families or experiences with family. For example, some families may not provide care or help. Some children may have experienced family trauma, so I did not want to define family as "people who love and care for you," because that may not be true for some children. Some children may have never met a family member or may live with friends of their family. So, there needs to be understanding that family may not include people technically related to you through ancestry or legal documentation, which also is different than experiences like adoption or foster families. There are many complexities to different family experiences and structures.

After noting these teaching challenges, I faced when developing a definition, I decided like defining family through one sentence may not be the best option. Using one sentence can lead to a definition that minimizes families to fitting into the traditional structure or is not inclusive of all families. Explaining family around diverse experience and structures is the best

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way to "define family" or explain families to children. For future revisions, I will provide a description of families that builds off how I explained in the lessons, but I will provide examples for teachers to include and provide room for fluidity in explanation since family identities continue to develop and shift over time. This fluidity will allow teachers to be responsive to the classroom's understandings of families as well as their experiences and structures of family. I will utilize Tschida and Buchanan's (2017) list of marginalized family structures and experiences to build a list of examples (divorce, incarceration, displacement, poverty, military deployment, deportation, foster families, stepfamilies, adoptive parents, multiracial families, multigenerational families) (p. 3).

Overall, when the children described what families were, they did not show expansion of knowledge on diverse families. Their explanations were framed around what families can provide (e.g., care, help, love, living together) rather than discussing diverse structures and experiences. Because it is challenging to define family and there may not be one definition that can encompass all families, moving towards explaining family through different examples of structures and experiences may provide children with more inclusive understandings of families.

Societal Views on Families

In the post-interview one child, Ryan, demonstrated an awareness of the way society has informed or influenced their perceptions of what a family is or who is part of a family. In the post-interview's picture sort activity, she gave an explanation that related to what she noticed in cartoons. She explained that photograph one showed a family in her opinion. She explained, "Because there's like a mom, a dad, a grandpa and grandma, and a little son. And I know that grandma and grandpa and like in cartoons they don't normally live, but they can live together. It's just a little rare, but it can happen. It just be [like] *Visiting Day*." Her response showed that

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she was thinking about how cartoons or media typically do not show children living with their grandparents. Even though cartoons do not show that family structure, she now understands that it can happen and connected to a text (*Visiting Day)* that was read for an interactive read aloud in session five. Her response showed how she typically sees traditional families in the cartoons that she watches, which showed how society continue to use the traditional family structure as a dominant example of families. This continuation of traditional family structures in media can impact how children learn about families or what they understand about families.

Pets as Family Members

Many children showed that they felt pets were part of their families or other families. For example, in the pre-interview when asked to name who was part of a family, Veronica said, "Your mom or your dad or your dog or you or your sister or brother or your cat." Three more children (Gale, Trish, Teresa) also explained pets as being members of families. In the pre-interviews, Chrissy added a "fluffy cat" and a "cat" to the pictures she drew of families. Trish drew a dog in one of her pictures. Veronica drew a cat in her first picture and a dog in her second picture. These three children showed how they believed pets to be part of the families they drew.

I used photographs of my own family to tell the children about my family experiences and structure. One of the photographs I showed to the children was a picture of my husband, our cat, and our two dogs from our wedding day. I showed this picture to the children in session one, but I also printed this photograph for the social studies center where they looked at family artifacts and asked questions on sticky notes. Many of the children were very focused on asking questions about the pets. For example, Allie asked, "Why does she have a cat?" Gale asked, "Why do you have a cat?" and "Why do the dogs have a bandana?" Trish asked, "What cat do you have?" Another child (do not know which child) wrote, "Are your animals still alive?" Louie

asked, "How many pets are in your family?" And Chrissy asked, "Are the dogs happy?" These questions show how interested the children were about the pets in that picture. In the discussion, they continued to ask questions about our cat and dogs.

When asked to name who was part of a family in the post-interviews, Gale, Lilly, Trish, Teresa, Veronica, and Wesley named pets as being family members. In the post interview, Chrissy drew a cat in both her pictures. Devin drew a dog in her first picture and a cat in her second picture. Lilly drew a dog in her first picture and Veronica drew a dog in her first picture. These responses show how some of the children continued to think about pets as family members and how some other children (Devin and Lilly) expanded their drawings to include pets from pre- to post-interviews.

When thinking about who members of a family are, children mainly named humans in the family, the additions of pets as family members was an emergent finding. Not all children have pets at home, but many children do think of them as members of their family whether they have their own pet or not.

Summary

These three emergent findings show important understandings about how children think and learn about family structures and experiences. It seems that family is a challenging word to define without providing examples and further explanation. To inclusively teach about families, using one definition to encompass all families is challenging, so providing a more detailed explanation that can be fluid for teachers to be responsive to funds of knowledge as well as children's family structures and experiences.

Society continues to have an influence on what children and adults are exposed to about families. This societal influence has been strong throughout the years and continues to influence

children's perceptions of families. This societal influence needs to be expressed to educators who are teaching about families so that they can be mindful of how much society can influence thinking around families that can be marginalizing.

Lastly, when children think about families some often think about pets as family members. Although pets are not humans, they can still be considered members of the family, and this thinking has different positive psychological impacts (McConnell, 2019).

These emergent findings arose out of children's answers to naming who is part of a family in pre- and post-interviews, drawings of families in pre- and post-interviews as well as at the art center, and inquiry around the photograph of my family with two dogs and a cat. These emergent findings show different understandings of families that were not anticipated with the initial research questions.

Summary of Findings

Children showed many shifts in their preconceptions of families after participating in a project-based learning unit on families. Children showed a more inclusive and expanded understanding of family diversity after learning about families in their 12-day unit. For example, children showed shifts in how they thought about diverse families, children in families, adults/caregivers in families, and racial identities in families.

Project-based learning shows promise for building children's awareness of diverse families. The children demonstrated new understandings following active participation in whole group learning (e.g., interactive read alouds, interactive Google Slides presentations, and whole group activities) and small group learning (e.g., centers). They drew connections with key vocabulary through both whole and small group activities and learning.

In the final chapter, I discuss how the findings for both research questions are situated in the literature, explain implications for teaching and teacher education, limitations, suggestions for future research, and the educational significance of this line of work on teaching families in schools.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

"Well, I learned just because a family doesn't have one mom, it still makes a family."

-Ryan

Major Findings

The major findings of this study support and build on previous research on project-based learning, interdisciplinary learning in social studies and literacy, and teaching and learning about families in the early elementary classroom. Utilizing project-based learning to teach about diverse family structures and experiences in social studies is a promising approach and appeared to be successful in one first-grade classroom. The major findings indicating the promise of this approach include: 1. Children showed shifts in their preconceptions of families, expanding some of their initial understandings of families to include more diverse structures and 2. Children responded positively to aspects of project-based learning and engaged in activities designed to build their awareness of diverse families. This project-based unit provided children with authentic writing activities (Duke, 2014), interactive read alouds (Strachan, 2015; Whitford, 2021), and small group learning activities (Duke, 2014) that fostered collaboration and opportunities for play (Eggum-Wilkens et al., 2014), while dismantling traditional teaching strategies such as family trees and exit tickets (McCormick, 2021; Tschida & Buchanan, 2017).

Prior research in elementary classrooms has found that project-based learning can support social studies and literacy learning (Duke et al., 2021; Halvorsen et al., 2012; Halvorsen et al., 2018). Tschida and Buchanan's (2017) work, as well as my previous research (McCormick, 2021; McCormick, 2022; McCormick & West, 2022) on the teaching and learning of families in early elementary social studies, found large gaps in research in how family units can be taught in

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classrooms in inclusive and equitable ways. This study utilized project-based learning to address

that gap and demonstrate that the family units can be taught in more purposeful, authentic, and

inclusive ways.

The unique contributions of this study include preliminary evidence that project-based

learning can support the learning and understanding of diverse family structures shifting

traditional thinking about families; preliminary evidence that project-based learning can support

students' learning about families in interdisciplinary and engaging ways; identifying conceptual

difficulties in defining family and; recognizing the role of the teacher's identity in teaching about

families.

In this section, I 1. Explain how this study's findings support and build on the literature

of project-based learning and teaching and learning about families; 2. Describe the implications

of this study on teaching, teacher education, and curriculum design; 3. Describe the limitations of

the study; 4. Offer suggestions for future research; and 5. Argue for the study's educational

significance.

Project-Based Learning and Understanding Diverse Family Structures and Experiences

Previous research has demonstrated the impacts of project-based learning and

interdisciplinary learning in elementary classrooms (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013; Duke, 2014;

Duke et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021). There is very little previous research on teaching and

learning about families in elementary social studies or in informal ways, but what does exist has

documented problematic ways of teaching about families persisting in classrooms (McCormick,

2021; Tschida & Buchanan, 2017).

I conducted two previous studies about the family unit in early elementary social studies

(McCormick, 2021; McCormick, 2022). I found many curriculum materials were outdated (e.g.,

books out of print) or did not include inclusive representations of families, leaving children from families who do not follow the traditional structure left out or silenced (McCormick, 2021). My two previous studies showed a need to improve early elementary social studies curriculum on families, leading me to develop this dissertation study.

Powerful social studies requires interdisciplinary learning with literacy (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013; Duke, 2014). This study adds to the current research base on the impact of interdisciplinary learning in elementary social studies (Duke et al., 2021; Halvorsen et al., 2012; Strachan, 2015; Whitford, 2021). This project-based learning unit on families showed promise of children learning social studies content on families while driving literacy and social justice learning. A project-based approach like this unit uses can support teachers when they have time constraints (Rock et al., 2006; Strachan, 2015). Rather than skipping social studies and miss key content such as a family unit, teachers can integrate the subject areas to support learning social studies and reading and writing content simultaneously.

Based on my analysis of the children's thinking through pre- and post-interviews, children showed a more expanded understanding of family structures after participating in a project-based unit on families. For example, in pre-interviews, 17 out of 18 children described a traditional family structure when asked who is part of a family, compared to 13 children who included more diverse structures in the post-interviews. This study shows how project-based learning can be utilized to drive learning about families in elementary social studies. The children who participated in the project demonstrated the understanding that all families do not have to have a mom, dad, and children to be considered a family. For example, many children learned that some families may not have children. Children also learned about caregivers or adults in families and learned about families with single parents, grandparents

(multigenerational), as well as families with two moms or two dads. Children also showed expanded understanding of family racial identities. They drew families that appeared to be multiracial or shifted responses to the picture sort activity showing a group of people identifying with different races. In the next section, I explain how different aspects of project-based learning (interactive read alouds, writing, and centers) were utilized in this project to shift children's preconceptions of families.

A More Inclusive Family Unit

This study aimed to develop a more inclusive way of teaching about families in early elementary social studies and to add research on project-based learning to the field. Research shows how teaching about families continues to be problematic in classrooms (e.g., family tree projects) (Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). My previous study found how curriculum materials often utilize interactive read alouds and worksheets or exit tickets to drive teaching about families (McCormick, 2021). Sometimes the children's literature resources were out of print or teachers had challenges gaining access to the materials (McCormick, 2021). In the traditional way of teaching about families, children would typically sit in a whole group lesson with a read aloud and then complete some form of an exit ticket but did not have opportunities to learn about families in small groups or through differentiated activities (e.g., incorporating art and play) (McCormick, 2021; Tschida & Buchanan, 2017).

Based on this prior research (McCormick, 2021; McCormick 2022; Tschida & Buchanan, 2017), there is a clear need for a new family unit that children can engage in to learn about diverse family structures and experiences as well as drive learning around social justice (e.g., inclusion, diversity, identity). The goal of this project was to develop a new family unit that would be teachable by early elementary teachers as well as be more inclusive of the family

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diversity that children bring to their classrooms. This new family unit also provided opportunities for children to independently engage in small groups (Duke, 2014) with opportunities for art and sociodramatic play (Eggum-Wilkens et al., 2014), which supported engagement (Bandura, 1986).

This interdisciplinary project was aligned to the *College, Career & Civic Life C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (NCSS, 2013), *Common Core State Standards* (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), *Social Justice Standards* (Learning for Justice, 2014) as well as *Michigan K-12 Standards Social Studies* (MDE, 2018). Rather than aligning to state social studies standards like many existing curriculum materials (McCormick, 2021), project-based learning allows for teachers to focus on more than one subject area at a time (Boss & Larmer, 2018; Duke, 2014), drawing on national standards in both social studies and literacy.

Through project-based learning, children should have a clear understanding of what they are learning and why and learn how to take action (McDowell, 2017). Teachers can challenge students through differentiated instruction (e.g., writing with the teacher). For example, in this project, children reviewed the driving question and project products at the beginning of each lesson to remind them of the focus and purposes of the project. In each lesson, the children also participated in small group centers where instruction could be differentiated to meet their needs (e.g., different levels of scaffolding while writing the personal narratives), and they engaged in taking action to make their school more inclusive to families (e.g., creating signs to hang up to welcome families and creating a class book for their school principal to teach how to be inclusive to new families). Rather than just reading books aloud and asking children to answer an exit ticket about what they learned from the read aloud, children were able to engage in different

learning experiences to learn more about diverse family structures and experiences to expand their understanding of families (e.g., art projects, play centers, class census activity).

This study indicates the promise of project-based learning to support teaching and learning about families in elementary social studies.

Shifting Traditional Preconceptions of Families

After participating in a project-based learning unit on families, children demonstrated expanded thinking about families that included more diverse family structures. The children expressed their more inclusive thoughts about children as members of families, adults/caregivers as members of families, as well as racial identity in connection to family identity. As previously mentioned, in pre-interviews, 17 out of 18 children described a traditional family structure when asked, "Who is part of a family?" compared to 13 children who included more diverse structures in the post interviews. This large shift shows how after participating in the project-based learning unit, children better understood that families do not just have to follow the traditional narrative of family (McCormick, 2021; McCormick, 2022).

During the project, children were taught about many different family structures and experiences through whole group learning (interactive read alouds, interactive Google Slides presentations, class census, identity wheel) as well as small group learning (centers), which supported the shifts in these preconceptions (Argarwal-Rangnath, 2013; Boss & Larmer, 2018; Duke, 2014). In the following sections, I elaborate on the use of fiction in project-based learning and other major findings about how to do project-based learning.

Interactive Read Alouds

Previous research has shown the impact of interactive read alouds to support content area instruction, especially in social studies (Strachan, 2015; Whitford, 2021; Wright, 2019).

Powerful social studies instruction engages children in purposeful whole group learning activities, which can include interactive read alouds of high-quality children's literature that relates to the social studies content (NCSS, 2016). Interactive read alouds "provide opportunities for students to ask questions, share ideas, and make connections" (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013, p. 9). This project showed continued promise of children learning social studies content about families through interactive read alouds.

This new family unit included ten children's books that were read during whole group learning (See Appendix F). Two books, *IntersectionAllies: Make Room for All* by Chelsea Johnson and Carolyn Choi and *The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* by Selina Alko, were either re-read or continued in a second lesson due to the challenge of the content or the length of the text. Each lesson incorporated an interactive read aloud of either informational or fiction/narrative text. The children also engaged in learning information through informational Google Slides presentations before engaging in the read aloud. I used interactive Google Slides presentations to provide a focus for each lesson and explicitly teach or review specific knowledge/build background knowledge before conducting the interactive read aloud that connected to the focus (Duke, 2014).

Although project-based learning calls for the use of informational text (Duke, 2014), fiction was important in this project because these books showed family diversity in child-friendly ways that aligned to the project's goals. For example, when teaching about adoption, there are limited books to choose from that are child-friendly and informational, so the use of realistic fiction was vital to teach the children about adoption in lesson three (McCormick & West, 2022). Overall, there was a lack of strong informational texts about diverse family structures and experiences to choose from overall for a project of this magnitude. *Families* by

Shelley Rotner and Sheila M. Kelly was one of the most inclusive informational texts that I found to utilize in this project. Overall, the informational texts I searched for seemed outdated or featured photographs of traditional family structures but showed diversity through racial identity (e.g., all Black families or all Asian families). These texts did not align with the project's broader goals, so fiction was necessary for the interactive read alouds.

To make sure children were exposed to informational text, I paired some informational text through the interactive Google Slides presentations to support the learning through informational text in the Reading and Research phase of project-based learning (Duke, 2014). Teaching through pairing informational Google Slides with fictional books was successful because children made connections to their new or existing learnings about families to the texts that they read or engaged in during the listening center (Duke, 2014). For example, children learned about families who have members who have different abilities. Then, the children participated in the interactive read aloud, *My Brother Charlie* by Ryan Elizabeth Peete, Holly Robinson Peete, and Denene Millner. Victor expressed that his brother also was autistic during the read aloud, connecting to the text, and learning from the informational slides (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013; Duke, 2014; Wright, 2019).

This study found that teaching about family experiences and structures can be accomplished with pairing fiction with information through the interactive Google Slides presentations to provide background information, review information, as well as provide a focus for the read alouds (Duke, 2014). For example, I taught about the injustices that occurred to multiracial families through a historical fiction book, *The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* by Selina Alko. Then, I taught about adoption through a realistic fiction book, *Our Subway Baby: The True Story of How One Baby Found His Home* by Peter Mercurio.

I also taught inclusivity was taught through two narrative texts, *All Families Invited* by Kathleen Goodman and *My Family, Your Family* by Lisa Bullard. Some student answers in the post-interview questions reflected the themes of these interactive read alouds. For example, some children shifted preconceptions about multiracial couples during the picture sort activity, reflecting the themes of *The Case Loving*. Other children's answers showed understanding of adoption, reflecting the themes of *Our Subway Baby*. Some children utilized vocabulary in post-interview answers drawing from these books (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013; Boss & Larmer, 2018; Duke, 2014; Lòpez & Friedman, 2019; Nagy, 2004; Reed et al., 2020). For example, when asked what she learned from this project, Devin said, "That families don't have to have the same race to be a family."

Children were engaged during the interactive read alouds, frequently asking questions and sharing their feelings or drawing connections during the interactive read alouds (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013; Wright, 2019). For example, Chad said his favorite part of the project was reading *Our Subway Baby: The True Story of How One Baby Found His Home* by Peter Mercurio, and according to my observational notes, children were very engaged in this text and asked a lot of questions throughout the read aloud about adoption, including making text to life connections regarding my own adoption (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010; Wiseman, 2010). Powerful social studies instruction calls for students to engage in reflective discussion as they respond to each other's ideas, and they learn about different perspectives (NCSS, 2016). Through interactive read alouds, children discussed the content that they learned through this project (Strachan, 2015; Whitford, 2021). *The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* by Selina Alko was read in lessons nine and ten and seemed to be the most popular book of the project because it had the strongest engagement throughout the lesson. For example, many

children inquired about the injustice that the Loving family and other families experienced before the Supreme Court case, and one child was visibly upset. She asked why people cared so much about the race of people marrying each other, which ignited other children into asking similar questions or wondering why it mattered and why it was illegal to marry someone from a different race. She then drew a connection to my own family identity and pointed out that I would not have been able to marry my husband under these laws because we are different races (Strachan, 2015; Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010; Whitford, 2021; Wright, 2018). This rich discussion showed complex understanding and drawing connections to understanding multiracial families and the injustices around marriage that multiracial families faced before the *Loving v. Virginia* (1967) Supreme Court case. Interactive read alouds like this one can foster discussions around social studies content that can challenge children to think critically about historical content as well as social justice (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013). When children are engaged and interested in read alouds motivation may be increased for a project and children may be more invested in taking action (Bandura, 1986; Duke et al., 2021; NCSS, 2010).

Interactive read alouds can be engaging and motivating to children and can support development of vocabulary and skills such as inferencing (Lòpez & Friedman, 2019). Although, this project did not aim to understand how the unit impacted motivation and literacy learning, it was promising to understand that children did express enjoying the read alouds either in the post-interviews or throughout the lessons (Bandura, 1986).

Writing for an Authentic Purpose

This project was deliberately designed to foster authentic writing opportunities for the children. Based on my previous research, Tschida and Buchanan's (2017) scholarly work on teaching and learning about families, and Duke's (2014) work on project-based learning calls for

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children to develop "written responses to content-based questions and issues" (NCSS, 2016, p. 182). Most curriculum materials included children engaging in whole group learning and then completing a written exit ticket (McCormick, 2021). Exit tickets are a way to assess student learning but they are also not authentic and do not provide the children with purpose for writing (Purcell-Gates et al., 2007). Rather, in this project, children participated in developing authentic writing products that related to the project's goals (Boss & Larmer, 2018; Duke, 2014; Duke et al., 2012; Duke et al., 2021; Halvorsen et al., 2012; Halvorsen et al., 2019). The children went through the phases of the project to learn more content about families while applying their learning from whole (Google Slides, activities, and interactive read alouds) and small groups (centers) to their writing (Duke, 2014). For example, children collaborated or wrote independently to go through the writing process throughout the project during the small group writing center with me (e.g., draft, revise, and final draft) (Boss & Larmer, 2018; Duke, 2014; Duke et al., 2021).

When teaching about families, children can engage in different types of writing (e.g., narrative, opinion, persuasive, informational) (Boss & Larmer, 2018; Duke, 2014). For this project, I chose to have two project products. First, children wrote their own family histories in a personal narrative for their families. Then, the children collaborated to write an informational text on how to be inclusive to diverse families for their principal (Boss & Larmer, 2018). These two project products related to what the children learned about during whole and small group centers about families (Duke, 2014). The children showed connections between what they learned in whole group lessons and with their writing products.

For the personal narratives, the children drew connections to learning about family memories and histories from the whole group lesson on day two. Children understood that

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histories or memories happened in the past, so they all wrote about something that had already happened. They shared about different experiences such as trips, events, or just a favorite memory they had with their family that they wanted to share with them. During the writing center, some children expressed wanting to show their family members and retell their memory, especially to their caregivers, confirming that authentic audiences are important to project-based learning (Boss & Larmer, 2018; Duke, 2014; Duke et al., 2021). The authentic audience and purpose of this project allowed for me, the teacher, to lead discussion to support any needs the children had and to support them drawing connections to families and family experiences based on their backgrounds and cultural knowledges (Barron et al., 1998; Halvorsen et al., 2012; Katz & Chard, 2000; Krajcik et al., 1998).

For the informational text for the school principal, children made connections to learning about inclusivity. They came up with examples of being inclusive and welcoming to new families at school connecting to the interactive Google Slides presentations, interactive read alouds (e.g., *All Families Invited* by Kathleen Goodman and *My Family, Your Family* by Lisa Bullard), and the listening center (Duke, 2014; Duke et al., 2021). For example, they wrote about greeting families, asking them if they needed help, showing families around the school because they felt they would not know the locations of certain places, and inviting families to school events (e.g., the school movie night that was coming up during that time). Throughout the project, the children expressed wanting to share with their school principal, which also confirms that children can be motivated by an authentic audience (Boss & Larmer, 2018).

Children showed engagement in the writing throughout this project. For example, four children mentioned liking the teacher writing center where they worked on their project products with the support of the teacher as well as peers (Bandura, 1986). This project adds to the research

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based on project-based learning and the importance of writing (Duke et al., 2021; Halvorsen et al., 2012). This is the first project-based learning study on diverse families, and it demonstrated that authentic writing can be engaging and motivating ways to process the new information students are learning.

Timing proved to be a challenge for writing in this project. The project needed to be longer in length or a project product needed to be dropped to allow children to have a full, in-depth writing experience (Boss & Larmer, 2018; Duke, 2014; High Quality Project Based Learning, 2018). Although deliberate writing instruction occurred in the writing center as well as modeling through interactive read alouds, more writing instruction was needed to make the project better aligned with high-quality, project-based learning. Rather than dropping writing from a project, teachers need to provide enough time to support the development of writing products throughout a project. Curriculum designers also need to be mindful of the length of a project to make sure there is enough time for writing instruction and time for children to fully develop a project's writing product(s).

Centers

Powerful social studies requires children to "participate in a variety of individual, small group, and whole class activities" (NCSS, 2016). Centers are a way to provide individual and small group learning opportunities for children (Duke, 2014). Different types of centers not only provide opportunities for children to practice literacy skills but also social studies skills (e.g., inquiry) (NCSS, 2013) as well as learning about social studies content (families) (Duke, 2014). Centers must connect to the greater project goals, so children do not get distracted, but there are many ways that centers can be developed to be engaging and aligned with the project learning goals (Duke, 2014). For example, each center that I planned was designed to connect to learning

on families as well as connecting to different standards (e.g., the listening center connected to *Common Core English Language Arts* standards).

Centers during this project-based learning unit provided an interdisciplinary approach to learning about families. For example, children engaged in writing outside creating the project product, reading, as well as speaking and listening (Duke, 2014). For example, children participated in inquiry centers and listening centers where they wrote down notes or questions to ask to learn more about the topic of families (Halvorsen et al., 2012; NCSS, 2010). These centers aligned to both the *C3 Framework* (NCSS, 2013) and *Common Core English Language Arts* standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Throughout the project, children reviewed the new vocabulary that they learned (e.g., *inclusivity*) (Archer & Hughes, 2011). At the art center, children engaged in creating signs to promote inclusivity of families that also gave them the opportunity to write. Many of the children created signs that said "welcome" to greet people into their school, which connected to their understanding of the word inclusive in whole group instruction (Archer & Hughes, 2011; Capin et al., 2021). This activity highlighted the interdisciplinary nature of project-based learning, as children used their phonetic spelling skills to express the content they learned, which showed that children actively engaged in writing independently (Duke, 2014). Their signs also aligned with the purpose of the center and their authentic audience, the school community (Boss & Larmer, 2018; Duke, 2014).

Figure 15

Sample Sign to Promote Family Inclusivity
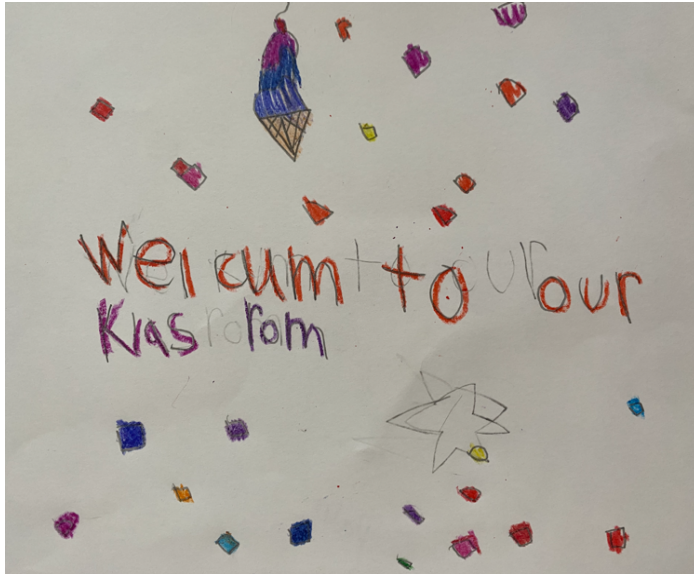
A play-based center supported children in problem solving while also talking about families (e.g., using family vocabulary to name family members). For example, Caden expressed that he liked the play center the most, "cause there were some disagreements with and that happens a lot in families. So, I like that how that it was kind of realistic" (Barron et al., 1998; Halvorsen et al., 2012; Katz & Chard, 2000; Krajcik et al., 1998). Play can support children in speaking with each other as well as integrating funds of knowledge in early childhood classrooms (e.g., cultural knowledge on families) (Wright et al., 2022; Xu, 2003).

Although these child participants were in first grade and dramatic play is not often included in first grade, the dramatic play seemed to support this particular group of children who did not have much experience with play due to COVID. Many of the children missed in-person preschool experiences or experiences for dramatic play in kindergarten due to COVID protocol (e.g., no sharing of toys or classroom materials). The play center is important for building community in the classroom, especially in the beginning of the school year (Eggum-Wilkens,

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2014). At this center, I noticed a lot of parallel play, especially when the children visited the center for the first time. They picked different dramatic play materials (e.g., household items, baby dolls, construction materials like blocks) and played alone on the rug. As time went on, children showed more interest in collaborating. Some groups assigned roles in the family before they started playing. For example, Louie explained he was a gaming person and a building person. Ryan explained, "Well, I really liked the play. I especially loved of what I get to be a mom, and nobody apparently wanted to be a mom for some reason." I also noticed children interested in imitating "teenagers" in families (Brody & Stoneman, 1981; Eggum-Wilkens et al., 2014).

Overall, the engagement at the play center was high and eventually became more collaborative which can support motivation in a project (Bandura, 1986). Seven children mentioned liking the play center when asked what they enjoyed about the project, showing promise of integrating play during centers. For example, when asked what her favorite part of the project was, Devin said, "I like when we played the family. When we played family, I was the older sister and then Chrissy was another sister younger than me. I was the oldest child. Caden was a naughty baby actually. He turned into the puppy, and we had two dads." Devin not only liked this center, but her group also chose to have two dads, showing expanded understanding of families. Lilly explained, "Centers. Play center. We got to play family." The play center allowed children to express creativity and had an opportunity for sociodramatic play, which was something they were not used to doing before this project was implemented.

Centers provided children with authentic and purposeful opportunities to continue their learning about diverse family structures and experiences throughout the project (Duke, 2014). In elementary school, centers are an impactful learning approach in project-based learning. Centers

provide purposeful learning opportunities and can support collaborative and independent

learning (Duke, 2014).

Differentiation

Project-based learning allowed for differentiation of instruction to occur throughout the

unit. This differentiation allowed for children's needs to be met in reading, writing, vocabulary

instruction, as well as socially. Project-based learning is an approach for all children, and after

this project all children learned something about diverse family structures and experiences

(Condliffe et al., 2017; Duke, 2014). For example, Trish needed the most support with her

writing and during the teacher writing center, I was able to support her writing needs while other

children wrote independently. Even though I attended to Trish's writing needs more than other

children, I was able to continue to check in with the other children as they wrote to provide

support they needed.

When teaching about content, there may also be differentiation of content depending on

the classroom demographics and knowledges. Each class will have different cultural knowledge

about families, so it is important that content is aligned to what background knowledge they may

or may not have. For example, teachers should be able to shift and provide more background

knowledge before a read aloud if they feel their class needs more background knowledge prior to

reading (Duke, 2014). Teachers also should be able to pivot if they need to discuss a different

topic if a specific topic may cause a child to be uncomfortable or embarrassed (e.g., adoption)

(McCormick & West, 2022). Teachers may also have to differentiate a project like this project

on families from year to year because each class will have different family structures and

experiences (e.g., incarceration, adoption, same sex parents). Overall, this project-based learning

unit on families allowed for differentiation to occur throughout the project, supporting children's needs.

Vocabulary

This study confirms how a project-based learning unit on families can support the learning of vocabulary that connects to social studies and social justice content. Social studies is tied to language more closely "than any other field because the impact of culture, society, and the communication of ideas in various contexts" (Alexander-Shea, 2011, p. 95). There is a close relationship between social studies, language and literacy, and understanding the world (Alexander-Shea, 2011; Capin et al., 2021).

In this project, children learned vocabulary throughout their project that they would typically not learn in a traditional family unit. Children learned words such as *identity, intersectionality, race, gender, inclusive/inclusivity,* and *diversity* throughout this project. Most family units discuss family words like *mother, father, grandparents*, and *siblings* (McCormick, 2021). This family unit is more social justice- and social studies-oriented and was designed to highlight the different identities that make families diverse (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013). This project pushed children to think in a more critical way about how we define and recognize families (Alexander-Shea, 2011).

Research has shown that project-based learning can drive understanding of social studies content as well as academic vocabulary in the reading and research phase of project-based learning (Boss & Larmer, 2018; Duke, 2014). This study confirms this potential and extends it to understanding vocabulary around family units. In this project, the vocabulary instruction occurred during whole group (e.g., interactive read alouds, interactive Google Slides presentations) or small groups (e.g., centers) (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013; Reed et al., 2020).

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Sometimes individual words (e.g., *race, intersectionality*) were taught in explicit ways so children could draw associations, and make connections between words (Nagy, 2004; Reed et al., 2020). For example, in this project children drew connections between *inclusive* and *welcoming* and provided examples of what being inclusive may look like (Capin et al., 2021; Reed et al., 2020). At a social studies center, children made signs to be inclusive to families and many of the signs said, "Welcome" or "Be welcoming."

Children also showed their understanding of race when they were asked to complete an identity wheel in lesson eight. For example, children identified their own race and wrote it on their identity wheel. Some children identified as white and Asian (multiracial) and one Asian student also noted her ethnicity being Korean, showing her understanding of ethnicity that was taught in the lessons about identity.

Vocabulary instruction has many benefits. Teachers can utilize vocabulary instruction to improve reading comprehension (Duke, 2014; Elleman et al., 2009). For example, teachers can pay attention to: 1. How authors use unfamiliar words; 2. How to ask questions around vocabulary; 3. Infer the meaning of words; 4. Understand the relationship of words to other words (Duke, 2014, p. 90). In this project, children did not have background knowledge on the word *inclusive* and this project began the exploration of this word. For example, there was a strong focus on how inclusivity is connected to being welcoming. This understanding could then be built over the course of other projects or throughout the year to focus more on equity and justice (Capin et al., 2021; Reed et al., 2020). From this exploratory understanding, the children drew connections to the texts that discussed these words or showed examples of being inclusive or welcoming (e.g., on their signs for the school, during interactive read aloud discussions).

Children showed their understanding of vocabulary terms when they were asked to share about what they learned from the project on families, children also showed growth in utilization of different vocabulary that they learned during the project. For example, in the post-interviews when asked what they learned in this project children utilized the words *unjust, race, inclusive,* and *welcome.* These words were not utilized in the pre-interviews. For example, Chrissy said, "I learned some family words, like unjust." Devin said, "Families don't have to have the same race to be a family." Then, Gale said, "That [we] can welcome a family into Willow Tree Elementary."

Children also showed learning through their understanding of being inclusive or welcoming to families in their informational class book project product. The children came up with examples of how to be inclusive to families such as greeting them, showing them around the school, answering questions or offering help, and inviting them to school events, which were authentic answers to the problem for them (Duke et al., 2021; Halvorsen et al., 2012). Although the definition of inclusive was foundational, over time children could continue to build on that definition to build better understanding of what it means to be inclusive beyond just being welcoming (Kim et al., 2021). This foundational understanding could then be extended into learning or projects throughout the rest of the year, where children could build on their understandings as well as draw new connections to different content in social studies (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013).

The Challenges of Defining Family

After teaching this project and all the vocabulary in the project, I argue that the word family cannot be defined with a definition like many curriculum materials try to do (McCormick, 2021). As stated in the introduction, Merriam-Webster's (2019) definition of family is: "the basic

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unit in society traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their children" (Definition 1), erasing many different family structures (e.g., same sex parents, single parents, adoptees).

Family structures have shifted over time and have become more diverse, so explanations need to be clear to children that there is not one type of family (Erera, 2002; Lee & Smith, 2000; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Family identities (e.g., racial identity, gender identity) intersect and this intersectionality impacts the way we define family. To teach about families in culturally sustaining and responsive ways, there is not one definition of family that can encompass all family structures and experiences (Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2014). Rather, this study shows that families should not be limited to a definition, but explained and taught through many examples of diverse family structures and experiences so that children can build an awareness of different types of families.

In this study, children were asked to describe what families were in interviews. Children had surface level explanations in both pre- and post-interviews about families. For example, many children expressed family is who you live with, who cares for you, who loves, you, or a group of people together. These explanations may refer to some families but are not inclusive of all families (Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). Some children may not feel supported or loved by their family or some children may not actually live with their family and may have to live with guardian, which needs to be considered when teaching about families (McCormick, 2022; Paris & Alim, 2014). Children also thought about pets as family members, which is a valid understanding because many people do view pets as part of their family and there are benefits to this thinking (e.g., enhancing social connections, reject feelings of social rejection; feelings of support) (McConnell, 2019, McConnell et al., 2019). Rather than limiting children to believing only humans count in family structures, teachers can embrace this thinking of pets as family

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members. It is important to allow children to believe that pets are family members because of the psychological process around social support (Horowitz, 2009; McConnell, 2019)

Children also demonstrated an awareness of the way society has informed or influenced their perceptions of what a family is or who is part of a family. One child expressed how she knew that families were depicted through the traditional structure most often in the cartoons that she watches but not all families look like those families. This deep understanding showed how this child witnessed how the media may depict families in a way that is not always the norm or indicative of what all families may look like in structure (Despain et al., 2015; Erera, 2002). She showed understanding of family diversity and drew connections beyond the scope of the project. This was an important moment of child thinking because it shows how powerful the media is and how it can impact children's preconceptions about family diversity. This project could be expanded to provide opportunities for children to inquire and critically analyze families that are depicted in books, media, or other sources (NCSS, 2016).

Culturally Sustaining and Responsive Pedagogies When Teaching About Families

This project was developed to be culturally sustaining and responsive (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014). Learning about families is personal, and all children bring funds of knowledge to the classroom on this topic (Muhammad, 2020; Muhammad, 2022). There were moments that stood out throughout the project that showed the importance of culturally sustaining and responsive pedagogies when teaching about families in early elementary social studies. For example, during the identity wheel whole group activity, children shared personal information, and some had to ask questions about their race/ethnicity because they were not sure. Ryan is white but initially thought she was Asian because she had "light skin" like mine and my

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identity wheel said Asian. In that moment, I had to be responsive to her thinking and explain the differences between white and Asian.

I also noticed there were missing understandings of family experiences. Although these experiences were taught (e.g., interactive read alouds), children had a lack of background knowledge (Wright, 2019). Some children made references in post-interviews to the interactive read alouds that showed a lack of understanding for some family experiences and background knowledge on another experience. For example, Ryan made a connection to the read aloud *Visiting Day* by Jacqueline Woodson when she described a family that showed grandparents because in the text the child lived with her grandma while her father was incarcerated. For this read aloud, the children understood that some children live with grandparents (multigenerational family) but did not draw a direct connection to the father being incarcerated. The children in this classroom did not seem to have the background knowledge or first-hand experience with incarceration. During the interactive Google Slides presentation, the children were introduced to incarceration and other ways that all family members may not live together. Even with the explicit teaching on incarceration prior to the read aloud, children needed more explanation to better build awareness and comprehend the text (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013; Capin et al., 2021; Duke, 2014).

This example about children not understanding the experience of incarceration in families shows the connection between culturally sustaining and responsive pedagogy to teaching about families (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014). Children have diverse background knowledge on different family experiences (such as incarceration) than others, so it is vital that teachers know the experiences and knowledges that children and their families bring to the

classroom before teaching about diverse family structures and experiences (Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2014).

For classes lacking prior knowledge of different family structures and experiences, teachers can teach to expand understanding or provide "windows" to understand through informational presentations or interactive read alouds (Bishop, 1990; Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2014; Strachan, 2015; Whitford, 2021). Teachers can determine which structures and experiences would make sense to teach based on their classroom demographics and cultural knowledges so that children do not feel embarrassed or ashamed of the different experiences their families face or their structure.

Children Connecting to the Teacher's Family Identities

As previously mentioned, children drew connections to my family identities during interactive read alouds (e.g., adoption, multiracial families). This connecting occurred naturally and authentically (Halvorsen et al., 2012). I believe that some of the interest stemmed from me being a new teacher in the classroom, so they wanted to get to know me. I also shared a family photograph and would utilize my experiences as a model for the children during specific activities (e.g., class census, personal narrative, and identity wheel).

Children drew connections during interactive read alouds. For example, Devin made a connection to me being in a multiracial couple with my husband during the interactive read aloud of *The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* by Selina Alko. Shifts in preconceptions also discovered in post-interviews related to my own family identities (e.g., adoption, no children, multiracial, pets as family members). These shifts in connection to teacher identity are important to note because children connect with the person who is teaching them (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). This connection is something that teachers need to be

cognizant of because children can "perceive themselves as inferior to the dominant group" (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010, p. 270). Teachers who do follow the traditional family structure and hold privileged identities will need to be careful that children do not lose their own cultural identities to assimilate (McCormick & West, 2022; Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010).

Teachers should be prepared to share about their own families while teaching a unit on families, but they can decide what they are willing to share and what they may not be willing to share with students. For the purposes of this project, I wanted to share about my family's identities because I felt comfortable teaching about some diverse aspects of my identity and felt like the children would be able to draw some connections through seeing family photographs as well as hearing my stories (Barron et al., 1998; Halvorsen et al., 2012; Katz & Chard, 2000; Krajcik et al., 1998). Teachers may come from traditional family structures themselves, so they need to be careful to not reinforce the dominate narrative or traditional structure of family through discussions of their own family. Teachers from traditional family structures need to represent diverse family structures and dig into those structures through different learning opportunities (e.g., interactive read alouds, instructional slides, artifact explorations, guest speakers).

Intersectionality

Although intersectionality was a theme that came out of previous studies and research that I conducted, this theme was not as apparent with this project (McCormick, 2022). There was some movement towards understanding intersectionality of family identities (e.g., *Our Subway Baby* showed two dads and adoption) but overall, the project was too short for children to deeply understand what intersectionality meant. For example, when they developed their identity wheels, they articulated thinking about each identity separately rather than understanding the

impacts of the intersectionality of those identities. This lack of understanding of intersectionality may have reflected because that this was the first time that many of the children thought or learned about many of those identities (e.g., racial/ethnic).

Implications

This study shows the promise of utilizing project-based learning to teach children about diverse family structures and experiences in first grade social studies. As previously stated, curriculum materials to teach family units in elementary social studies were problematic, outdated, out of print, or unattainable by teachers (McCormick, 2021; Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). Curriculum materials did not include project-based opportunities for teachers or even strong interdisciplinary opportunities for learning (McCormick, 2021). In this project, I designed and tested more inclusive and accessible lessons for teachers to teach about diverse family structures and experiences in elementary social studies.

Social studies is often neglected in elementary school due to time constraints as well as lack of access to rich curriculum materials (McCormick, 2021; Rock et al., 2006; Strachan, 2015). For example, some teachers said they did not have a social studies curriculum to follow and had to find their own materials online (e.g., *Teachers Pay Teachers*) or use *Scholastic News* to teach social studies, which is not an actual curriculum (McCormick, 2021). There is a clear need for curriculum to address the lack of resources for teachers and provide rich, inclusive, just, and equitable instruction for all children (Tschida & Buchanan, 2017; McCormick, 2021; McCormick, 2022).

I developed a project-based unit that was authentic, standards-aligned, culturally sustaining and responsive, interdisciplinary, and engaging for children to address the learning and understanding of families (Duke, 2014; Duke et al., 2021; Halvorsen et al., 2012; Halvorsen

et al., 2021; Paris & Alim, 2014). This project expanded initial and very traditional understandings (e.g., mother, father, and biological children living together) about families and shifted preconceptions that children had about family structures and experiences. Projects like this one can also be expanded and modified for classrooms so that children are learning about families in meaningful and authentic ways based on their own identities (Barron et al., 1998; Halvorsen et al., 2012; Katz & Chard, 2000; Krajcik et al., 1998; Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2014).

In this section, I describe the implications this unit could have for teaching and teacher education as well as educational policy and publishing.

Teaching and Teacher Education

Teaching and teacher education often lack training opportunities to teach about families in elementary social studies (McCormick, 2021). Teaching about families occurs formally in elementary classrooms as part of the expanding communities approach that is common in schools (Halvorsen, 2013; Ravitch, 1987; Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). Families are also taught in informal ways in the classroom (McCormick, 2021), such as through writing projects or read alouds (Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). This teaching can be problematic due to the lack of inclusivity as well as harmful ways of teaching about families (e.g., family trees, star student projects) (Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). Teachers show diverse families through only one family identity (e.g., showing a picture of an Asian identifying family that follows the traditional structure) (McCormick, 2021).

There is a lack of teacher training and professional development on how to teach about families in the early elementary school (McCormick, 2021; McCormick, 2022). My previous research found that teachers were not offered professional developments or trainings in social

studies or for teaching about families in the classroom (McCormick, 2021, McCormick, 2022). This lack of training and professional development is problematic for teachers because family is taught in formal and informal ways and in elementary social studies (Halvorsen, 2013; Ravitch, 1987), so teachers need training to teach about diverse families in meaningful and culturally sustaining ways (McCormick, 2021).

Teaching Family Units

Teaching about families should be part of how pre-service teachers learn how to teach early elementary social studies. In a previous study, I asked teachers if they had been trained to teach about diverse family structures and experiences, and they had not (McCormick, 2021). The inclusion of families as a topic of discussion or study in pre-service teacher education is valuable because there can be an assumption that many of the pre-service teachers will teach about families formally or informally in the classroom (McCormick, 2021; Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). This preparation could support teachers if and when they teach a family unit in different ways. For example, teachers could be prepared to discuss different family structures or experiences in child-friendly ways. While teaching, a child asked about stepfamilies, and I found myself explaining a very narrow definition of a stepfamily that related to divorce. Another child, Ryan, raised their hand and explained that you can have a stepfamily without divorce because a parent could die and then remarry. This moment stood out as a moment that I wished I better anticipated different child responses or questions. Teacher education can address these types of situations that teachers may run into while teaching about families as well as provide more guidance on how to teach in culturally sustaining and responsive ways.

With better pre-service training and professional development opportunities on the topic of families, teachers could develop skills to more confidently and inclusively teach about

families in their classrooms. For example, teaching teachers to accept children's understandings and definitions of families like having pets as family members is important to teaching about families (McConnell, 2019; McConnell et al., 2019). Rather than rejecting or silencing this idea, teachers could teach about how some people may have different pets and they can be considered part of a family, because psychology shows the benefits of considering pets as family members (Horowitz, 2009; McConnell, 2019; McConnell et al., 2019). In addition to pets as family members, children may bring ideas of non-related people being family members because their family has taught them that a family friend is considered an aunt, uncle, or cousin (Degges-White, 2018; Friedberg, 2023). Pre-service teachers and teachers can learn to avoid telling children who their "real" family is because that could be a problematic and potentially harmful practice (Degges-White, 2018; Friedberg, 2023; McCormick & West, 2022).

To teach in culturally sustaining and responsive ways, teachers must be trained to have flexible ideas of who is considered to be part of each child's family because it could differ from what society has traditionally and consistently told us a family is (Despain et al., 2015).

Culturally Sustaining and Responsive Pedagogies

Culturally sustaining and responsive pedagogies are vital when teaching about families (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014). "The elementary teaching demographic has remained largely static over the last several decades while our student demographics have shifted radically" (Shear, 2018, p. xvi). Many pre-service teachers could come from traditional family structures or experiences, or they may not have the experience of learning about diverse family structures and experiences themselves, impacting how they would teach about families in a classroom setting. For example, whiteness works to assume that dominant narratives (e.g., traditional structure of family) are unproblematic (Hawkman, 2018). Pre-service teachers need to

learn about the ways that whiteness perpetuates their curriculum and can impact children in silencing or marginalizing ways so that they can teach in culturally sustaining and responsive ways (Hawkman, 2018).

Children enter school having a family and understanding something about families due to their own personal experiences (Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2014). Most families do not follow the traditional family structure anymore and families are increasingly diverse in structure and experience. Children can bring unique and diverse knowledges to the classroom to share (Despain et al., 2015; Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2017).

While teaching the project, I realized that many students connected to my own family identities (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). For example, many children realized that you could be a different race from your family members because I am a transnational adoptee. Many also had the realization that I did not have children with my husband, but they still considered me a family with him. These connections to their shifting preconceptions show how children do connect to the people they teach and their identities, including family identities. To dismantle the whiteness that is so central in family units, pre-service programs can support pre-service elementary teachers in thinking about how they would teach about families based on their own family experiences (Hawkman, 2018; Jiménez, 2021). Pre-service teachers and teachers can participate in ongoing personal identity work, which can support them understanding how their identities can impact the children (Blakeney, 2005; Muhammad, 2020). Understanding your own identity, including your family identities, can support the teaching of this unit in thoughtful and purposeful ways.

Family Engagement

In a previous study, I found that families did not have a clear understanding of how their children learned about families at school. There was a lack of communication from school to home as well as a lack of opportunity for family engagement. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1974) shows the relationship between the mesosystem and microsystems, which can include family engagement opportunities at school as well as the bi-directional relationship between home and school (Darling, 2007; Hong et al., 2021). Family and community engagement can enhance child learning and provide reflection and discussion opportunities (Freeman & Swick, 2003; Seitz, 2005).

Partnerships with families can bring cultural knowledge and understandings that children would typically not get through curriculum, through the sharing of ideas (Hewitt, 2001; Paris & Alim, 2014). For example, children can bridge new learning by activating background knowledge, connecting to new learning, inspiring inquiry, and teaching vocabulary through the utilization of family and community engagement (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013; Seitz, 2005). Family units present a natural connection to inviting families to engage in the learning with the children. In this project-based learning unit on families, I wrote families a welcome note to notify them about the project and what the children would be learning about families (See Appendix H). I asked families to share family artifacts so that children could inquire about different family artifacts during a social studies center. This activity sparked many questions around the artifacts for example, many children wrote Gale questions about her baby blanket, many children asked questions about Wesley and Caden's family photo they brought in, as well as wondered about Andrea's baby book. This inquiry-based activity allowed children to ask questions and then the

children were given time to respond to the questions, which fostered a discussion and learning about different families present in the classroom (NCSS, 2013).

I also deliberately chose families to be the audience for the family narratives that children wrote as one of the final products. Families provided an authentic audience for this writing product because I planned to invite families to the final class celebration (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013; Boss & Larmer, 2018; Duke, 2014), and families are a natural audience to hear about a family memories or history that the children found important. Through a narrative, children could share their family history or a family memory through their perspective, which could lead to questions, discussion, and connections (Bishop, 1990). Families themselves may not be the best audience for every single classroom because sometimes families may have a challenging time getting to school for a celebration during school hours. Having options of an audience for this product could support authenticity, engagement and cultural responsiveness based on the demographics of the class being taught (Barron et al., 1998; Katz & Chard, 2000; Krajcik et al., 1998). By inviting families to be part of the learning about families, children can learn about their peer's experiences and could support the building of a classroom community and culture of care.

Overall, it is vital for teachers to understand their classroom demographics when teaching about families. Some children may feel uncomfortable talking about a family identity that may mirror their family. For example, a child with an incarcerated parent may feel uncomfortable talking about incarceration (e.g., *Visiting Day* by Jacqueline Woodson) during a lesson. It is important for teachers to be mindful of the children in their classrooms and their identities and experiences, so they know what may be uncomfortable for children (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014). In addition to feeling discomfort, some children may enter

the classroom with a lack of knowledge on different family structures or experiences. Teachers need to understand the class demographics and the cultural knowledges children bring with them so they can provide authentic learning about families (Barron et al., 1998; Halvorsen et al., 2012; Katz & Chard, 2000; Krajcik et al., 1998; Muhammad, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2014).

Project-Based Learning

Despite its many benefits, research also shows that project-based learning can feel daunting for teachers (Duke, 2014). Teachers can feel overwhelmed with the interdisciplinary nature of project-based learning as well as time constraints in their daily schedules (Heafner, 2018). To drive the learning of families through this project-based learning unit on families, teachers will also need training opportunities to learn about project-based learning in general and how to build a classroom culture for project-based learning (Boss & Larmer, 2018) Most curriculum materials do not use a project-based approach in elementary social studies, so this may be a new way of teaching for many teachers.

Pre-service teacher education can provide learning opportunities to explore project-based learning in social studies methods courses as well as other methods courses (e.g., literacy, science). Schools must provide professional development opportunities for teachers if they are going to implement a project-based learning unit like this one on families. Professional development can support teachers to teach in asset-based ways (Muhummad, 2020) and culturally sustaining and responsive ways (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014).

Professional development can also support teachers with an understanding of how to implement a project for all the learners in the classroom versus just thinking that projects are for gifted students (Duke, 2014; Duke et al., 2021; Halvorsen et al., 2012; Halvorsen et al., 2021). Project-based learning allows teachers to scaffold instruction to meet the needs of all learners,

but teachers may need support with implementation to appropriately scaffold instruction in authentic ways (Barron et al., 1998; Condliffe et al., 2017). Timing can also be challenging with project-based learning, so providing teachers with time to make sure their schedules have a block of time to support a project is important to implementation (Duke, 2014). Teachers can learn about the different phases of project-based learning and the characteristics of high-quality project-based learning to support implementation (Duke, 2014; High Quality Project Based Learning, 2018).

Educational Policy and Publishing

This study is timely due to the current political climate. Many states are aiming to censor many different identities, which impacts the teaching of families. For example, Florida's House Bill 1557: Parental Rights in Education also known as the "Don't Say Gay" Bill would censor teachers teaching or discussing families with LGBTQIA+ identities. This censorship would then exclude children creating an inequitable environment to learn about families. Educational policymakers need to understand the importance of children learning about diverse family identities. More advocacy is necessary for policy to change and for policymakers to fight against the injustice of different legislation that can have negative impacts on children when learning about diverse families.

Children's literature is often utilized to drive the teaching of families in early elementary school (McCormick, 2021). There is a lack of children's literature that highlights diverse family structures and experiences, especially in informational text. Although, children can learn about diverse families through narrative or fictional text, more informational text could be useful to learn about families. Publishers need to be more mindful of the families they are depicting and

take into account which families they may be leaving out or silencing. Increased access to diverse children's literature could support teachers in teaching about diverse families.

Summary

Improved pre-service teacher education and professional development opportunities are needed to improve the teaching and learning of families in early elementary social studies as well as just informal teaching of families that occurs in elementary classrooms. These improved training opportunities can support teachers in understanding how and why some outdated practices such as family trees, star student, Mother's and Father's Day celebrations are problematic (McCormick, 2021; Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). Professional development that supports teachers prior to teaching a project-based learning unit on families could address different problematic practices and provide teachers with supports to make sure these practices are no longer continued in classrooms across the nation. These trainings could also support teachers in feeling confident to teach about diverse families, especially if they are not from marginalized backgrounds themselves. These trainings could also not only be utilized by pre-service teachers and teachers, but curriculum leads and administrators so that they can support teachers in not using these types of practices throughout schools and districts.

More understanding of the ways in which inequitable and unjust legislation can censor the diverse learning of families in classrooms is vital to create inclusive spaces to learn about families in classrooms. Also, publishers need to be more mindful of the different types of family structures, experiences, and identities they are highlighting. This mindfulness could lead to more diverse representations of families in children's literature which could support the learning of families in classrooms and beyond.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study regarding the setting and participants. I chose to teach at a school district that I taught in before. I made this choice because I knew a principal and first grade teacher who were former colleagues of mine. The teacher and principal I worked with also were involved in previous studies that led to this study. These prior connections meant that they were more interested in allowing me to conduct this work in the school and classroom.

Because I had a relationship with both the teacher (Molly) and principal (Luanne), I felt that I had their prior trust to do this work that could be potentially controversial (e.g., discussing LGBTQIA+ families) depending on the personal views of the families consenting to participate. This Michigan district tends to reflect the liberal college town it is part of, however, there are still controversies over content that is taught, so I felt strongly that I wanted a prior relationship with the school administrator.

Overall, I had no pushback on teaching the project in this classroom and setting. There were two families who did not consent to have their children to participate in the project. The first child was out of the country and came back after the pre-interviews were finished. Then, the second child's mother did not want them to participate in the interviews because she felt it may be stressful to discuss families at that time. The two families wanted their children to participate in the lessons with the rest of the class, just not the individual data collection.

The school that I taught in was a high-performing, mid-high socioeconomic status school. This school is limiting because many of the children in the classroom did come from families that followed the traditional structure of family, although their experiences may have varied. This project could be taken up differently with a different, more diverse population of children. There may need to be more thought around which types of family structures and experiences

should be taught and how to do so in ways that would not make any children feel extremely uncomfortable or unsafe in the classroom. Although discomfort can be good in some cases, discomfort around forcing children to share about family structures and experiences feels inappropriate. Most often this unit is taught in the beginning of the school year and can support building a climate of care in a classroom. It is important that teachers are creating spaces for learning rather than potentially embarrassing or making children feel upset about their family identities.

Timing was a challenge during the project, especially with the completion of the writing product. Duke (2014) suggests projects last between 15-20 lessons. Due to constraints on how many lessons I could teach, I only taught 12 lessons, which confirms Duke's (2014) suggestion of length for a project. More time was needed to complete the writing with the children in a more purposeful and meaningful way. For example, we did not get to peer editing due to time constraints, which would have been a rich collaborative experience (Duke, 2014; High Quality Project Based Learning, 2018). More opportunities to study personal narratives and informational texts during whole group instruction was also lost due to time constraints. Moving forward, this project needs to be expanded to provide more time for the children to engage in the writing process (e.g., from 12 sessions to 15 or 20 sessions). If the project needed to continue to be 12 lessons reducing to one writing product could support more meaningful learning and integration of writing (Boss & Larmer, 2018; Duke, 2014).

I also believe that teaching the project myself was a limitation as well. If the classroom teacher taught the project, it could have been different and could have required different training. I have studied and researched this topic of teaching and learning about families throughout my graduate school experience. I have also immersed myself in learning about culturally sustaining

and social justice-oriented teaching practices through my research and work on a large-scale curriculum project. I am also open and comfortable sharing about my adoption experience and family identities. This knowledge and comfortability supported my implementation of the project because it could be different for someone who is not comfortable talking about their own family identities or someone who does not come from diverse family identities.

Also, because I taught the unit, I did have the classroom teacher there to support the independence of the centers (e.g., responding to technology issues). This type of support is not present in every classroom, which could impact the implementation of a project-based learning unit in an early elementary classroom. Since this study was conducted in only one classroom with me as the teacher, this study has low ecological validity because it cannot be generalized. More research is needed to increase the ecological validity.

Finally, because this study represented just one development cycle in design-based research and did not test the family unit against business-as-usual instruction or other interdisciplinary approaches of teaching about families. Since there was no control classroom, I am not able to causally interpret the children's shifts in preconceptions as resulting from participating in the unit, only to document how these changes in thinking too place during the unit. It is possible that children's thinking would change as a result of discussing their own and other families in other curricula and approaches as well, or that simply being asked the same questions before and after the unit gave students more time to think about questions like "what is a family?" and offer more nuanced responses.

Suggestions for Future Research

I suggest three main areas for future research based upon my experiences conducting this study: 1. Examining how the project-based learning unit on families can help build children's

awareness of diverse families in classrooms with diverse demographics; 2. Examining the interdisciplinary skills that children learned through the project-based learning unit on families; 3. Examining how to teach about diverse family experiences (e.g., incarceration, deployment, homelessness).

The first-grade classroom at Willow Tree Elementary did not have much diversity in socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, or family identity. More research is needed to see how children in more diverse classroom would respond to a project-based unit on families. Children in other schools could have different preconceptions about families and could have different responses to the project-based learning unit, which could inform more revisions to the project to be more inclusive to diverse classrooms. This project was also written in a way that assumed independence during small group learning and did not have to be differentiated too much across the class, due to children being around grade level expectations at that point of the year. Consequently, more research is needed to better understand which differentiations and scaffolds would need to be built into lessons for classrooms with varying academic needs.

Further research could also examine the interdisciplinary skills that children practiced and improved from an interdisciplinary unit like this project-based learning unit on families. Interdisciplinary skills such as writing about social studies content, read aloud about social studies content, related talking about social studies content with peers, retelling social studies content, as well as drawing personal connections to social studies content could be evaluated to understand the impact of project-based learning on interdisciplinary learning and skills. This project focused on how children learned about diverse families and whether their understandings changed or expanded after participating in the project. This project did not directly address whether or not interdisciplinary skills improved after participating in a project, which is

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important to add to the body of research connected to project-based learning in elementary social studies.

The results from this project showed how children expanded their understanding of diverse family structures and experiences when thinking about the number of children in families, adults/caregivers in families (e.g., single parents, two moms, two dads), as well as family racial identities. How children learned about diverse family experiences was not taken up throughout the project. During the project, there were different family experiences that were discussed such as multilingualism, deployment, homelessness, and incarceration (see Appendix F). The children did not discuss these experiences throughout the post-interviews. More understanding of how children understand families outside of the western understanding of families (e.g., Indigenous families) is also necessary to understand how children learn about families but also how to teach about families in early elementary classrooms. More research is needed to better understand how to teach children about diverse family experiences in child-friendly ways that they can comprehend and discuss. Lastly, more research is needed to understand the professional developments and pre-service teacher training that is necessary to teach families in inclusive and responsive ways.

The results from this project-based unit on families showed promise and can add to the body of research around teaching and learning about families as well as project-based learning. More research is needed to better understand how this project can support learning for diverse learners, how interdisciplinary skills are learned and improved through a project-based learning unit, how children best learn about diverse family experiences, and what trainings teachers and pre-service teachers need to teach about diverse family structures and experiences.

Educational Significance

This study has implications for teaching, teacher education, curriculum as well as contributing to the field of elementary social studies and further understanding of project-based learning in early elementary school. My own personal experiences in school and as a kindergarten and first-grade teacher and social studies curriculum lead, led me to conduct this work. I found myself often marginalized in school due to my family structure and having a desire to assimilate. When I taught, I found that many children's families were being left out of the conversation presented by the social studies curriculum materials. I felt that I was teaching in a surface level way when families are complex and can support deep learning.

Overall, there continues to be a gap in understanding of how family units are taught in elementary classrooms as well as how children learn about diverse family structures and experiences (McCormick, 2021; Tschida and Buchanan, 2017). This study and line of personal research builds on Tschida and Buchanan's (2017) research as well as my own previous research about how teachers teach family units in first grade classrooms, how caregivers understand what is taught to their children about families, and how children understand families (McCormick, 2021). From my previous research, I found we need to diversify and improve how children learn about families in schools so that children can learn in inclusive, just, and equitable ways (McCormick 2021; McCormick, 2022). I gathered data from teachers, families, children, as well as current curriculum materials. These data supported my development of this project and will continue to support future research I conduct on the teaching and learning of families.

This study was designed to address the gaps in research and support a better learning of diverse family structures and experiences for first grade children. I designed a curriculum unit that was project-based for early elementary children so that they could engage in a richer teaching of the traditional family unit that is surface level and not very engaging (e.g., use of exit

tickets versus writing for an authentic purpose) (McCormick, 2021). This project is the first study on the use of project-based learning to drive the learning of family units in elementary social studies, contributing to research in social studies education as well as project-based learning and interdisciplinary learning. This study showed promise of teaching families through project-based learning because children showed engagement and expanded understandings of families after participating in the unit. Project-based learning also provided interdisciplinary opportunities for children to learn (e.g., reading, writing, art, play).

Family cannot be defined in just one way like many dictionaries and curriculum materials attempt to do (McCormick, 2021; Merriam-Webster, 2019). Curriculum materials continue to represent families in limiting ways that are often very traditional (McCormick, 2021; McCormick, 2022; Tschida & Buchanan, 2017). For example, many materials only utilize texts with white characters to show different family structures or the traditional family structure is shown through families that all appear to be the same race (e.g., all Asian family with traditional structure) (McCormick, 2021). Curriculum materials need to highlight diversity of familial identities in a multitude of ways. Teaching the understanding of family through diverse examples of family structures and experiences is vital to expand children's understandings of families.

This study aimed to build a curriculum unit that can be utilized to replace harmful and problematic curriculum materials to provide children with the space to share their cultural knowledge in the classroom, which is inclusive of sharing about diverse family structures or experiences (Muhammad, 2020). Teachers must utilize culturally sustaining and responsive pedagogies when teaching about families so that children feel represented, understood, and like they can share about their own family identities and experiences (Paris & Alim, 2014). Teachers must also understand their own family and personal identities and how those may impact how children learn about families in the classroom (Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). Children may

connect to the teacher's family identities, so if a teacher follows a traditional family structure, it is important that the teacher explicitly teaches about diverse family structures and experiences rather than just through their own family structure and experiences.

Teaching about families may be viewed as easy to teach, but this unit of family can easily be taught in harmful and problematic ways. Family should not be defined and taught in narrow ways to children and that there are opportunities for children to learn about many different family structures and experiences. These diverse learning opportunities can support mirroring families in the classroom as well as providing windows to learn about families that are different than children's families (Bishop, 1990).

This study can provide some solutions and thinking points for educators when teaching about families in early elementary social studies. This study continues a line of research on the teaching and learning about diverse families in elementary social studies. This line of research is of utmost importance to continue because families will always be taught in schools in some ways, and it is important that problematic teaching is dismantled and changed for children. Children deserve to learn about families in ways that are inclusive and representative of their own family identities and experiences, but also so they can learn about families who may not mirror their own. This study shows the promise of project-based learning to drive the learning of families in early elementary social studies in inclusive, just, and equitable ways.

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APPENDIX A

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How are these lessons similar to and different from the social studies lessons you typically teach about families?

2. Can you think of some families that could benefit from the lessons? How so?

3. Do you feel that these lessons are inclusive of diverse families? Why or why not?

4. What are some situations you have encountered when teaching about families that were difficult to respond to or address? Do you think that these lessons would support you in responding to or addressing diverse topics about families?

5. Would you feel comfortable teaching these lessons? What would make you feel more comfortable in teaching these lessons?

6. Which family structures or experiences from these lessons would you be most comfortable teaching? Which family structures or experiences from these lessons would you be most uncomfortable teaching? Why?

7. Do you think these lessons would fit into your social studies block (e.g., pacing, timing)? If so, how would you envision implementing these lessons?

8. Do you feel this content was developmentally appropriate for first-grade students? Why or why not?

APPENDIX B

CAREGIVER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do these lessons represent diverse family structures and experiences? Did you feel

    like your family structure or experiences were represented in the lessons? Why?

2. Are there any family structures or experiences that you wish were represented by the

    lessons? Why?

3. Do any parts of these lessons make you feel uncomfortable? If so, why?

4. Do you feel like this content is developmentally appropriate for first-grade students? Why

    or why not?

5. What concerns, if any, do you have about the implementation of these lessons in

    classrooms?

APPENDIX C

CHILD PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is a family?

2. Who is part of a family?

    a. For clarification- Who is in a family?

3. Draw a family that is not your own family. Name who you drew in your picture.

4. Let's do an activity together. I am going to show you different pictures of people. You are going to tell me if they are a family or if they are not a family by picking an index card. This card says family, this card says not a family. Then, you are going to tell why you think that.

5. Draw another picture of a family that is not your own. Name who you drew you in your picture.

    a. How is this family different from the first family you drew?

APPENDIX D

CHILD POST-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is a family?

2. Who is part of a family?

    a. For clarification- Who is in a family?

3. Draw a family that is not your own family. Name who you drew in your picture.

4. Let's do an activity together. I am going to show you different pictures of people. You are going to tell me if they are a family or if they are not a family by picking an index card. This card says family, this card says not a family. Then, you are going to tell why you think that.

5. Draw another picture of a family that is not your own. Name who you drew you in your picture.

    a. How is this family different from the first family you drew?

6. What are some things that you learned from this project?

7. What was your favorite thing we did during this project?

APPENDIX E

LIST OF PROJECT REVISIONS NEEDED

1. The project needs to be longer. 15 days minimum but 20 days would be ideal.

    a. One full week needs to address intersectionality.

    b. One full week needs to address historical injustice with families.

2. Add in the read aloud of *Henry's Freedom Box* by Ellen Levine to drive the understanding of injustice around families.

3. Defining/Explaining family

    a. Build off from Google Slides, "It can be challenging to explain what a family is because families are diverse or different. Some families live together, others may not. Some families may look alike, while others do not. Families can be groups of people who are united together or connected together by some common bond."

    b. Provide a list of different experiences and structures for teachers to build off of and note that this explanation is fluid and needs to be responsive to children's funds of knowledge as well as their family structures and experiences

    c. Make a teacher note of how one sentence to define family can minimize diverse experiences and structures as well as negative feelings towards family members as well as family trauma.

    d. Use Tschida and Buchanan's (2017) list of family structures and experiences to build from

4. Offer more opportunities for re-reads of texts to dig deeper into the content.

a. *Our Subway Baby* by Peter Mercurio would be a great book to re-read. Then you can also dig into the court and eventually draw those connections to *The Case for Loving* by Selina Alko.

5. Provide flexibility with when the guest speaker occurs during the week because the principal may not be available that day.

6. Provide more time to conduct the identity wheel activity.

7. Provide more time to conduct the class census activity so there can be a better discussion at the end.

8. Add in explicit teaching about the project products (narrative and informational text) in the whole group lessons. This can then be transferred to the small group writing center.

9. Do better with preparing vocabulary for interactive read alouds. Provide better tips before teaching to anticipate vocabulary that children may not be familiar with.

10. Provide better vocabulary instruction in the whole group interactive Google Slides.

11. Reduce the number of family experiences that are taught or take more time to dig into them because they were not picked up by the children as anticipated.

12. Note the challenges with technology and provide some tips for independence of centers

13. Vocabulary

a. Need to provide more explicit teaching moments in slideshows as well as interactive read aloud lessons

b. Need visuals to connect to the words

UNIT OVERVIEW, LESSONS, AND LESSON MATERIALS

Unit Title: What is a Family?: Exploring Family Diversity

Driving Question: How can we be inclusive to families who are different from our own?

Supporting Question: What different identities can families have?

Project Products:

1. Individual: Children will create a personal narrative about their family or family history.

2. Small Group: Children will create an informational class book about how to be inclusive to families for their school's principal and other staff at school (informational text)

Key Vocabulary:

1. Artifact: Objects that are made by and used by people

2. Culture: The way that people live

3. Diverse: Differences

4. Experience: Events that people live through

5. Identity: Characteristics that make you who you are

6. Inclusive: Welcoming people and making sure they feel welcome

7. Intersectionality: A word that explains how all the different parts of a person combine to affect their life experiences and personal identity

8. Memory: Experiences that you remember and talk about or remember later

9. Race: A way to describe a group of people who share physical characteristics or shared ancestry

10. Family Structure: The combination of relatives that make up a family

11. Tradition: Beliefs or information that are handed down from generation to generation

Family Structures and Experiences Discussed:

1. Adoption (transnational/transracial)

2. Multiracial

3. Two moms

4. Two dads

5. Multigenerational families

6. No children

7. Divorce

8. Stepfamilies

9. Foster families

10. Deployment

11. Guests in families- foreign exchange students

12. Loss of a family member

13. Living in different homes as a child

14. Incarceration

15. Poverty

16. Homelessness

17. Sick family member

18. Family members with a disability

19. Multilingual families

20. Different religions

Family Members Discussed:

1. Parents/Guardians/Caregivers

2. Siblings

3. Grandparents

4. Extended family

    a. Aunts

    b. Uncles

    c. Cousins

5. Pets

Books Utilized

1. *Families* by Shelley Rotner and Sheila M. Kelly

2. *Families Through Time* by Jeanne Dustman

3. *Our Subway Baby: The true story of how one baby found his home* by Peter Mercurio

4. *The Family Book* by Todd Parr

5. *Visiting Day* by Jacqueline Woodson

6. *My Brother Charlie* by Ryan Elizabeth Peete, Holly Robinson Peete, and Denene Millner

7. *IntersectionAllies: Make Room for All* by Chelsea Johnson and Carolyn Choi (re-read)

8. *The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* by Selina Alko (re-read)

9. *All Families Invited* by Kathleen Goodman

10. *My Family, Your Family* by Lisa Bullard

Standards Addressed

C3 Framework Standards:

1. D2.Civ.10.K-2. Compare their own point of view with others' perspectives.

2. D2.His.9.K-2. Identify different kinds of historical sources.

Social Justice Standards:

1. Identity 1 ID.K-2.1 I know and like who I am and can talk about my family and myself and name some of my group identities.

2. Diversity 7 DI.K-2.7 I can describe some ways that I am similar to and different from people who share my identities and those who have other identities.

3. Diversity 8 DI.K-2.8 I want to know about other people and how our lives and experiences are the same and different.

4. Action 16 AC.K-2.16 I care about those who are treated unfairly.

Michigan Social Studies Standards:

1. 1 – H2.0.3 Use historical sources to draw possible conclusions about family or school life in the past.

2. 1 – H2.0.4 Compare life today with life in the past using the criteria of family, school, jobs, or communication.

Common Core State Standards: ELA

1. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.3- Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure. (Independent)

2. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.2- Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic, and provide some sense of closure. (Whole group)

Figure 16

Session One Plan

Session 1: Project Launch- What is a family?	
Lesson Purpose(s): ● The children will learn about the purposes and final products of their project. ● The children will begin to explore family diversity.	**Overview**: In this lesson, children will be introduced to their project. They will learn about the purposes of the project as well as the project's driving question. They will be introduced to family diversity.
Child-Friendly Goal(s): ● We can tell about the project's driving question and purposes. ● We can tell different ways families can be diverse.	**Materials:** ● Interactive Presentation Slides ● *Families* by Shelley Rotner and Sheila M. Kelly ● Chart paper ● Two colors of sticky notes ● Key: colors of sticky notes corresponding to key ● Markers
Lesson Steps: (30 minutes whole group) **Introduction:** 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain to the children that they are going to start a project for the next few weeks of school. They are going to learn about families and how families can be different as well as how they can be inclusive to families. Inclusive means welcoming people and making sure they feel welcome.	

Figure 16 (cont'd)

2. **Think-Pair-Share.** Ask the children to share how families can be similar or different. Have children share with a partner, then have them share out responses. Note their responses on chart paper.
3. **Interactive presentation.** Share the interactive presentation slides. Be sure to check the narration for notes and teaching points.

Interactive Read Aloud:
1. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain that the families can be similar and different in many ways. Families can be similar and different with how many people are in their family, what they look like, what they like to do together, and many other things. Throughout this project, they will get to learn about how families can be diverse. Diverse means differences.
2. **Introduce the text.** The children will engage in a read-aloud of the book *Families* by Shelley Rotner and Sheila M. Kelly. This book shows how families can be diverse.
3. **Read the text, pausing as you read to ask questions to assess and build comprehension.**
   ○ Are there any families that were similar to your own family? How so?
   ○ How can families be diverse or different?
   ○ What is your family like?

Activity: Class Census
1. **Introduce the focus.** Explain that the children are going to participate in an activity where they take a family census. Explain that they will choose from the different cut outs to show who is in their family. They will add these to the chart.
2. **Census.** Have the children choose which cut outs they will add to the chart (adults or children). Then, call the children up to add to the class census chart.
3. **Discussion.** Ask the children to share what they notice about the chart.

Teaching Tip(s):
- Understand the familial demographics of your classroom to be responsive to children when discussing families.
- There are many positive psychological impacts of considering a pet a family member. Allow children to name pets as family members and do not only focus on humans as family members.

Teacher Reflection Questions:
- What preconceptions did children have about families?
- What surprised you about what children understood about families? How can you build off these understandings?

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Figure 17

Session Two Plan

Session 2: What is important to and about families?	
Lesson Purpose(s): ● The children will explore what is important to know about families. ● The children will explore what some things are important to families.	**Overview**: In this lesson, children will explore
Child-Friendly Goal(s): ● We can tell what is important to know about families. ● We can tell what is important to families.	**Materials:** ● Interactive Presentation Slides ● *Kids Show and Tell- Family and Culture* by Hiho Kids ● *Families Through Time* by Jeanne Dustman
Lesson Steps: (30 minutes whole group) **Introduction:** 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain to the children that they are going to explore what is important to families and what is important about families. Remind the children that all families are diverse or different so what is important to one family may not be as important to another. 2. **Think-Pair-Share.** Ask the children to share what is important to their family. For example, some families may find having dinner together each night is important while another family may not because maybe someone works at night. Just because something is important to one family does not mean that it cannot be important to another family. Have children share with a partner, then have them share out responses. Record responses on a chart or on the Smartboard. 3. **Interactive presentation.** Share the interactive presentation slides. Be sure to check the narration for notes and teaching points.	**Teaching Tip(s):** ● Acknowledge all the important things that children share about their families. Provide them the space to share and if time runs out, you can use a community building activity to allow them to share more about their experiences.

Figure 17 (cont'd)

Lesson Steps: (30 minutes whole group)	Teaching Tip(s):
Introduction: 4. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain to the children that they are going to explore what is important to families and what is important about families. Remind the children that all families are diverse or different so what is important to one family may not be as important to another. 5. **Think-Pair-Share.** Ask the children to share what is important to their family. For example, some families may find having dinner together each night is important while another family may not because maybe someone works at night. Just because something is important to one family does not mean that it cannot be important to another family. Have children share with a partner, then have them share out responses. Record responses on a chart or on the Smartboard. 6. **Interactive presentation.** Share the interactive presentation slides. Be sure to check the narration for notes and teaching points.	• Acknowledge all the important things that children share about their families. Provide them the space to share and if time runs out, you can use a community building activity to allow them to share more about their experiences.
Interactive Read Aloud: 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain that families have different things that are important to them. Some things may include a book, food, jewelry, toys, or special events they celebrate together. All families have different things that they find important, and they will explore what is special to the children in the video. 2. **Introduce the video.** The children will engage in watching a video *Kids Show and Tell- Family and Culture* by Hiho Kids. 3. **Watch the video, ask questions to assess and build comprehension.** 　　○ Was there something that was special to a child's family that is also special to your family? 　　○ What is special to your family? Why is that special? 　　○ How can you share what is special to your family with other people? 4. **Introduce the text.** The children will engage in a read-aloud of the book *Families Through Time* by Jeanne Dustman. Read from A Place to Call Home to the end of the text (pp. 16-29).	**Teacher Reflection Questions:** • What is important to your own family? What can you share with the children about your own family?

Figure 17 (cont'd)

	Teaching Tip(s):

Interactive Read Aloud:
5. **Introduce the text.** The children will engage in a read-aloud of the book *Families Through Time* by Jeanne Dustman. Read from A Place to Call Home to the end of the text (pp. 16-29).
6. **Read the text, pausing as you read to ask questions to assess and build comprehension and review target vocabulary.**
   ○ What are some different things that the families found important?
   ○ How can a family keep memories alive over time?
   ○ How can family traditions help children learn about their family history?
 	
Prepare for Guest Speaker:
1. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain to the children that they will have a guest speaker in the next lesson. They are going to be able to ask the guest speaker questions about their family structure and family experiences. They need to come up with questions in preparation for the guest speaker as well as expectations on how to welcome a guest to the classroom.
2. **Developing expectations.** Tell the children that it is important to welcome a new guest into the classroom to make them feel welcome and comfortable. Remind them that the guest speaker is taking time to meet with them and help them learn. Ask the children to share some expectations that they could follow to make someone feel welcome to their classroom. Write down the expectations on chart paper. These expectations can be used whenever there is a guest in the classroom. Explain that they will develop questions for the guest speaker in the next session.
	● Acknowledge all the important things that children share about their families. Provide them the space to share and if time runs out, you can use a community building activity to allow them to share more about their experiences.
	
	Teacher Reflection Questions:
	● What is important to your own family? What can you share with the children about your own family?

Figure 18

Session Three Plan

Session 3: How can families be diverse? Part I	
Lesson Purpose(s): ● The children will explore the ways that families can be diverse. They will explore diverse family structures.	**Overview**: In this lesson, children will explore diverse family structures.
Child-Friendly Goal(s): ● We can tell about diverse family structures.	**Materials:** ● Interactive Presentation Slides ● *Our Subway Baby: The true story of how one baby found his home* by Peter Mercurio ● Chart paper and markers
Lesson Steps: (30 minutes whole group) **Introduction:** 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain to the children that they are going to explore how families can be diverse. Family structure means the combination of relatives that make up a family. 2. **Think-Pair-Share.** Ask the children to share the different types of families they think there are. Have children share with a partner, then have them share out responses. 3. **Interactive presentation.** Share the interactive presentation slides. Be sure to check the narration for notes and teaching points. **Interactive Read Aloud:** 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain that family structures can have similarities and differences. There are many different/diverse family structures. Some families have two dads and some families may adopt a child, which the children will explore in this read aloud.	**Teaching Tip(s):** ● Children may express that pets are part of their families. Acknowledge this as a valid understanding of who is part of families. ● If there is an adoptee present in the classroom, have a prior conversation with the child and their family to make sure they are comfortable discussing adoption.

Figure 18 (cont'd)

Interactive Read Aloud:
  2. **Introduce the text.** The children will engage in a read-aloud of the book *Our Subway Baby: The true story of how one baby found his home* by Peter Mercurio and illustrated by Leo Espinosa.
  3. **Read the text, pausing as you read to ask questions to assess and build comprehension.**
    ○ Who is part of this family?
    ○ How do you know they are a family?
    ○ Why do you think Peter and Danny were nervous? What made their feelings change?
 	
Prepare for Guest Speaker:
  1. **Introduce the purpose.** Remind the children that they will have a guest speaker in the next lesson. They are going to be able to ask the guest speaker questions about their family structure and family experiences. They need to come up with questions in preparation for the guest speaker as well as expectations on how to welcome a guest to the classroom.
  2. **Reminding of the expectations.** Remind the children that it is important to welcome a new guest into the classroom to make them feel welcome and comfortable. Remind them that the guest speaker is taking time to meet with them and help them learn. Review the expectations they came up with for the guest speaker that they could follow to make them feel welcome in the classroom.
  3. **Developing questions.** Ask the children to turn and share some questions they could ask the guest speaker. Have children share out their responses and record on chart paper or on the Smartboard. These questions will be used in the next lesson with the guest speaker.
	Teacher Reflection Questions:
	  ● Are there any other questions you may want to write down to guide the guest speaker presentation in the next lesson?

Figure 19

Session Four Plan

Session 4: How can families be diverse? Part II	
Lesson Purpose(s): ● The children will explore the ways that families can be diverse. They will explore diverse family structures.	**Overview**: In this lesson, children will continue explore diverse family structures.
Child-Friendly Goal(s): ● We can tell about diverse family structures.	**Materials:** ● Interactive Presentation Slides ● *The Family Book* by Todd Parr ● Guest Speaker
Lesson Steps: (30 minutes whole group) **Introduction:** 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain to the children that they are going to continue to explore diverse family structures. Remind children that family structure means the combination of relatives that make up a family. 2. **Think-Pair-Share.** Ask the children to share their family structure. Who is part of their family? Have children share with a partner, then have them share out responses. 3. **Interactive presentation.** Share the interactive presentation slides. Be sure to check the narration for notes and teaching points. **Interactive Read Aloud:** 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Remind the children that there are diverse family structures and they explored families with two dads and families that adopt in the previous lesson. There are many other different family structures that the children will explore in this read aloud. 2. **Introduce the text.** The children will engage in a read-aloud of the book *The Family Book* by Todd Parr.	**Teaching Tip(s):** ● Provide the questions to the guest speaker beforehand so that they can know how to steer the discussion. **Teacher Reflection Questions:** ● What knowledges did the guest speaker share that surprised you? How can you use these knowledges for future lessons in this project?

Figure 19 (cont'd)

3. Read the text, pausing as you read to ask questions to assess and build comprehension. 　　○ How can families be different? 　　○ How can a family member help another family member be strong? 　　○ What makes your family special? **Guest Speaker:** 1. **Introduction.** Remind the children about the expectations they created for welcoming a guest in their classroom. Introduce the guest speaker and explain that the guest speaker is going to share about their family. Explain to the children that they can ask questions but need to follow the expectations of when a guest is present in the classroom. They need to show care, respect, and patience. Have the children welcome the guest speaker to their classroom. 2. **Questions.** Allow the guest speaker to share about their family and then have children ask questions they have. Use the chart of questions from the previous lesson, but allow them to ask new questions as well. They can draw connections to their family or families they have been exploring the past three lessons.	

Figure 20

Session Five Plan

Session 5: Diverse Family Experiences Part I	
Lesson Purpose(s): ● The children will explore the ways that families can be diverse. They will explore diverse family experiences.	**Overview**: In this lesson, children will explore diverse family experiences.
Child-Friendly Goal(s): ● We can tell about diverse family experiences.	**Materials:** ● Interactive Presentation Slides ● *Visiting Day* by Jacqueline Woodson
Lesson Steps: (30 minutes whole group) **Introduction:** 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Remind the children that they have been exploring diverse family structures. Remind children that family structure means the combination of relatives that make up a family. Families can be diverse in structure but also can have diverse experiences. Experiences are events that people live through. They can have different feelings about the experience. They can also learn from experiences. 2. **Interactive presentation.** Share the interactive presentation slides. Be sure to check the narration for notes and teaching points. **Interactive Read Aloud:** 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain that families have different things that they experience. Some things that they experience can be challenging. But families can work together to support each other through those challenges. Sometimes a family member may get into trouble and have to go away for some time, which the children will explore in this read aloud. 2. **Introduce the text.** The children will engage in a read-aloud of the book *Visiting Day* by Jacqueline Woodson and illustrated by James E. Ransome.	**Teaching Tip(s):** ● If a child in the classroom is experiencing a family member who has or is in prison/jail, have a conversation with them and their family prior to this lesson. **Teacher Reflection Questions:** ● Are there any children who have family experiences that were surprising to you?

Figure 20 (cont'd)

3. **Read the text, pausing as you read to ask questions to assess and build comprehension.**
    ○ How does Grandma feel on visiting day? How do you know?
    ○ How does the child feel on visiting day? How do you know?
    ○ How does Dad feel on visiting day? How do you know?
    ○ How is this family's experience challenging? How do they support each other and make the day special?	

Figure 21

Session Six Plan

Session 6: Diverse Family Experiences Part II	
Lesson Purpose(s): ● The children will explore the ways that families can be diverse. They will explore diverse family experiences.	**Overview**: In this lesson, children will continue to explore diverse family experiences.
Child-Friendly Goal(s): ● We can tell about diverse family experiences.	**Materials:** ● Interactive Presentation Slides ● *My Brother Charlie* by Ryan Elizabeth Peete, Holly Robinson Peete, and Denene Millner

Figure 21 (cont'd)

Lesson Steps: (30 minutes whole group)	Teaching Tip(s):
Introduction: 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Remind the children that families can be diverse in structure but also can have diverse experiences. Experiences are events that people live through. They can have different feelings about the experience. They can also learn from experiences. They will continue to explore the diverse experiences of families in this session. 2. **Interactive presentation.** Share interactive presentation slides. Be sure to check the narration for notes and teaching points. **Interactive Read Aloud:** 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain that all families experience different things. Some families may have a family member who is in the military and living in a different place. Some families may have a family member with a disability. Disabilities can impact your brain or your body and limit people's activities. For example, someone may have a disability that impacts their hearing (e.g., deaf). Then family members can learn sign language to communicate with them. Families experience different things and they can support one another through those experiences. ○ **Introduce the text.** The children will engage in a read-aloud of the book My Brother Charlie by Ryan Elizabeth Peete, Holly Robinson Peete, and Denene Millner. In this book, children will learn about Callie's brother, Charlie. Charlie has autism, which means his brain works in a special way. Charlie is really good at playing on the piano, can name all the presidents, and loves to swim. But it is challenging for Charlie to make friends, show his feelings, and even stay safe. We will read to find out	Understand the familial demographics of your classroom to be responsive to children when discussing families.

Figure 22

Session Seven Plan

Session 7: Diverse Family Identities Part I	
Lesson Purpose(s): ● The children will explore the diverse identities that families can have.	**Overview**: In this lesson, children will explore the diverse identities that families can have.
Child-Friendly Goal(s): ● We can tell about diverse family identities.	**Materials:** ● Interactive Presentation Slides ● *IntersectionAllies: Make Room for All* by Chelsea Johnson and Carolyn Choi
Lesson Steps: (30 minutes whole group) **Introduction:** 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Remind the children that families can be diverse in structure but also can have diverse experiences. Families also have identities. Identities are the characteristics that make you who you are. For example, where you are born, what languages you speak, what your age is all make you who you are and are part of your identity. Explain that the children are going to explore the diverse identities that families can have. 2. **Interactive presentation.** Share interactive presentation slides. Be sure to check the narration for notes and teaching points.	**Teacher Reflection Questions:** ● What are your personal identities? ● What are your family identities?

Figure 22 (cont'd)

Interactive Read Aloud:
2. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain that everyone has identities that make them who they are. Share your identities that you have (e.g., daughter, teacher, Asian American, English-speaking). Explain that all these identities impact how people experience life. For example, as a teacher, I am able to help children even outside of school when I notice they need help. As a person who only speaks English, I will need people or tehcnology to teach me other languages or to translate other langauges other than English.
3. **Introduce the text.** The children will engage in a read-aloud of the book *IntersectionAllies: Make Room for All* by Chelsea Johnson and Carolyn Choi. In this read aloud, children will explore the different identities that the children have in the book. They will learn about how these identities impact how they live their lives and how they are inclusive to others. Inclusive means including others no matter what their identities are.
4. **Read the text, pausing as you read to ask questions to assess and build comprehension.**
    ○ How do their identities impact their lives?
    ○ Why should we be inclusive to others?
    ○ How can we be inclusive to others?
    ○ How can we ask others about their different identities?	

Figure 23

Session Eight Plan

Session 8: Diverse Family Identities Part II	
Lesson Purpose(s): ● The children will explore the diverse identities that families can have.	**Overview**: In this lesson, children will continue to explore the diverse identities that families can have.
Child-Friendly Goal(s): ● We can tell about diverse family identities.	**Materials:** ● Interactive Presentation Slides ● *IntersectionAllies: Make Room for All* by Chelsea Johnson and Carolyn Choi
Lesson Steps: (30 minutes whole group) **Introduction:** 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Remind the children that families can be diverse in structure but also can have diverse experiences. Experiences are events that people live through. They can have different feelings about the experience. They can also learn from experiences. They will continue to explore the diverse experiences of families in this session. 2. **Interactive presentation.** Share the interactive presentation slides. Be sure to check the narration for notes and teaching points.	**Teaching Tip(s):** ● Model the identity wheel yourself or fill it in with the children so that you can explain which each category is and provide examples if they need support.

Figure 23 (cont'd)

Interactive Read Aloud:	Teaching Tip(s):
1. Introduce the purpose. Remind the children that everyone has identities that make them who they are. Remind the children of your identities that you have (e.g., daughter, teacher, Asian American, English-speaking). Explain that all these identities impact how people experience life. In the last session, we read about different identities (e.g., skin color, size, age) that people have and how it impacts their lives. It is important to be inclusive to people no matter what their identities are. We can learn from diverse identities and can make room for all identities.	● Model the identity wheel yourself or fill it in with the children so that you can explain which each category is and provide examples if they need support.
2. Introduce the text. The children will engage in a reread of the book *IntersectionAllies: Make Room for All* by Chelsea Johnson and Carolyn Choi. In this read-aloud, children will explore the different identities that the children have in the book. They will learn about how these identities impact how they live their lives and how they are inclusive to others. Inclusive means including others no matter what their identities are.	

	Teacher Reflection Questions:
3. Read the text, pausing as you read to ask questions to assess and build comprehension. ○ Why do you think some people treat others bad because their identities are different? ○ Why should we be inclusive to others? ○ How can we be inclusive to others who are different than us? **Activity: Identity Wheel** 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain that each of the children have an identity that makes them who they are and impacts their life experiences. They have their own identity and their family also has identities. They may share some identities with their family and they may not. They are going to explore their identity and think about how their identity is similar and different from their family's identities. 2. **Identity wheel.** Show the identity wheel. Model filling in the identity wheel yourself. 3. **Fill out the identity wheel.** Provide each child with an identity wheel and a writing utensil. Have them fill out their identity wheel. Children can draw or write depending on their individual needs.	● How do your identities impact your teaching?

Figure 23 (cont'd)

4. **Discussion.** Have the children come back as a whole group. Ask the children: 　○ Do you share all the identities you named with your family? 　　■ Which identities are the same? 　　■ Which identities are different? 　○ Why do you think families share some identities and do not share others? 　○ How do these identities impact your life? 　　■ Age 　　■ Education 　　■ Part of family 　　■ Language spoken 　　■ Race	

Figure 24

Session Nine Plan

Session 9: Historical Family Exclusion, Part I	
Lesson Purpose(s): ● The children will explore the ways that families have been excluded throughout history.	**Overview**: In this lesson, children will explore how diverse families were excluded throughout history in the United States.
Child-Friendly Goal(s): ● We can tell about ways families have been excluded in the past.	**Materials:** ● Interactive Presentation Slides ● *The Case for Loving: the Fight for Interracial Marriage* by Selina Alko
Lesson Steps: (30 minutes whole group) **Introduction:** 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain to the children that not all families have been included throughout history. Some families have been excluded based on how they look or their gender. They are going to explore ways that families have been excluded throughout history. 2. **Interactive presentation.** Share the interactive presentation slides. Be sure to check the narration for notes and teaching points. **Interactive Read Aloud:** 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain that throughout history families have been excluded in different ways. There are many unjust things that have happened to families. For example, if people were a different race they were not allowed to get married. But people took action to make change because of these unjust laws.	**Teaching Tip(s):** ● Sessions 9 and 10 explore racism and gender discrimination. Be prepared to teach these topics. **Teacher Reflection Questions:** ● Are there any children who have family experiences that were surprising to you?

218

Figure 24 (cont'd)

2. **Introduce the text.** The children will engage in a read-aloud of the book *The Case for Loving: the Fight for Interracial Marriage* by Selina Alko. Explain that they will read this book in the next session as well.
3. **Read the text, pausing as you read to ask questions to assess and build comprehension.**
    ○ What was unjust? Why?
    ○ Why do you think the government made laws like this?
    ○ Do you think all laws are fair today? Why or why not?
    ○ What did people do to fight against the injustice?	

Figure 25

Session Ten Plan

Session 10: Historical Family Exclusion, Part II	
Lesson Purpose(s): ● The children will explore the ways that families have been excluded throughout history.	**Overview**: In this lesson, children will explore how diverse families were excluded throughout history in the United States.
Child-Friendly Goal(s): ● We can tell about ways families have been excluded in the past.	**Materials:** ● Interactive Presentation Slides ● *The Case for Loving: the Fight for Interracial Marriage* by Selina Alko
Lesson Steps: (30 minutes whole group) **Introduction:** 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Remind the children that not all families have been included throughout history. Some families have been excluded based on how they look or their gender. They are going to explore ways that families have been excluded throughout history. 2. **Interactive presentation.** Share interactive presentation slides. Be sure to check the narration for notes and teaching points.	**Teaching Tip(s):** ● Sessions 9 and 10 explore racism and gender discrimination. Be prepared to teach these topics.

Figure 25 (cont'd)

Interactive Read Aloud:	Teacher Reflection Questions:

1. **Introduce the purpose.** Remind the children that throughout history families have been excluded in different ways. There are many unjust things that have happened to families. For example, if people were the same gender (e.g., both male or both female) they were not allowed to get married. Also, if people were a different race they were not allowed to get married. But people took action to make change because of these unjust laws. Families should have the right to be diverse in many different ways.
2. **Introduce the text.** The children will engage in a re-read of the book *The Case for Loving: the Fight for Interracial Marriage* by Selina Alko.
3. **Read the text, pausing as you read to ask questions to assess and build comprehension.**
    ○ Why do you think some people thought it was okay to not allow people to get married based on race?
    ○ Do you feel like they were brave? Why or why not?
    ○ What are some ways you could fight against injustice as a child?
	Have you ever felt excluded due to your family identities or witnessed someone being excluded? How can you support the children in learning about being inclusive to families based on those experiences?

Figure 26

Session Eleven Plan

Session 11: How can we be inclusive to families? Part I	
Lesson Purpose(s): ● The children will explore the ways they can act as activists to be inclusive to diverse families.	**Overview**: In this lesson, children will continue to explore ways they can act as activists to be inclusive to diverse families.
Child-Friendly Goal(s): ● We can tell ways to be inclusive to families.	**Materials:** ● Interactive Presentation Slides ● *All Families Invited* by Kathleen Goodman
Lesson Steps: (30 minutes whole group) **Introduction:** 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain to the children that there are ways that they can be inclusive to others. They can also act as activists to create change when they notice things that are unjust or unfair. Remind them that they explored ways families have been excluded throughout history. They will learn about ways to be inclusive to diverse families. 2. **Interactive presentation.** Share interactive presentation slides. Be sure to check the narration for notes and teaching points.	**Teaching Tip(s):** ● Be mindful of the family demographics in your classroom and think of ways to be inclusive to any diverse family structures or experiences. **Teacher Reflection Questions:** ● What are your personal identities?

Figure 26 (cont'd)

Interactive Read Aloud:
 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain that being inclusive means being welcoming and making people feel welcome. There are often times in schools where children have to be inclusive to guests. The guests may be community members or they may be families. All school communities are made up of diverse people. It is important to be inclusive to others even if they are different than you.
 2. **Introduce the text.** The children will engage in a reread of the book *All Families Invited* by Kathleen Goodman. They will explore diverse families and how to be inclusive to families at school.
 3. **Read the text, pausing as you read to ask questions to assess and build comprehension.**
     ○ Why was the banner that said, "Father Daughter Dance" not inclusive?
     ○ How did Annabel stand up against injustice?
     ○ How was Annabel's family diverse?
     ○ Why should we be inclusive to others?
     ○ How can we be inclusive to others who are different than us?	

Figure 27

Session Twelve Plan

Session 12: How can we be inclusive to families? Part II	
Lesson Purpose(s): ● The children will explore the ways they can act as activists to be inclusive to diverse families.	**Overview**: In this lesson, children will continue to explore ways they can act as activists to be inclusive to diverse families.
Child-Friendly Goal(s): ● We can tell ways to be inclusive to families.	**Materials:** ● Interactive Presentation Slides ● *My Family, Your Family* by Lisa Bullard
Lesson Steps: (30 minutes whole group) **Introduction:** 1. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain to the children that there are ways that they can be inclusive to others. They can also act as activists to create change when they notice things that are unjust or unfair. Remind them that they explored ways families have been excluded throughout history. They will learn about ways to be inclusive to diverse families. 2. **Interactive presentation.** Share the interactive presentation slides. Be sure to check the narration for notes and teaching points.	**Teaching Tip(s):** ● Be mindful of the family demographics in your classroom and think of ways to be inclusive to any diverse family structures or experiences. **Teacher Reflection Questions:** ● What are your family identities?

Figure 27 (cont'd)

Interactive Read Aloud:
1. **Introduce the purpose.** Explain that being inclusive means being welcoming and making people feel welcome. There are often times in schools where children have to be inclusive to guests. The guests may be community members or they may be families. All school communities are made up of diverse people. It is important to be inclusive to others even if they are different than you.
2. **Introduce the text.** The children will engage in a reread of the book *All Families Invited* by Kathleen Goodman. They will explore diverse families and how to be inclusive to families at school.
3. **Read the text, pausing as you read to ask questions to assess and build comprehension.**
    ○ Why was the banner that said, "Father Daughter Dance" not inclusive?
    ○ How did Annabel stand up against injustice?
    ○ How was Annabel's family diverse?
    ○ Why should we be inclusive to others?
    ○ How can we be inclusive to others who are different than us?	

Figure 28

Final Celebration Plan

Final Celebration	
Lesson Purpose(s): ● The children will celebrate their learning from the project.	**Overview**: Children will present their final products to their audience.
Child-Friendly Goal(s): ● We can celebrate our accomplishments and learnings.	**Materials:** ● Final products ● Optional: Snacks
Celebration (Sample Itinerary) 1. Welcome families and the school principal to the celebration. 2. Review what the children have been learning over the course of the project. 3. Have the children present their class informational book and answer any questions from the audience. 4. Have the children present their personal narratives. This could be in front of the whole group or in small groups. Or audience members could walk around to the children. 5. Optional: Provide snacks and have time for the audience to interact with the children.	**Teaching Tip(s):** ● Be sure to not make children uncomfortable if they are shy and do not want to speak in front of the entire audience. Think of other ways they can present. **Teacher Reflection Questions:** ● How did the celebration go? What can you do for the next class celebration?

Figure 29

Centers Plans for Sessions One Through Four

Sessions 1-4	
Teacher Center	**Listening Center**
Children will write a personal narrative about their family or family history.	Children will listen to books or watch videos that expand learning on diverse families. If they finish early, they will write down something new they learned about diverse families.
Materials: ● Teacher mentor text ● Teacher chart paper or whiteboard ● Writing paper ● Writing utensils	Materials: ● Tablets/Chromebooks ● Headphones ● Schoology assignment ● Checklist of books ● Writing paper and writing utensils
Standards: ● CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.3- This narrative will recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, including some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure.	Standards: ● CCSS.ELA.Literacy.SL.1.2- Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media. ● Diversity 8 DI.K-2.8 I want to know about other people and how our lives and experiences are the same and different.
Social Studies Center	**Art Center**
Children will explore artifacts from family members in the classroom. They will then write a question on a sticky note about an artifact and post it on the chart paper.	Children will draw a picture of their family and label the picture with who is part of their family.
Materials: ● Family artifacts ● Chart paper ● Sticky notes ● Writing utensils	Materials: ● Drawing paper ● Colored pencils, crayons, pencils

Figure 29 (cont'd)

Standards:	Standards:
- D2.His.9.K-2. Identify different kinds of historical sources. - Diversity 8 DI.K-2.8 I want to know about other people and how our lives and experiences are the same and different. - D2.His.9.K-2. Identify different kinds of historical sources.	- Identity 1 ID.K-2.1 I know and like who I am and can talk about my family and myself and name some of my group identities. - Diversity 8 DI.K-2.8 I want to know about other people and how our lives and experiences are the same and different.

Notes for Teacher:
- If a child is challenged with writing, have them record a question or response using a recording device.
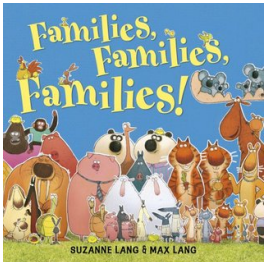
Figure 30

Centers Plans for Sessions Five Through Eight

Sessions 5-8	
Teacher Center	**Listening Center**
Children will continue to write a personal narrative about their family or family history.	Children will listen to books or watch videos that expand learning on diverse family experiences. If they finish early, they will write down something new they learned about diverse families.
Materials: ● Teacher mentor text ● Teacher chart paper or whiteboard ● Writing paper ● Writing utensils	Materials: ● Tablets/Chromebooks ● Headphones ● Checklist of books ● Schoology assignment ● Writing paper and writing utensils
Standards: ● CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.3- This narrative will recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, including some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure.	Standards: ● CCSS.ELA.Literacy.SL.1.2- Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media. ● Diversity 8 DI.K-2.8 I want to know about other people and how our lives and experiences are the same and different.
Social Studies Center	**Play Center**
Children will explore photographs of families from the past. These are family artifacts. They will then write a question on a sticky note about an artifact and post it on the chart paper.	Children will pretend they are a family. They can be any family they want and can pretend to be different families as well. They can name who is part of their family.

Figure 30 (cont'd)

Materials:
● Family artifacts
● Chart paper
● Sticky notes
● Writing utensils
	Materials:
	● Dramatic play materials
	  ○ Stuffed animals
	  ○ Household items
	  ○ Construction materials
	  ○ Dolls

Standards: ● D2.His.9.K-2. Identify different kinds of historical sources. ● Diversity 8 DI.K-2.8 I want to know about other people and how our lives and experiences are the same and different. ● D2.His.9.K-2. Identify different kinds of historical sources. ● 1 – H2.0.3 Use historical sources to draw possible conclusions about family or school life in the past. ● 1 – H2.0.4 Compare life today with life in the past using the criteria of family, school, jobs, or communication.	Standards: ● Identity 1 ID.K-2.1 I know and like who I am and can talk about my family and myself and name some of my group identities. ● Diversity 8 DI.K-2.8 I want to know about other people and how our lives and experiences are the same and different.

Notes for Teacher:
● If a child is challenged with writing, have them record a question or response using a recording device.

Figure 31

Centers Plans for Sessions Nine Through Twelve

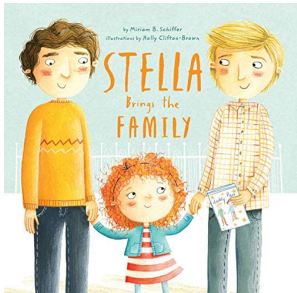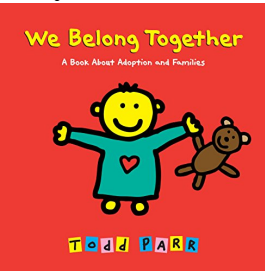| Sessions 9-12	
Teacher Center	**Listening Center**
Children will create informational pages for their class book about being inclusive to families at school.	Children will listen to books or watch videos that expand learning on diverse family experiences, If they finish early, they will write down something new they learned about families.
Materials: • Teacher mentor text • Teacher chart paper or whiteboard • Writing paper • Writing utensils	Materials: • Tablets/Chromebooks • Headphones • Checklist of books • Schoology assignment • Writing paper and writing utensils
Standards: • CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1.7- Participate in shared research and writing projects (e.g., explore a number of "how-to" books on a given topic and use them to write a sequence of instructions)	Standards: • CCSS.ELA.Literacy.SL.1.2- Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media. • Diversity 8 DI.K-2.8 I want to know about other people and how our lives and experiences are the same and different.
Social Studies Center	**Art Center**
Children will create signs to put up around the school to welcome families to the school. They will have the goal of showing diverse family structures in their signs.	Children will create diverse families. They will have blank cut outs of adults and children. They can choose how many people make up the family, who is in the family and how the family looks.
Materials: • Cardstock • Chart paper • Crayons	Materials: • Adult and children cutouts • Crayons

Figure 31 (cont'd)

Standards: ● Diversity 8 DI.K-2.8 I want to know about other people and how our lives and experiences are the same and different. ● Action 16 AC.K-2.16 I care about those who are treated unfairly.	Standards: ● Diversity 8 DI.K-2.8 I want to know about other people and how our lives and experiences are the same and different. ● Action 16 AC.K-2.16 I care about those who are treated unfairly.
Notes for Teacher: ● If a child is challenged with writing, have them record a question or response using a recording device.	

Figure 32

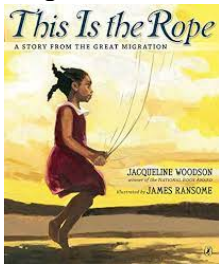*Listening Center Checklist for Sessions One Through Five*
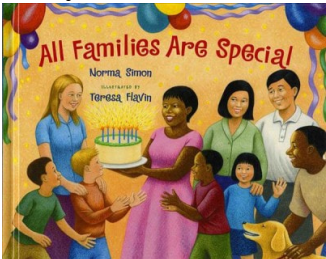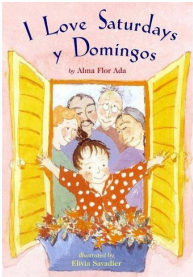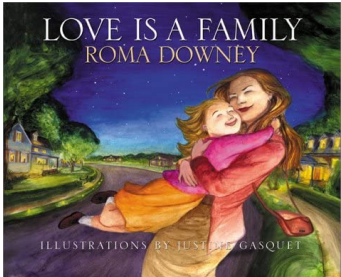
Checklist for Listening Center Sessions 1-5 **Check the box after you listened to the book.** **Name:**	

Families, Families, Families **By Suzanne Lang and Max Lang** ● **Done**	***Stella Brings the Family*** **By Miriam B. Schiffer** ● **Done**
We Belong Together **By Todd Parr** ● **Done**	***All Families are Special*** **By Norma Simon** ● **Done**
I Love Saturdays y Domingos **By Alma Flor Ada** ● **Done**	***Love is a Family*** **By Roma Downey** ● **Done**

Figure 33

Listening Center Checklist for Sessions Five Through Eight
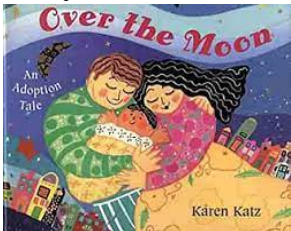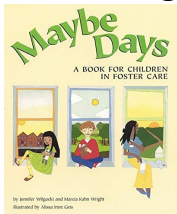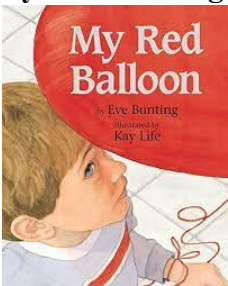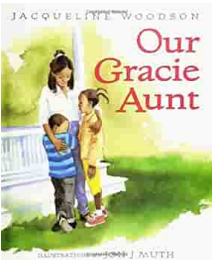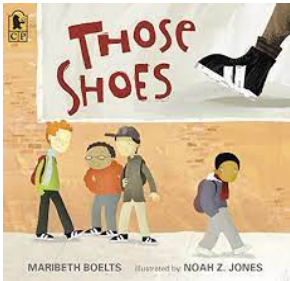
Checklist for Listening Center Sessions 5-8 **Check the box after you listened to the book.** **Name:**	
Over the Moon **By Karen Katz** ● **Done**	*Maybe Days* **By Jennifer Wilgocki** ● **Done**
My Red Balloon **By Eve Bunting** ● **Done**	*Fly Away Home* **By Eve Bunting** ● **Done**
Our Gracie Aunt **By Jacqueline Woodson** ● **Done**	*Those Shoes* **By Maribeth Boelts** ● **Done**

Figure 34

Listening Center Checklist for Sessions Nine Through Twelve
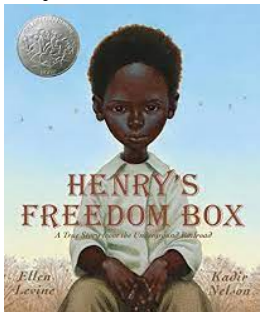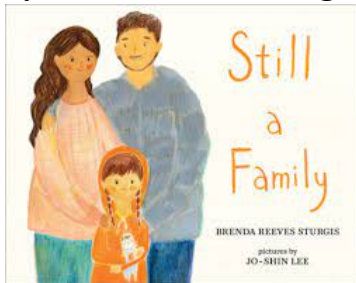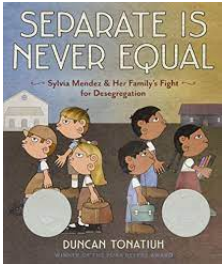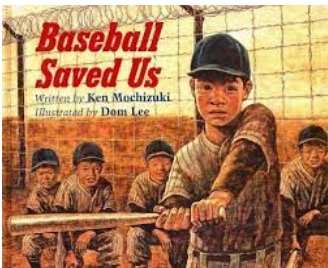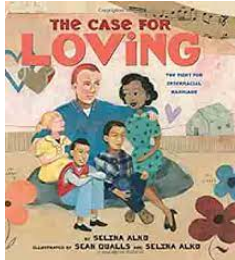
Checklist for Listening Center Sessions 9-12
Check the box after you listened to the book.

Name:

Henry's Freedom Box **By Ellen Levine** ● **Done**	*Still a Family* **By Brenda Reeves Sturgis** ● **Done**
Separate is Never Equal **By Duncan Tonatiuh** ● **Done**	*This Is the Rope: A Story from the Great Migration* **By Jacqueline Woodson** ● **Done**
Baseball Saved Us **By: Ken Mochizuki and Dom Lee** ● **Done**	*The Case for Loving: The Fight for Interracial Marriage* **By Selina Alko** ● **Done**

Figure 35

Art Center Sessions Nine Through Twelve
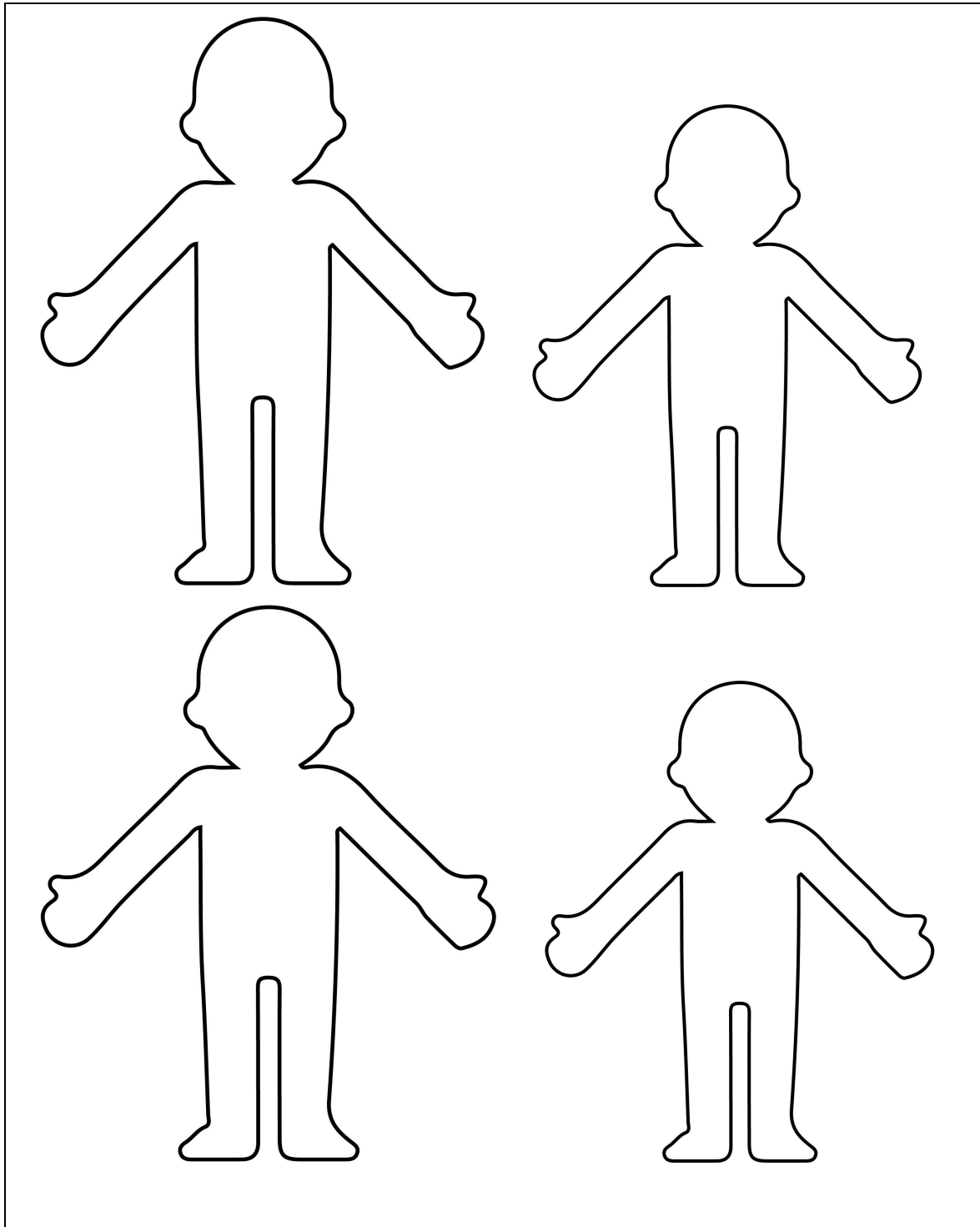
Figure 36

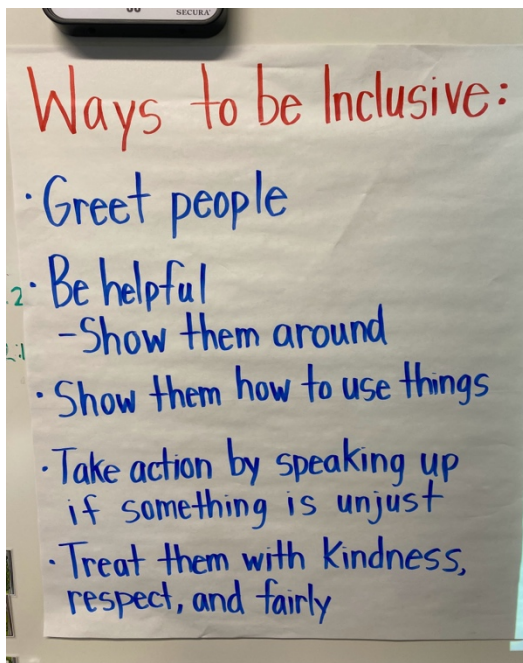*Anchor Chart About Inclusivity from Whole Group Instruction*

Figure 37

Anchor Chart About Families from Whole Group Instruction
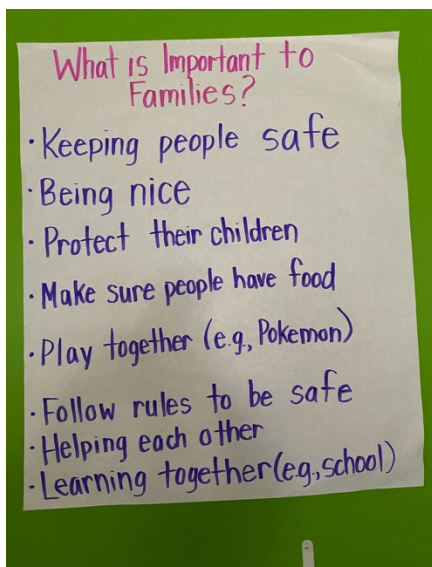
Figure 38

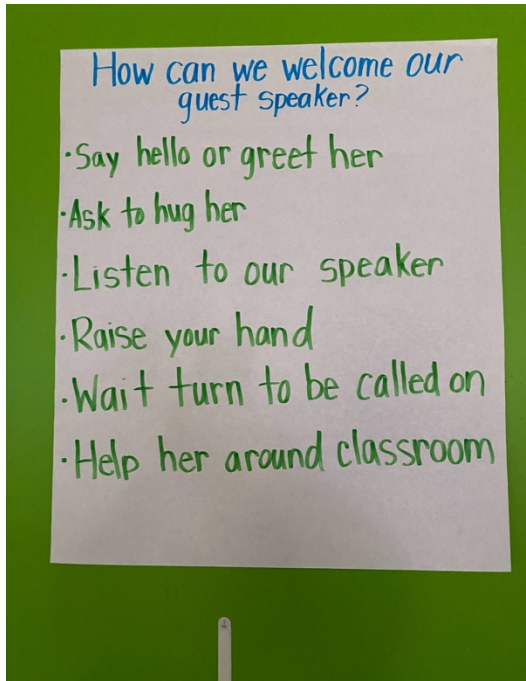*Anchor Chart About Welcoming from Whole Group Instruction*

Figure 39

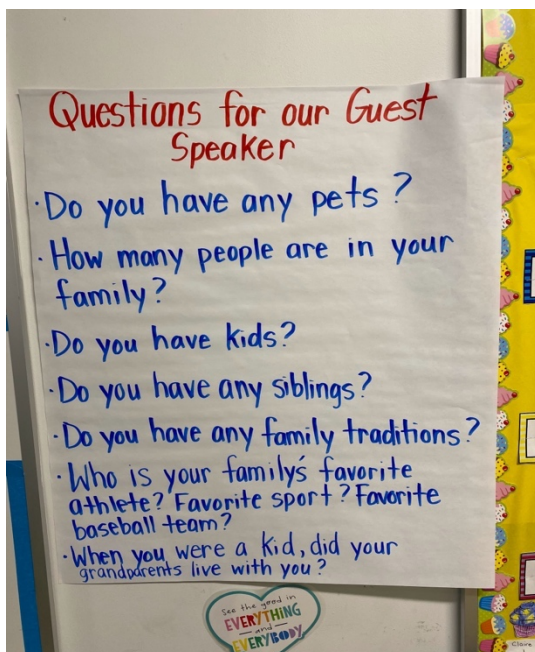*Anchor Chart for Guest Speaker Question from Whole Group Instruction*

Figure 40

List of More Questions for Guest Speaker from Whole Group Instruction
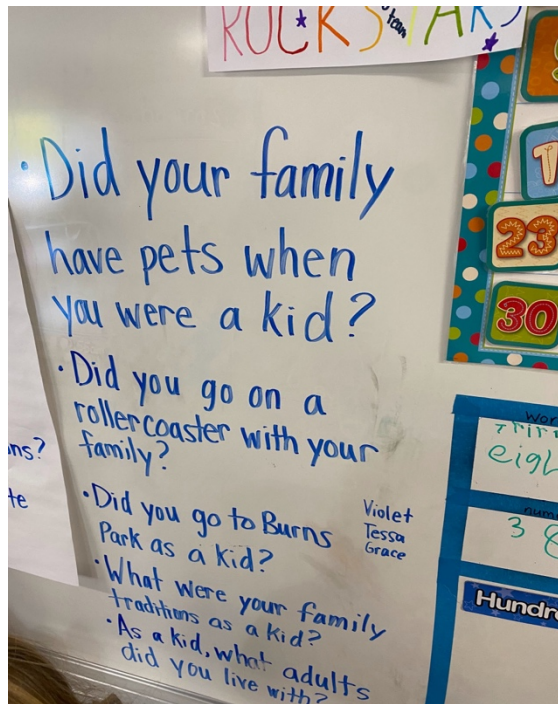

Figure 41

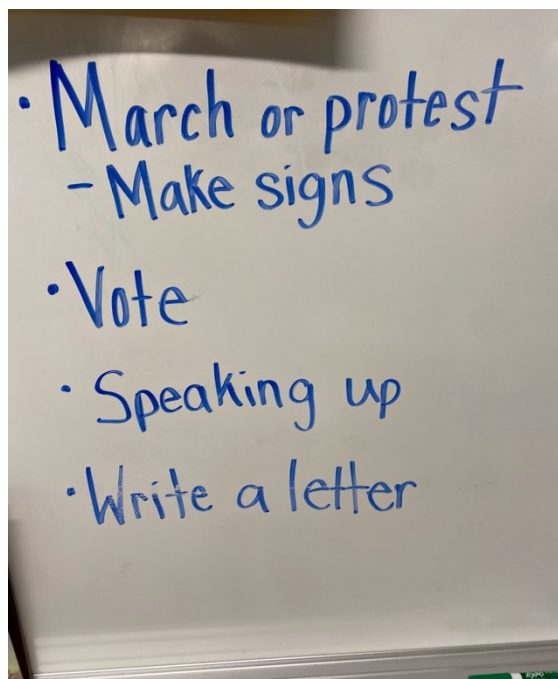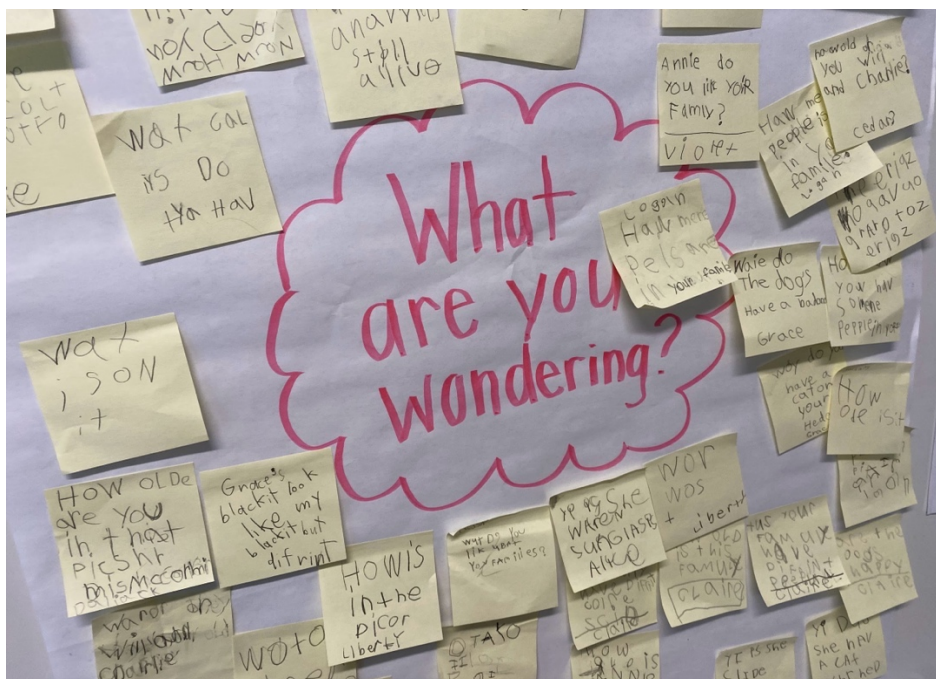*List of Ways to be an Activist from Whole Group Instruction*

Figure 42

Class Census from Whole Group Instruction

Figure 43

Example Student Work from Social Studies Center, One

Figure 44

Example Student Work from Social Studies Center, Two

Figure 45

Example Student Work from Social Studies Center, Three
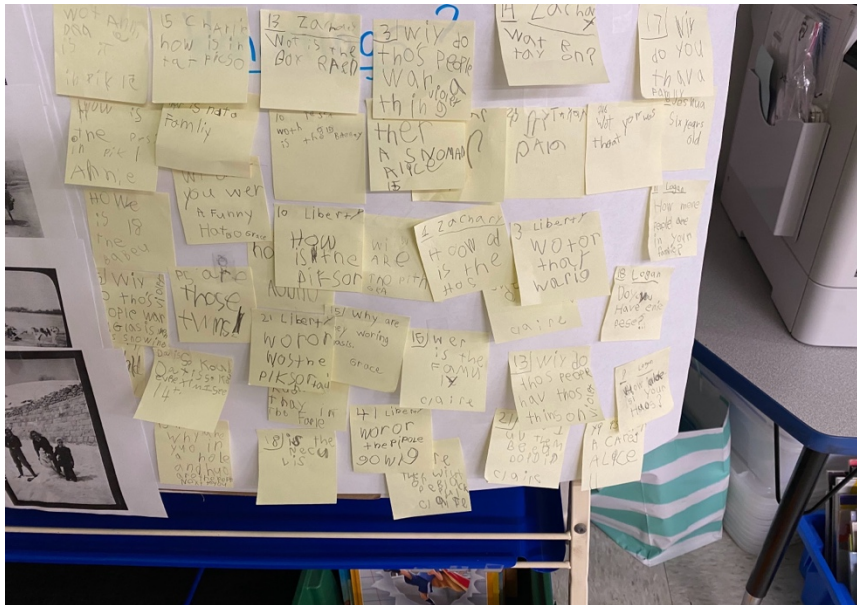

Figure 46

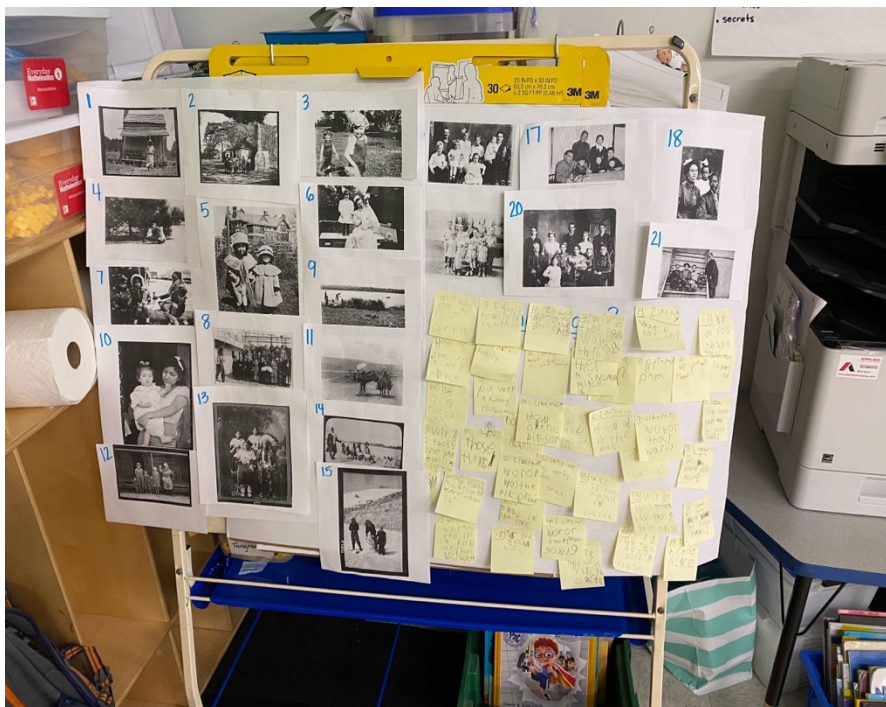*Example Student Work from Social Studies Center, Four*

Figure 47

Example Student Work from Art Center

FORMS AND NOTES FOR FAMILIES

Informed Consent for "What is a Family?" You are being asked to participate in a research study, titled "What is a Family: Exploring How to Teach About Diverse Families in the Early Elementary Classroom".

The purpose of this study is to investigate the following questions: 1) In what ways do children's preconceptions of families change after participating in a project-based learning unit on families? and 2) How can a project-based learning unit on families help build children's awareness of diverse families?

Your child's participation in this study begins with the completion of a 10-minute interview in person. This interview will be audio recorded or video recorded. I will ask your child what they believe a family is, who is in a family, to draw a family, and do an activity where they describe if photos show a family or not and share their thinking. I may ask follow-up questions if I need to seek any clarity for their answers. Then, I will teach a 3-week project-based unit for their social studies instruction that aligns with the Michigan state social studies standards on families. I will video record these lessons so that I can utilize the recordings to improve the lesson plans for future use in classrooms. I will then have a post-interview that asks the same questions as the pre-interview.

Only the appointed researchers, Dr. Laura Tortorelli and Melanie McCormick, and the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) will have access to the research data. Interview data, classroom teaching recordings, and student work will be accessible only to the research team and the MSU HRPP Offices. This data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the secondary researcher's office. Data will be entered into databases for analysis by ID number. A key which associates names with the ID numbers will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the secondary investigator's office up to five years after the study is completed and will only be accessible to the research team. In any papers that might result from this study, if teachers are named, you would be given a pseudonym and any identifying characteristics would be deleted or masked. Your confidentiality will be protected in the maximum extent allowed by law. Information that identifies you might be removed from the interview data, data collected while teaching, and student work. After such removal, the interview data could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from you.

Participation is voluntary. You may choose for your child not to participate at all, or your child may refuse to participate in certain procedures or answer certain questions. Your child may also discontinue your participation at any time without consequence (e.g. will not affect treatment you will receive, will not affect your evaluation, etc.).

There are no foreseeable risks to completing the study. There is no penalty for refusing to participate in this study.

If you need further information about this study, please contact Melanie McCormick, Graduate Student, Department of Education, (810)-429-7402, email: mccor158@msu.edu or Dr. Laura Tortorelli, Department of Education, Erickson Hall, 620 Farm Lane, Room 333, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824 (517)-432-1504, email:ltort@msu.edu.

Family-Participant Consent Form

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at (517) 355-2180, Fax (517) 432-4503, e-mail irb@ora.msu.edu, or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910.

One permission is sought below:

Your signature below means that you voluntarily give your permission for your child to participate in this research study.

You are being asked to participate in a research study and your parent is being asked to provide parental permission. Researchers are required to provide an assent form/parental permission form to inform both of you about the research study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have. Both of you need to agree for the child's participation in this study. In this assent/parental permission form, the YOU refers to both you (the participating child) and the YOUR CHILD refers to parental permission.

Background Information

This background information will be collected on this consent form. Please, note you have the right to skip any questions you do not wish to answer; this information will never be reported with names or other identifying information.

Name of child participating:

_____

Ethnicity of Your Family: (Check all that apply) Alaskan Native
Asian
Black or African American Indigenous
Native Hawaiian
Pacific Islander
White
Hispanic or Latinx
Not Hispanic or Latinx Multiracial
Other: _____

Decline to report _____

Family-Participant Consent Form

Mailing Address: _____

Any other information you would like me to know:

_____
_____
_____

Figure 48

Family Welcome Note

Melanie McCormick
Doctoral Candidate

Dear First Grade Families,

I am thrilled to work in Mrs. Conklin's first-grade classroom for my dissertation. First, I want to share a little bit about myself and how I came to this work.

Before my doctoral studies, I graduated from the University of Michigan- Ann Arbor with an undergraduate degree in elementary education and a master's in educational leadership and policy. I am a certified elementary teacher and school administrator. I taught at Angell Elementary in K-1 for five years. I was active in the district participating on various committees, teaching professional developments, and leading the district's K-1 social studies curriculum team. Currently, I am a doctoral candidate at Michigan State University (Curriculum, Instruction and Teacher Education) and work for Dr. Nell Duke and Dr. Marisha Humphries on their curriculum project, *Great First Eight*. I am the pilot coordinator, lead social studies writer, and science liaison. Throughout my time at MSU, I have worked on various research projects, taught undergraduate and master's level courses, published articles and book chapters, and presented at various education conferences. I aim for my work to support teachers in creating more inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for students.

I am a Korean adoptee and grew up in a family structure that was diverse in comparison to my peers. I remember learning about families but in a very traditional way. Unfortunately, social studies curriculum has not progressed much and continues to highlight traditional family structures, when so many children do not fit that structure. I believe that children should learn about different family structures so they can see themselves represented as well as learn about other families. My past research aimed to understand what curriculum teaches about families, how teachers teach about families, what families think should be taught about families, and how children understand diverse families. This prior research led me to my current study. This study aims to develop a new, more inclusive family unit for first-grade social studies (since that is the grade level family is addressed). I am conducting a Design-Based Research study, which means I am using feedback from teaching my lessons to revise them to improve them for future use.

This study was approved through the Institution Review Board as well as Ann Arbor Public Schools. This study will not interrupt your child's learning in the classroom. I am working closely with Mrs. Conklin and Principal Bullock to ensure we meet the needs of your children.

Thank you for this opportunity to work with your child. I am thrilled to be back in the classroom and in Ann Arbor Public Schools. Please, reach out if you have any questions (mccor158@msu.edu).

Sincerely,
Melanie McCormick

Figure 49

Family Note for Artifact Collection

DEAR FAMILIES,

I hope you are doing well. We are looking forward to starting our project!

As part of our family project, I am asking if you could please send in a family artifact that the children can share during class. Examples could include but are not limited to clothing, toys, photographs, kitchen tools, books, etc.

They will also explore the artifacts during a learning center. So, if this artifact is fragile, please send in a photo of the artifact. You will receive the artifact back at the end of the project.

Please, let me know if you have any questions (mccor158@msu.edu). I am more than happy to answer any questions. Have a wonderful day!

Sincerely,

MELANIE MCCORMICK