Why Won't They Let Them Wear Dresses? Exploring Gender-Nonconforming Issues in Three Children's Picture Books

Rachel Block

Inception

This paper was originally written for Professor Heather Snell's course, "Field of Children's Literature," in the Department of English.

Abstract

Children's literature plays a crucial role in the Early Years classroom. The focus of this article is on children's picture books featuring gender non-conforming children who dance, play sports, and prefer to wear dresses. This article brings awareness to the need to include gender non-conforming picture books in elementary classrooms. The three picture books used communicate the dissonance between the characters' self-conscious identity and the constructed version that society tries to impose. These books educate young readers about the modern experience of being an LGBTQI child and they teach children to be welcoming and supportive towards all types of learners.

★ ★ ★

Three twenty-first-century picture books represent the struggles that gender non-conforming children face: Cheryl Kilodavis's *My Princess Boy,* illustrated by Suzanne DeSimone; Sarah and Ian Hoffman's *Jacob's New Dress*, illustrated by Chris Case, and Marcus Ewert's *10,000 Dresses*, illustrated by Rex Ray. These

books constitute excellent resources for teachers. Through their depiction of protagonists who find acceptance, support, and normalcy either with, or in spite of, transphobic or homophobic family members, these books help to educate young readers about the modern experience of being an LGBTQI[1] child. They deftly communicate the dissonance between one's self-conscious identity and the constructed version that society tries to impose. Such dissonance can pose difficulties for children, who are pressed into feminine or masculine categories at birth. For those children who cannot settle into one of these categories, a loneliness in their own body is often the result. This essay explores realities for gender non-conforming children and how they can draw strength from these stories as they don their true identities and defeat oppressive sociocultural influences. Teachers need to be aware of the benefits gender non-conforming picture books have in the classroom.

Kilodavis' *My Princess Boy* questions whether or not cisgender people should treat gender non-conforming people as different. Kilodavis' experiences with her son, Dyson, inspired her to share their family's experiences in the form of a picture book that would benefit other young people. *My Princess Boy* narrates Princess Boy's struggles and successes in a tone that affirms, rather than negates, his identity. It is clear from the narrative that the environment she and Princess Boy's father have created is a kind and supportive environment for the boy in which to grow up. By extension, the book itself clears a supportive space with the hope of educating individuals about gender non-conformity. *My Princess Boy* is about a four-year-old boy who expresses himself by playing dress-up in dresses, wearing his favorite color pink, sporting jewelry, and dancing like a ballerina. This is how the Princess Boy expresses

---

[1] LGBTQI: The abbreviation includes Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex but is also inclusive of individuals who do not identify as gender binary in one way or another.

his authentic self. Kilodavis' maternal narrator never actually names the boy, a strategy that leaves considerable room for reader identification. Those who identify as gender non-conforming, for example, may project themselves onto the nameless protagonist. This picture book about a "boy" in dresses fits into a growing genre of books for young people that embrace "welcoming environments for gender-and sexuality- diverse students" (Sciurba 277). It is made clear that anyone can be both a princess and a boy.

Also significant is how DeSimone's illustrations emphasize the facelessness of each character. By obscuring identifying facial features such as eyes, nose, and mouth, the illustrations insinuate both that there is no natural connection between sex and one's facial features and that no one has control over their structural makeup. Therefore, how one fashions oneself goes according to how one feels on the inside. Cultural studies scholar Chris Barker discusses that "identity is a mode of thinking about ourselves":

> Giddens says… that identity is our creation. It is something always in process, a moving towards rather than an arrival. An identity project builds on: what we think we are now in the light of our past and present circumstances. And what we would like to be, the trajectory of our hoped for future. (217-18)

While each character wears different clothes and sports different hairstyles, their facelessness allows the reader to see individuals without questioning their gender. Think of it like a blank canvas where a person's physical characteristics do not press them into a masculine or feminine identity. This book shows how facial characteristics do not "live up" to their gender identity. Looking masculine or feminine, in other words, is a matter of presentation. DeSimone illustrates each character without giving any character feminine or masculine characteristics, thereby exposing the unimportance of gender as a feature of our character.

Expanding from a poststructuralist reading, the reader has the ability to see Princess Boy as a girl. Why? What defines a girl as a girl? Does one need to have reproductive organs? A vagina? Genitalia is thought to be essentially masculine or feminine, but they are not necessarily so. Why is it most of the time a penis is soft and limp but is thought of as strong and masculine all the time? In social media, a peach emoji is code for a vagina and an eggplant is code for a penis. This iconography is a carryover from traditional gender roles, as a peach is soft and an eggplant is hard. Why is a peach not seen as being hard also? Popular culture also recognizes the strangeness of this phenomenon. Comedian Sheng Wang, for example, says:

> A friend said to me, 'Hey you need to grow a pair. Grow a pair, Bro.' It's when someone calls you weak, but they associate it with a lack of testicles. Which is weird, because testicles are the most sensitive things in the world. If you suddenly just grew a pair, you'd be a lot more vulnerable. If you want to be tough, you should lose a pair. If you want to be real tough, you should grow a vagina. Those things can take a pounding. (Mixtape Comedy Show).

A vagina has those same characteristics and could be said to be strong and masculine as well. Having been assigned male at birth does not mean that Princess Boy needs to do "boy things," such as playing sports. Princess Boy loves pink, dancing, and dresses. This helps us as readers accept him as the person he truly is, instead of someone who does not fit in. Changes need to occur in society so that these opinions continue to evolve. If Princess Boy feels that he is a girl, then she is a girl. She can be whoever she wants to be; genitalia do not matter.

Just as Kilodavis has faceless characters in her book, she also openly discusses gender roles. *The Princess Boy* brings up the question: why is it bizarre that a boy could want to wear a dress "like a girl"? Kilodavis wants to educate young people, so that instead of laughing at gender non-conforming people, they will accept them. The idea is to educate them so that they are not ignorant like the

people who stare at Princess Boy and laugh at him for wanting to buy a sparkly dress. The book itself models inappropriate responses to gender non-conformity. Again, society needs to grow and learn to accept young boys in dresses. Kilodavis wants every reader to end the book with the message in mind of how important acceptance is.

Kilodavis gives LGBTQI children a space to be themselves, and maybe even a place in which to find their authentic self. This book chooses to use male pronouns; however, in being associated with traditionally female actions, these are turned on their head. Throughout the text, there are moments where it feels alright to reconsider the Princess Boy's gender, yet the book highlights that the Princess Boy can wear dresses and appreciate the colour pink without being called a girl if that is not how he identifies. At one point the narrator points out that "a princess boy can wear a dress at school, and I will not laugh at him" (Kilodavis). This book helps to see that as a society there should be no strict lines between genders as every individual has the right to feel how they choose. Kilodavis' book does not force any character to like the Princess Boy. Rather, each character comes to accept the Princess Boy on their own terms; as one student says, "I will tell him how pretty he looks." Another says, "a princess boy can play with me in pretty girl clothes and I will still play with him" (Kilodavis).

The Princess Boy can be used as an example to accept and support young people for whoever they are and however they choose to look. Notably, the last sentence of the book is "My Princess Boy is your Princess Boy." The author here asks the adult readers of the book to claim her son as their own. Kilodavis's knowledge helps to explain people like her son even outside the LGBTQI community. Kilodavis ends her book with the challenging questions: "if you see a Princess Boy… [w]ill you laugh at him? Will you call him a name? Will you play with him? Will you like him for who he is?" These questions bring the purpose of *The Princess Boy* into relief*;* that

being to educate. The goal is for gender normative children to treat gender non-conforming children just like anyone else.

Sarah and Ian Hoffman are the authors of *Jacob's New Dress,* a picture book about a young boy who is beaten down by "societal abuse and parental rejection" (Orr and Baum 49). Jacob loves dressing up, and when he does, he can be whoever he wants to be, even if that's himself: a boy wearing a dress. This picture book explains "what it's like for him, for his mother and his father, for his teacher, and for all the children around him" (Ehrensaft). Jacob wants a real dress, so he makes one himself and is teased for it. Hoffman "create[s] a world of gender acceptance for every child, for, in the words of Jacob's mom, '[t]here are all sorts of ways to be a boy'"(Ehrensaft). *Jacob's New Dress* shows a realistic representation of how people deal with those who are different.

Dominant social mores dictate that the only place it is appropriate for boys to wear dresses is when playing dress-up. Like all kids, Jacob loves to play dress-up; in this way, he expresses his inner feelings. Near the beginning of the book, Jacob rushes to get the crown, asserting, "I'll be the princess" (Hoffman). Society develops norms for gender, giving rise to specific prescriptions about what boys and girls should wear. Jacob loves dressing up as a princess, both at home and at school, and he no longer wants to pretend. However, he struggles with his parent's lack of understanding of his point of view.

Jacob asks for familial support at the beginning of the book when he wants to wear his Halloween witch's dress to school. His mother responds with "I don't think so. That's for dress-up at home. It would get dirty at school" (Hoffman). Instead of articulating her own anxiety about Jacob's desire to wear a dress to school, Jacob's mom makes excuses for why he cannot. She is clearly uncomfortable with her son wearing something that she thinks only girls are supposed to wear. As her excuse is that Jacob cannot wear the dress because

he cannot get it dirty, Jacob makes his own dress. He tells his mom that "It's like a dress, but I can get it dirty" (Jacob's dress is made out of a towel, not the black lace of the witch's dress). Testifying further to the weak rationale that helps to support Jacob's parents' decision to not allow him to wear a dress to school, Jacob's dad does not want his son to wear even the new, more school-appropriate dress in public. He tells Jacob, "You can't go to school like that." Jacob's mom does not have time to fight, because her son is late for school. She tells him to "Put on some shorts and a shirt under that dress-thing" (Hoffman). Through the use of the words "dress thing," Jacob's mom once again manifests her own anxiety about Jacob's desire to wear a dress. She will do whatever it takes to not call what her son wore to school a real dress. After this situation, Jacob repeats the term to Emily, insisting that what he is wearing is called a "dress-thing." He continues, "It's not a dress" while "glancing up at his mom" (Hoffman).

From Jacob's point of view, his anxiety and mental battle from constant verbal abuse for wearing his "dress-thing" brings him to his breaking point. After the incident with his dress-thing, he pleads for help from his mom and he asks her, "Can you help me make a real dress?" Jacob works himself up, making this moment feel a century long, nowhere equal to the vast pause. Hoffman writes that, "The longer she didn't answer, the less Jacob could breathe." This describes the anxiety, fear, unease, and daily troubles that non-binary individuals face. Only once Jacob's mom realizes how hard this is for her child does she come around. She recognizes that all her son wants is to be accepted for his true self.

Hoffman brings to light the bullying that gender non-conforming children face. Christopher, a schoolboy, teases Jacob for dressing up as a princess. He says, "Jacob, why do you always wear the girl clothes? Put on the knight armour" (Hoffman). This comment has Jacob question himself. He goes home and asks his mom if it is true that boys cannot wear dresses. She responds, "Of course they can"

(Hoffman). About halfway through the book, there is another incident where Jacob is bullied again for wearing his version of a dress. Christopher torments Jacob when he snatches off Jacob's dress-thing. Christopher waves the dress-thing around like a flag until Jacob starts to cry; meanwhile, the majority of the class laughs at him. Ranta Ghosh, author of *Redefining Multicultural Education*, writes that "In classrooms… deviation from… [Feminine or masculine] gendered roles is often linked to bullying… and gender-based violence" (15). *Jacob's New Dress* displays real-life scenarios that occur with emerging non-conformity to stereotypical gender norms.

Chris Case, the illustrator of the book, etches the story into the reader's mind through his cartoon-style drawings; they keep the mood lighthearted in spite of such deep content. It must be stated that the cartoon artworks heighten, rather than lower, the seriousness of the picture book, an important strategy given that the target readership is preschoolers. The artwork helps the reader to understand how Jacob feels. On the page where Jacob is telling his mom about how he was bullied, the lines under Jacobs's eyes, and his tight grasp while he gives his mom a hug, conveys his pain to the reader. Until this point, Mother and Father do not agree with his choices, but after seeing how helpless he is, Jacob's mom comes around, bringing a smile to Jacob's spirit. The illustrations in a picture book are equally as important as the actual story. Case's pictures invite each reader to experience feelings and emotions based on his characters' facial expressions. This is how young children come to understand the story: they see how Jacob is feeling through the illustrations.

The narrator of *Jacob's New Dress* is straightforward when discussing Jacobs' gender in pages leading to the end as Mom comes around and says to her son, "There are all sorts of ways to be a boy." Hoffman makes it clear that no one needs to fit into one area of the spectrum, meaning that Jacob can call himself a boy and

wear dresses, thereby expressing both his gender identity[2] and gender expression.[3] Jacob surpasses these stereotypes and does what makes him happy. He breaks down gender barriers by wearing his new dress to school when he knows others like Christopher, Mother and Father will not approve. Only near the end of the book do Mother and Father allow Jacob to wear what he wants. Father specifically wants his son to be happy and says, "Well, it's not what I would wear, but you look great" (Hoffman). At the end of the book, Christopher places Jacob on the girls' team for tag. He owns his dress, which to him feels like armour: "soft, cottony, *magic* armour." Jacob stands up for himself, saying to Christopher, "I made this dress, I'm proud of it, and I'm going to wear it!" (Hoffman). *Jacob's New Dress* shows all children that they do not need to conform to stereotypes—they can be their true selves and still find happiness in some way or form.

Long before this book was published, the Gender and Sexuality Advocacy and Education Program was launched. Catherine Tuerk, one of the founders of the program, wrote at the end of *Jacob's New Dress* that, "We need to teach that there is nothing wrong with gender nonconformity, just as there is nothing wrong with left-handedness or any other way of being different" (qtd. in Hoffman). Her goal is aligned with that of Hoffman, who explains that their intention when writing this book was "to help parents, families, teachers, physicians stand behind all the differently gendered little people in their lives."As Barker argues, "There is no essence of identity to be discovered; rather, cultural identity is continually being produced within the vectors of similarity and difference" (229). *Jacob's New Dress* is designed to help children of all different genders and orientations. At this young age, or any age for that matter, no one needs to conform to a societal or a specific gender

---

[2] Gender Identity refers to how individuals perceive themselves.

[3] Gender Expression is how a person presents their gender, and it is done through clothes, hair, hair-up, voice and body language.

norm. Learning that their gender identity, gender expression, and biological sex do not need to match helps children to keep an open mind, just like Bailey in the picture book *10,000 Dresses*.

Marcus Ewert takes his picture book one step further than both *My Princess Boy* and *Jacob's New Dress*, as *10,000 Dresses* focuses on Bailey, a character who, despite having been assigned male at birth, identifies as a girl. Predictably, Mother, Father, and Brother do not accept her expressed identity and, although she dreams of dresses, everyone in her family insists that she is a boy (Ewert). Bailey would like to be seen as a girl and called a girl; she understands herself, even if her family does not. For the purpose of this essay, Bailey can be read as transgender. This contrasts with Princess Boy and Jacob, who are gender non-conforming children. Jamie Campbell Naidoo states in *Rainbow Family Collections* that *10,000 Dresses* is the first transgender picture book on the market for children (45). In her reading of the book, Sharon Smulders observes that Bailey goes out into the community seeking recognition only to find it in one girl, Laurel, who accepts her unconditionally (418). Unlike Bailey's family members, Laurel appreciates Bailey and tells her that she is "the coolest girl" she's ever met (Ewert). Laurel's interaction with Bailey as a girl affirms her own sense of identity and helps to facilitate self-empowerment. Moreover, once she is accepted for who she is by another character within the book, readers can side with her too, recognizing, along with Laurel, that she is a girl.

Significantly, Ewert chooses to avoid identifying Bailey's gender for the first few pages, presumably because the suspense allows readers to be somewhat surprised when the book's use of feminine pronouns reveals that part of her identity. By using specific gender terms, the narrator also models acceptance of Bailey's choice of gender identity for the benefit of young readers. Even if Bailey's family does not recognize her as she prefers, the narrator does. In other words, the use of feminine pronouns is a strategy designed to

encourage readers to side with Bailey. The idea is that this book will encourage young readers to respect Bailey's choice of identity, as well as encourage them to treat gender non-conforming people with respect.

Without the narrator or readers, there is still someone who believes in Bailey: Laurel. When the girls meet, they both have a problem: Laurel has trouble with creativity and Bailey has the problem that no one truly understands her. Together they help each other, and Bailey finds someone she can look up to. Laurel is the one person that Bailey can count on for support. Smulders uses the term "believing mirror" to describe Laurel, as she perceives Bailey as her wonderful, creative self (420). Immediately after they meet, Bailey no longer feels alone in the world. This heartwarming sentimentalism persuades readers, from young children to grown adults, to accept gender non-conforming people, including transgender people.

Before Bailey finds acceptance, she looks for familial support for each of her dreams, but she is constantly shut down. The first time she speaks to Mother, their conversation goes as follows:

> Mom, I dreamt about a dress.
> Uh-huh.
> A dress made of crystals that flashed rainbows in the sun! And I was wondering if you would buy me a dress like that?
> Bailey, what are you talking about? You're a boy. Boys don't wear dresses!
> But… I don't feel like a boy.
> Well, you are one, Bailey, and that's that! Now go away… and don't mention dresses again! (Ewert)

Bailey's next dream happens to be about another dress. She goes to Father and says "Dad I dreamt about a dress" (Ewert). He has the exact same reaction as Mother did the previous day. The repetition of this experience continues with phrases such as "woke up," such

as “When Bailey woke up,” she went to find Mother: “Bailey woke up, and went to find Father”; and “Bailey woke up, and went to find her Brother” (Ewert). This repetition shows Bailey’s hope that at least one family member will listen and accept her, thus helping her to get a dress. All she desires is her family’s support. Unfortunately, however, Bailey’s family members are reluctant to look beyond traditional gender norms. Smulders notes how “familial opposition functions to diminish and belittle…[Bailey’s] transgender self” (420). This quote opens readers up to Bailey’s vulnerability and the effect her family’s rejection has on her.

The rejection of Bailey’s true identity from her family is shown ambiguously, as the reader never sees Mother’s, Father’s, or Brother’s faces. Ray illustrates these three characters with their backs always towards the reader. The majority of Mother’s body is shown, with only a bit of her head cut off by the frame; Father’s legs are in the grass while the majority of his head is cut off; and finally, all the readers sees of Brother are his legs which are as tall as the sky. Neither his face nor upper body is ever shown. Within these illustrations, everyone grows larger except for Bailey. Compared to her family, she seems practically dwarfed (Smulders 419). Scuirba also recognizes the importance of size, arguing that “Bailey is illustrated diminutively in the scenes above, which seems to accompany her shrinking sense of self-worth.” Ray explains through visuals how Brother is not a man; he is a boy who is stretched to look superior. Bailey comes to her family members as they hold the power, but their rejections make her feel small and unimportant. This feeling continues until near the end of the book, when illustrations display a soccer ball that is taller than Bailey and takes up almost half the page (Ewert). Brother’s massively tall legs accompany the enormous soccer ball, which makes one feel as if Bailey is a target.

North American family stereotypes and pressures to conform to a heteronormative society are on display in Ray’s illustrations. Ewert and Ray work together to deliberately present stereotypes such as

the following: Mother, the traditional housewife who cuts coupons in the kitchen; Father, who works in the backyard, and Brother, who plays soccer, a sport typically associated with males. Brother purposely represents "conventional masculinity" (Smulders 420). Bailey's family represents a realistic version of what some LGBTQI children's lives might look like. Through Ray's illustrations readers can see that Mother, Father, and Brother all represent gender stereotypes; Bailey's character represents the overcoming of these stereotypes.

The denial of Bailey's true identity also exposes her to potential violence, which often operates against transgender people within the gender normative culture. After being shut down by Mother and Father, Bailey comes to Brother and says:

> I dreamt about a dress. A dress made of windows, which showed the Great Wall of China and the Pyramids!
> The brother responds You dream about DRESSES, Bailey? That's gross. You're a boy! Bailey tries to stand up for herself and says
> But…
> Brother continues But nothing, [g]et out of here, before I kick you! (Ewert)

On Bailey's last attempt for familial support, her brother finds her breach of norms threatening and decides to relieve his conflict by threatening her with physical violence. Bailey's brother is trying to resolve his dissonance by forcing her to be gender normative, an approach that Smulders defines as "transphobic harassment" (420). Norton questions Brother's actions and asks, "Shouldn't we provide counselling for adults and children whose speech and behaviour clearly shows them to be transphobic—that is, irrationally anxious and fearful in the presence of gender diversity?" (296)

Bailey's brother's display begins a conversation about how transgender children are targets. At the same time, however, the book is a reminder that they are not alone. For individuals like Bailey, dreams are the only place where they can be who they truly are, while in the real world, they face both friends and foes. Norton explains, "Pending the creation of a substantial body of specifically trans children's literature, we can intervene in the reproductive cycle of transphobia through strategies of transreading: intuiting/interpreting the gender of child characters as not necessarily perfectly aligned with their anatomies" (299). *10,000 Dresses* discourages transphobia and encourages young readers to adopt the point of view that differences ultimately do not matter. This example of trans children's literature promises to help abolish the reproductive cycle of transphobia.

It is apparent that *10,000 Dresses* should be read and visually understood within gender non-conforming terms. Bailey does not have the familiar long-haired female hairstyle or any recognizable signs of maturation; therefore, she can be said to display androgynous characteristics. However, in her dreams there is no confusion about her gender: Bailey is a girl. Therefore, Bailey's first dress represents all types: men, women and LGBTQI (Smulders 419). Smulders suggests that "[the] millions of tiny bells […] is suggestive of gender diversity." The second dress made of lilies and roses shows "natural beauty," while the third dress shows "global adventure." The three descriptions explain Bailey's authentic self, expanding her character beyond these traditional gender label barriers (Smulders 419).

Besides the triumph over traditional gender label barriers, Bailey's dresses also show how colour is strategically set when corresponding to her different identities. Close to the beginning of the picture book, Ray illustrates a different dress on each stair. The dresses include colours and patterns in pink, navy, turquoise, and light blue (Ewert). Even though these dresses are in Bailey's

dreams, they are perfectly designed. So much colour, detail, and thought go into each dress, and this is a mere child in a dream. There is no comparison between the overall effort in her dreams and what Bailey decides to put on, which is a white t-shirt with blue shorts, each and every day. There is no variety shown within Bailey's male clothing. The difference between these outfits shows an important change between Bailey's identities; when she is a 'boy', her world is dull, but when she is herself it is incredibly vibrant, featuring vivacious creative colours.

Within *10,000 Dresses*, colour is shown in multiple ways—through illustrations, colour tones, and singular coloured words. Ewert purposely has certain words that are coloured differently than the rest of words that appear in the sentence. The words that are coloured differently are specifically done for emphasis or as visual aid to help children make connections. This is shown within the first few pages where the word "valentine" is highlighted red. The word pops out amongst the bleak yellow sentences and connects to Bailey's love for dresses. Similarly, like "valentine," the word "rainbow" is emphasized near the start of *10,000 Dresses*. Ewert purposely uses the actual colours of the rainbow to teach children that rainbows are a representative symbol for the LGBTQI community. This pattern continues later in the book, where the word "boy" is accentuated and is specifically written in dark blue to feel out of place. It is the darkest word on the entire page, not because being a boy is bad, but because Bailey is not a boy. The colour alone gives the stern impression that there is no room for discussion or for learning on the matter. Colour is seen across thought-provoking descriptions, emphasis, and education for children.

Many people could scoff at these books, perceiving that they serve no purpose to their gender-conforming child's development. However, these books are meant for everyone; they will help lead discussions and foster acceptance among conforming and non-conforming communities alike. These picture books are important

teaching tools, and educators should utilize them in elementary classrooms. It is the role of a teacher to make sure that everyone fits in, and these books help to assure this as they help to bring awareness of the LGBTQI community. In her reading of gender-variant males in picture books, Katie Sciurba concludes that "Through critical examinations of the texts' implications, [where] educators can raise children's consciousness about expectations for boys, as well as girls, and talk about how these expectations can harm us" (291). This conversation may be uncomfortable, but it is a necessary one to have if one wants to create awareness about gender norms in the classroom. Children rely on picture books because of the way they make sense of gender identities. Visuals can help children to understand gender variance; although, as Sciurba reminds us, there "is still a long way to go before gender variance is represented positively and equitably" (291). These LGBTQI picture books help children to learn how to react when they see a young boy out in the community in a dress, contributing to the aim of creating a world in which little to no anxiety about gender exists, especially among young people. Such books do not need to be read with a targeted approach but can simply be used as a teaching method about differences in the classroom.

From a young age, children are told not to judge a book by its cover; however, through socialization they learn the opposite. Kids are taught to judge others. Teachers need to instil in children a way to look beyond what a person wears and simply accept them for who they are underneath. In life all anyone wants is to be accepted and supported. In *My Princess Boy,* Mother, Father and Brother support their Princess Boy, but that is not always the case. Not all picture books have a happy ending. Teachers want children to be able to read texts that "accurately represent and celebrate a diverse panorama of gender identities" (Sciurba 291). The goal is for children to be able to find themselves in these stories so they can become a support.

Books such as these are important, because discrimination of LGBTQI people can start before children enter kindergarten. As teachers we need to model diversity. Young explains in *Queer Youth Advice for Educators* that "Kids need to learn that there aren't 'boy colors' and 'girl colors' or 'boy games' and 'girl games,' that their teachers respect gay and lesbian people, and that only individuals can say whether they are gay or not" (4). Teachers must address how no one could know who is LGBTQI by how a person dresses or speaks. Young goes on to say that we must "[i]ntroduce the idea that all people have a different balance of masculine and feminine qualities, and that mix is part of what makes them unique" (4). The only way to normalize LGBTQI is through awareness, and that is why gender non-conforming picture books should be made accessible by mandating that they be an integral part of inclusion in the early years classroom.

In conclusion, these picture books add to a minuscule but rising number of books for and about gender non-conforming and transgender children. *My Princess Boy, Jacob's New Dress* and *10,000 Dresses* are splendid resources for representation of the LGBTQI community within children's literature, as they show the different paths one can take to find acceptance, support, and regularity despite constant gender-label barriers. These books offer young readers a glimpse of gender non-conforming children's feelings. This essay has discussed how Princess boy, Jacob, and Bailey "do not want/need to be one of the 'boys'" (Sciurba 289). As Sciurba points out,

> Each of these characters in dresses heroically stands up to adversity, asserting him/herself and finding happiness in an imperfect world. Although these characters' families and/or peers do not (fully) embrace them, due to their gender identities, the protagonists all achieve much-needed self-acceptance and end their stories valorized, feeling comfortable in their own symbolic clothing (289).

As teachers, we must teach that LGBTQI is not some ridiculous new trend. Rather, it is a growing revolution of life where people can chose to accept others for who they are or live in the past. These books can help in any classroom to be a discussion starter. They can be used as the framework within multiple subjects and lessons. What is most important is that these picture books have the ability to be a role model for students when no one else understands them. Books such as these need to be visible and made accessible in all early years classrooms.

Works Cited

Barker, Chris. *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. 3rd ed. SAGE, 2008.

Ehrensaft, Diane. Review of *Jacob's New Dress,* by Sarah and Ian Hoffman. http://www.sarahandianhoffman.com/books/jacobs-new-dress/. Accessed 15 Dec. 2016.

Ewert, Marcus. *10,000 Dresses*. Illustrated by Rex Ray, Seven Stories, 2008.

Ghosh, Ratna. *Redefining Multicultural Education*. Harcourt Brace, 1996.

Hoffman, Sarah, and Ian Hoffman. *Jacob's New Dress*. Illustrated by Chris Case, Albert Whitman & Company, 2014.

Kilodavis, Cheryl. *My Princess Boy*. Illustrated by Suzanne DeSimone, Aladdin, 2010.

Naidoo, Jamie Campbell. *Rainbow Family Collections: Selecting and Using Children's Books with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Content*. Libraries Unlimited, 2012.

Norton, Jody. "Transchildren and the Discipline of Children's Literature." *Over the Rainbow: Queer Children's and Young Adult Literature,* edited by Kenneth B. Kidd and Michelle Ann Abate. The University of Michigan Press, 2011, pp. 293-309.

Orr, Asaf and Joel Baum. *Schools in Transition*. (Resource Guide). Gender Spectrum, 2015.

Sciurba, Katie. "Flowers, Dancing, Dresses, and Dolls: Picture Book Representations of Gender-Variant Males." *Children's Literature in Education: An International Quarterly*, vol 48, no. 3, 2017, pp. 276-293.

Smulders, Sharon. "Dresses Make the Girl: Gender and Identity from *The Hundred Dresses* to *10,000 Dresses*." *Children's Literature in Education*, vol. 46, no. 4, 2015, pp. 410-423.

Wang, Sheng. "Mixtape Comedy Show- Sheng Wang" *YouTube,* uploaded by Mixtape Comedy Show, 12 April 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8QKGwb3c5I&t=15s.

Young, Abe Louise. *Queer Youth Advice for Educators*. Next Generation Press, 2011.