

Access to a World of Rainbow Family Children's Books via Partnerships and Programs: Suggestions for Library Outreach to LGBT Family Associations

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Abstract:

This paper explores the theme of Rainbow Families' access to information and library collections throughout the world. Specifically, it describes the role of LGBTQ children's literature in the lives of Rainbow Families, provides a brief overview of international LGBTQ children's books publishing, suggests library collaborations with Rainbow Family or LGBT Family associations, and profiles a selection of literacy or educational programs designed for children in Rainbow Families. The intent is to call attention to resources available for Rainbow Families around the globe and highlight the need for collaboration and library outreach in these countries to enhance access to these rich materials.

Keywords: LGBT families, public libraries, children's literature, library programs, library partnerships

Role of LGBTQ Children's Literature in the Lives of Rainbow Families

Children formulate their understanding of family structures from the world around them, which includes the attitudes and behaviours of their classmates, families, and educators; print and digital media; and society at large (Vygotsky, 1986). Children also develop their understanding of family based upon their personal experiences and family composition. Their family is seen as an extension of themselves and they need validation that their family loves and cares for one another. This validation can be provided in the form of children's literature that depicts various family compositions: single parent households, grandparent caregivers, adopted children, divorced parents, stepfamilies, single and multiple siblings, same-sex parents, and interracial families.

Society's depiction of mainstream families in dominant culture generally includes a nuclear family with a heterosexual mom and dad and children. This type of family is most common in children's books, educational media, film, video games, television programs, and advertisements as well as in materials found in classrooms, libraries, religious organizations, play groups, and community agencies. It is quite possible that children can go through their entire childhood without encountering lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or

queer/questioning (LGBTQ) characters and families in educational and reading materials. Accordingly, many children assume that nuclear, heterosexual families are the norm and any other composition, even if it reflects their own, is wrong. This is harmful to the emotional and social development of children as they cultivate an understanding of their own family and the diverse families of their classmates and other children that they encounter in the world around them (Naidoo, 2014).

LGBT Families or Rainbow Familiesⁱ are legitimate members of a community and should receive the same services and educational opportunities as any other type of family. Children in Rainbow Families are no different than other children in their need to feel accepted, valued, and loved. In November 2014, UNICEF affirmed the universal rights of both children and caregivers in Rainbow Families emphasizing that they should not be discriminated against, and calling for steps to change attitudes and foster understanding of Rainbow Families, LGBTQ individuals, and gender diversity (UNICEF, 2014).

Public libraries hold a unique opportunity for these families by creating welcoming environments that acknowledge their existence and celebrate their differences and similarities. By providing LGBTQ children's books, libraries can uphold UNICEF's position and validate Rainbow Families' experiences, provide opportunities for children in these families to make important literary connections and develop positive self-efficacy and self-esteem, and assist all children in understanding themselves and the world around them (Chapman, 2013; Cooperativa Culturale Giannino Stoppani, 2013; Gelnaw and Brickley, 2010; Janmohamed and Campbell, 2009; Naidoo, 2012). LGBTQ picture books in particular can cross language borders and provide children and caregivers in Rainbow Families with global perspectives of other families like themselves. At the same time, these books build bridges of understanding between children in heteronormative families and children in Rainbow Families.

Brief Overview of International LGBTQ Children's Book Publishing

Children's books with LGBTQ content have been published throughout the world in a variety of languages, covering a wide array of topics such as bullying, homophobia, gender diversity, gender nonconformity, adoption, divorce, Rainbow Families, LGBTQ extended family members (Aunts, Uncles, Grandparents, etc.), important LGBTQ historical figures, same-sex friendships and relationships among children, and Gay Pride events. In some countries such as France, Italy, or Spain, specialized children's book publishers offer picture book and novel series as well as multiple individual titles addressing the informational and recreational needs of children in Rainbow Families (Naidoo, In Press). Other countries such as the United States, Canada, and Germany make LGBTQ children's books available by way of small presses or self-publishing. The quality of these books varies widely from beautiful, award-winning titles to obscure, poorly written and/or illustrated offerings. Despite international licenses and book fairs such as the Bologna Children's Book Fair, very few LGBTQ children's books are translated into other languages. Even with global online booksellers, only a limited number of these books cross international borders.

Some libraries such as the International Youth Library/Internationale Jugendbibliothek in Munich do provide holdings of LGBTQ children's books from countries around the world but the books are for research purposes only and not allowed to circulate. Similarly, book exhibitions – such as “Famiglie. Papà, mamma, fratelli, zii, nonni, cugini e amici” organized by the Cooperativa Culturale Giannino Stoppani at the 2013 Bologna Children's Book Fair –

hold the potential for sharing international LGBTQ children's books with larger audiences but are limited to only those children and families able to attend the Fair.

In the past, attempts have been made by various researchers and bloggers in multiple countries to navigate these barriers through the creation of online bibliographies and other resources focusing on LGBTQ children's literature. Unfortunately, many of these Internet resources are not easily identifiable because of the different terminology for Rainbow Families used throughout the world (i.e. Rainbow Families, Same-Sex Parents, Homoparents, LGBT Parents, LGBT Families, Gay and Lesbian Families, Gay and Lesbian Parents, Same-gendered Family, etc.) The need to know the equivalent of each of these words in multiple languages severely limits access to LGBTQ materials. In addition, these sources often solely focus on titles published in a particular language or by a specific country. This inhibits readers' understanding of the shared experiences of Rainbow Families around the world.

Below is a list of selected, specialized LGBTQ children's book publishers to assist librarians in locating examples of international LGBTQ titles.

Editorial Molinos de Viento, Argentina – Children's book publisher offering board books and children's picture books that depict alternative, interracial, and Rainbow Families. <http://www.editorialmolinosdeviento.com/>

A Fortiori, Spain – Spanish publisher situated in Bilbao, Spain that produces a series of picture books entitled “Cuentos en favor de TODAS las familias.” These children's books include numerous alternative types of families including Rainbow Families. http://afortiori-bilbao.com/editorial/documents/catalogo_familias.html

Lo Stampatello, Italy - Created to fill a void in children's publishing, this Italian publisher focuses on books with same-sex parents and gender diversity to provide vital opportunities for all children to see mirrors of their experiences in books. <http://www.lostampatello.com/>

OLIKA Publishing, Sweden – Focusing specifically on children's books that address diversity in modern society, this Swedish publisher offers books representing gender diversity, Rainbow Families, and multicultural characters. It was one of the first publishers to use the Swedish gender-neutral pronoun “hen” and some of the publisher's titles allow children to select the gender of the character. <http://www.olika.nu/>

For the most part, children and caregivers in Rainbow Families are limited to children's books published in their own or a neighbouring country. Yet, many libraries do not make a concerted effort to reach out to Rainbow Families and many of these families are unaware that the library has LGBTQ children's books to offer. The following sections provide suggestions on how libraries can connect with Rainbow Families via partnerships and library programs.

Library Collaborations with LGBTQ Family or Rainbow Family Associations

Often public libraries do not have the physical or human resources needed for specialized library programming. In some instances Rainbow Families may not be easily identifiable or “out” about their family composition and libraries will have a hard time reaching them. For these reasons, collaborative partnerships offer a wonderful opportunity for libraries to reach children and caregivers in Rainbow Families. By partnering with LGBT family associations, libraries can increase their outreach to children and families who might not ordinarily visit

the library. Many of these associations already offer social activities for Rainbow Families such as picnics, trips to theme parks, workshops, support groups, and play dates. Some countries such as Sweden, Spain, Canada, France, and the United States have multiple LGBT parenting associations; other countries – such as South Africa – provide limited online information about LGBT parenting groups and associations. In cases such as the latter, librarians could partner with general LGBTQ associations and identify any subgroups that focus on LGBT parents or children with LGBT parents.

An analysis of more than 20 LGBT family associations throughout the world indicated that many provide suggestions for LGBTQ children's books and recommendations for educational activities to foster understanding of Rainbow Families and gender diversity (Naidoo, In Press). However, very few of these organizations offer storytimes or activities related to LGBTQ children's books. Since public libraries are poised to offer the best literacy and literature-related activities for children, it would be logical for them to collaborate with LGBT family associations to offer storytime events at Rainbow Family picnics, parent groups, etc. These organizations could provide free publicity for other events offered by the library and the library might consider offering meeting spaces for the organizations.

To facilitate a global perspective, the following selective list describes a few LGBT family associations from different countries. Included are two international organizations that librarians might consider for partnerships. Librarians can also explore the webpages for these associations to find lists of recommended LGBTQ children's books.

Associació de famílies Lesbianes i Gais/Asociación de Familias LGTB or FLG, Spain – Established in 2001, this association participates in advocacy efforts for equality rights for Rainbow Families, provides opportunities for social support and gatherings, and offers a variety of relevant information for Catalan and Spanish Rainbow Families.

<http://www.familieslg.org/familieslgtb/>

Association 360° (Groupe Homoparents), Switzerland – Created in 2001, this parent group provides opportunities for same-sex families with children to meet together and share information. The organization offers events for families as well as workshops and training for educators and other interested in the needs of Rainbow Families (Les familles arc-en-ciel).

<http://association360.ch/homoparents/>

Association Des Familles Homoparentales (ADFH), France – Serving as a clearing house for information influencing Rainbow Families in France, this organization serves as an advocacy group for the rights of children and caregivers in these families and helps to facilitate opportunities for social and educational events. <http://adfhn.net/>

Association des Parents et futurs parents Gays et Lesbiens or APGL, France – Founded in 1986, this parent association advocates for recognition of Rainbow Families throughout France and offers legal advice for caregivers in these families. Support services, educational seminars, conferences, and social gatherings are also organized by APGL.

<http://www.apgl.fr/>

Coalition des Familles LGBT/LGBT Family Coalition, Canada – Established in 1998, this non-profit organization advocates for legal and social recognition of Rainbow Families in Quebec. Social activities as well as support groups and workshops are provided along with information for future and current Rainbow Families. <http://www.familleslgbt.org/>

Famiglie Arcobaleno, Italy - Founded in 2005, this association provides educational, legal, and counselling information to Rainbow Families in Italy. Social gatherings, support groups, and advocacy meetings are offered to help both children and adults in Famiglie Arcobaleno (Rainbow Families). <http://www.famigliearcobaleno.org/>

Famílias Arco-íris, Portugal – A project of ILGA Portugal - Intervenção Lésbica, Gay, Bissexual e Transgénero Associação, this support group provides a clearinghouse of information for Rainbow Families in Portugal. Legal information along with opportunities for social networking (in-person or online) is provided. <http://familias.ilga-portugal.pt/>

Family Equality Council, United States – Established in 1979, this organization supports caregivers and children in Rainbow Families through a variety of activities that promote the advancement of social justice for all families. Regional events are held throughout the United States and include socials, potlucks, parenting groups, Pride events, and family weekend gatherings. The Council also provides a plethora of information for Rainbow Families on their website. <http://www.familyequality.org/>

FAMOs - Familien Andersrum Österreich, Austria – Created in 2011, this association is comprised of caregivers and parents in Rainbow Families who have created an online forum for networking with Rainbow Families in Austria. The group organizes social gatherings for children and adults in Rainbow Families and provides information for LGBT adults interested in starting families in Austria. <http://www.regenbogenfamilien.at/>

International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), Worldwide - Founded in 1978, this coalition of international organizations and associations serves as equality advocates for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI) people around the globe. <http://ilga.org/>. Europe has its own regional section of ILGA established in 1996 with representation from over 45 countries. <http://www.ilga-europe.org/>

Keshetfamilies, Israel – Created in 2009, this parenting organization offers Rainbow Families in Tel-Aviv educational, counselling, legal, and health information as well a national conference and social activities to support their unique needs. <http://keshetfamilies.org.il/>

Lesben- und Schwulenverband or LSVD Regenbogenfamilien, Germany – Established in 2002, this project of the LSVD, focuses on supporting and lobbying for Rainbow Families throughout Germany. Services include counselling hotlines, online counselling resources, workshops, and aggregate publications on German Rainbow Families. <http://www.lsvd.de/lebensformen/lsvd-familienseiten/lsvd-family.html>

Meer dan Gewenst, Netherlands – This association of same-sex parents or parents-to-be provides information for Rainbow Families on a variety of legal and social topics. Booklists, events calendar, new articles, and more are offered to LGBTQ parents and their children. <http://www.meerdangewenst.nl/>

Network of European LGBT Families Associations or NELFA – Created in 2011, this coalition of LGBT family associations in 15 countries offers information and support for Rainbow Families across Europe. The main goal of NELFA is to raise awareness of issues influencing Rainbow Families and to encourage projects that strengthen these families. The

network hosts a conference every year to great a global discussion of Rainbow Families and their social and legal needs. <http://www.nelfa.org/>

Rainbow Families Council, Australia – Established in 2006, this non-profit association in Victoria works to bring Rainbow Families together via social event as well as organized meetings. The Council also provides an information kit about Rainbow Families, educational materials for organizations working with children, and online and face-to-face community forums for discussing legal and social issues relevant to Rainbow Families. <http://www.rainbowfamilies.org.au/>

Sateenkaariperheet, Finland – Created in 1997, this advocacy organization supports caregivers and children in Rainbow Families (Sateenkaariperheet) with social activities, legal advice, policy information, and child welfare services. An online community is also available to connect families across Finland with each other. Resources for educational and childcare professionals serving Rainbow Families are provided as well <http://www.sateenkaariperheet.fi/>

Selected Literacy and Educational Programs for Children in Rainbow Families

Once librarians have approached representatives from a LGBT parenting association and initiated the collaboration process, it is recommended to begin brainstorming the types of library programs, story time events, or outreach that could be offered. The parenting association might have suggestions for particular themes or may recommend a specific day or holiday for the event. In addition to offering regular programs throughout the year, libraries might consider hosting programs in May for International Family Equality Day (<http://www.internationalfamilyequalityday.org>) or International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia. Another consideration would be during Gay Pride or LGBT History Month. If this type of guidance is not offered, librarians can consult a variety of online resources to see past examples of successful Rainbow Family programs or to locate educational or literacy materials to use in library programming.

Below is a selective list of successful literacy and educational programs and events for children in Rainbow Families throughout the world.

‘Això era i no era dues mares..’ literatura infantil i diversitat familiar, Spain – Program in April 2009 at the Biblioteca Central-Convent de Sant Roc de Gandia (Gandia Central Library) promoting family diversity. A selection of activities, offered in collaboration with Col·lectiu de Lesbianes, Gais, Transsexuals i Bisexuals de la Safor (CLGS), included storytelling, crafts, theatre, and storytime using Spanish LGBTQ children’s books.

Famiglie. Papà, mamma, fratelli, zii, nonni, cugini e amici, Italy - Organized by Cooperativa Culturale Giannino Stoppani, this exhibition of international LGBTQ children’s literature featured at the 2013 Bologna Children’s Book Fair. Books in a variety of languages were profiled and covered topics such as gender diversity and Rainbow Families. Displays such as this one provide opportunities for children in Rainbow Families to see affirmations of their experience, and offer educational opportunities for examining the rainbow of diversity in the LGBTQ community. Libraries could create similar displays during International Family Equality Day, Day of the Rainbow Family, etc. and offer storytimes the include some of the titles on display. <http://cargocollective.com/gianninostoppani/Famiglie-Papa-mamma-fratelli-zii-nonni-cugini-e-amici>

Family Story Time at the LGBT Center of Raleigh, United States – Story time programs offered for Rainbow Families and their children at the LGBT Center of Raleigh, North Carolina. The outreach includes books, crafts, and songs and has been funded by a Candlewick Light the Way: Library Outreach to the Underserved Grant, awarded by the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) a division of the American Library Association. <http://www.lgbtcenterofraleigh.com/library/library-sponsored-groups.html>

Festa delle Famiglie, Italy – A collaborative effort of several LGBT and Rainbow Family organizations throughout Italy, this multiday festival provides several events for children and caregivers including story reading, crafts, film screenings, book discussion groups, games, music, and more. <http://www.festadellefamiglie.it/>

Diversidad Afectivo-Sexua, Spain – Developed by Víctor Díez Mazo, this Spanish-language blog includes links to numerous Spanish-language LGBTQ and gender-variant children's books, educational resources, and other information for those interested in teaching children about Rainbow Families. Many links to current and past literacy or educational programs/events about Rainbow Families are provided. <http://diversidadafectivosexual.blogspot.com/>

Príncipes . . . (Otra Historia de Amor), Argentina – Sponsored by the Federación Argentina LGBT, this puppet show of the children's book *King and King* by Linda de Haan and Stern Nijland was performed from September to October 2011 in Buenos Aires to help normalize the experiences of LGBTQ children and children in Rainbow Families. A library could offer a similar program using their own puppets and another book. <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/suplementos/espectaculos/11-23037-2011-09-30.html>

Salon du Livre Homoparental, France – Book fair in Paris focused on books for LGBT parents. Event included book discussions, panels, booktalks, etc. A library could easily pair with this event to offer storytimes and events for the children of these families using LGBTQ children's books. <http://www.apgl.fr/article/item/294-deuxieme-salon-du-livre-homoparental>. A similar event in the United States focused on LGBTQ books is *The Rainbow Book Fair*. <http://rainbowbookfair.org> .

Libraries looking for specific educational activities or literacy materials for library programs with children in Rainbow Families might consider consulting some of the following resources representing a variety of languages and countries throughout the world.

Barn i regnbågsfamiljer (Children of Rainbow Families), Sweden – Published by Spegel förlag, this educator guide is designed to help caregivers and preschool teachers explore the diversity of Rainbow Families with young children. Developmentally appropriate questions, information, and activities are provided and could be used by librarians for programming along with the series of Rainbow Family books that accompanies the guide. <http://www.spegelforlag.se/>

Familias de Colores, Spain – Created by La Federación Estatal de Lesbianas, Gais, Transexuales y Bisexuales (FELGTB) and La Federación de Enseñanza de Comisiones Obreras (FECCOO), this training material offers educators and librarians posters, an interactive CD, and activities suitable for helping preschool and elementary school children understand family diversity. <http://felgtb.com/educacion/FamiliasColores/#/1/>

Learn to Include, Australia – Published by an Australian publisher, the Learn to Include easy-to-read series features a lesbian couple, their daughter, and friends that include other Rainbow Families. The website offers a free 44-page teachers manual that accompanies these picture books and describes how to use them in the classroom to be welcoming of Rainbow Families. Many of the activities are tied to Australian teaching standards.

http://www.hotkey.net.au/~learn_to_include/

ONG por la No Discriminación, Spain – Created by an anti-discrimination organization in Spain, this website includes downloadable e-books (free PDFs) of gay-themed picture books in English and Spanish. Information about plays and songs based on some of these books is provided along with other resources useful to librarians and educators interested in using these books in library programs to promote understanding of LGBTQ individuals and Rainbow Families. <http://www.ong-nd.org/>

Out for Our Children, England – This London-based community organization is comprised of Lesbian parents concerned about making nursery and preschools welcoming for LGBT families. The website contains numerous booklists, extensive downloadable lesson plans and classroom activities, information about UK laws related to Rainbow Families, and free downloadable posters that include Rainbow Families. <http://www.outforourchildren.co.uk/>

Otis & Alice/Ulysse et Alice Discussion Guide, Canada – Librarians interested in suggestions for library programs using books with two mothers might use the educator and discussion guides, available in English and French, that accompany the children's book *Otis and Alice/Ulysse et Alice*. http://www.familleslgbt.org/documents/pdf/Guide_Petits_en.pdf and http://www.familleslgbt.org/documents/pdf/Guide_Repondre_en.pdf

Rainbow - Rights Against Intolerance: Building an Open-Minded World, European Union – Funded in part by the European Union's Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Programme, this educational project connects EU LGBT associations, schools, and media professionals to examine the influence of electronic media on children. Of particular use to libraries are the educational toolkit and study guides (available in several different languages) that showcase a collection of short films for distinct age groups of children from preschool to high school. The films introduce topics such as same-sex parents and gender-diversity and can be used to spark discussions of family diversity. <http://www.rainbowproject.eu/index.htm>

Welcoming Schools, United States – Sponsored by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation, this up-to-date website is filled with lesson plans, teaching points, librarian tips, extensive bibliographies of books for all ages covering a broad spectrum of LGBTQ topics, and other resources for creating welcoming environments for Rainbow Families. Particularly useful is a free 93-page guide to creating inclusive educational environments for children in Rainbow Families. <http://www.welcomingschools.org/resources/>

Final Remarks and Looking Ahead

A world of Rainbow Families is waiting for librarians to build the necessary bridges and children's collections that will provide reflective global perspectives. The suggested partnerships in this paper are a first step. However, larger projects between organizations such as the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the Network of European LGBT Families Associations (NELFA) or the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) are needed to provide information access in a variety of languages to LGBTQ children's books from other countries. Libraries

can help through the standardization of access terminology and by purchasing books from some of the specialized LGBTQ children's publishers mentioned. The author of this paper is also working on a project entitled *A World of Rainbow Families: More Children's Books and Media with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Content from Around the Globe* that will serve as an English-language clearing house for some of this pertinent information, offering additional access to not only international librarians but also Rainbow Families and LGBTQ Parent Organizations.

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ⁱ The terms *LGBT Family* and *Rainbow Family* are used interchangeably to represent both children and caregivers in a family that identify as LGBT, children with LGBT parents, or children representing gender diversity. Throughout the world there are numerous diverse terms used describe this same group of individuals including Rainbow Families, Same-Sex Parents, Homoparents, LGBT Parents, LGBT Families, Gay and Lesbian Families, Gay and Lesbian Parents, LGBT-Parent Families, and Same-gendered Family.