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Expanding Kindergarten Students' Understanding of Family Types

Kaitlyn Kroneman

A Capstone project for the Bachelor of Arts in Human Development and Family Studies

### Expanding Kindergarten Students' Understanding of Family Types

Today, family dynamics are drastically changing. Many children may not recognize the variances of family members and styles. To educate young students, I formulated a 3-session lesson to address different family dynamics with Kindergarten students at Dual Language Academy. My goal is to form an understanding among the students of diversity and inclusion within families.

#### **Needs Statement**

The main reason I am doing this project is to introduce diversity and acceptance among children, in regards to families being the subject. I find it important to educate young children about this topic because they are able to absorb the information I present to them.

Five to six-year-olds “judge [groups] to be different in nature, and associate different patterns of characteristics with each group type” (Plötner, Over, Carpenter, & Tomasello, 2016, p. 11). Few children in the beginning of the study were able to have concrete ideas of what a group can be identified as. In addition, the children “judged the members to have social obligations and to behave pro-socially towards one another.” (Plötner et al. 2016, p. 10). Comprehending that there are different forms of families is important now more than ever with the wide, diverse range of families.

To expand on that, family dynamics are drastically changing with a variety of styles. The legality of same-sex marriage gave families a new diversity. Also, there is an increasing rate of single parent families and blended families. I feel that it is important to address these differences with young children in order to create an accepting generation. These children are most likely surrounding themselves with friends who have different types of people in their families so it is crucial to expand their minds as they are young.

Unfortunately, low income populations are often affected by broken homes and extended family stepping in for childcare and caregiving positions. "Extensive research in kindergarten and elementary school settings has established that the socioeconomic and racial/ethnic composition of schools affects children's learning and achievement" (Reid, Kagan, Hilton, & Potter, p. 12, 2015). It is important to address the needs of children who come from broken homes in order to help them be successful in and out of school. Many issues rise in a child's life just from the at home situation of a child. I do not plan on addressing this issue to the Kindergarten students but it is necessary to understand that families are the base of children's developmental niche.

Since children in Kindergarten enjoy shared book reading and can engage with the book when the reader is asking questions, my plan is to read the books, and ask the children questions regarding the story and their own family in relation to the book. In addition, I will have Kindergarten students from the Dual Language Academy of the Monterey Peninsula participate in the project, which will be integrated into the existing curriculum.

### **Developmentally Appropriate Practice**

From a Piagetian perspective, children are beginning to understand the notion of classification, where objects can be in different groups. Classification is essentially the theory that children can classify items into different groups based on characteristics (Wittmer, Petersen, Puckett, & Black, 2012). For instance, young children have specific ideas of gender roles where girls are associated with the color pink, ponies, and dolls whereas boys are associated with the color blue, motorcycles, and playing in mud, for example. Given that children have rigid views of gender roles, it is likely that these rigid frameworks also apply to families and family types as

they do with gender. I imagine that children believe that families are nuclear; meaning, they have a mom and a dad with children.

According to Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, during ages two through seven, children are in the Preoperational stage where they are learning language and engage in symbolic play. (Wittmer et al. 2012). Engaging in symbolic play in this stage can be children imagining that they are pretending to use a toy block as a race car or a telephone.

Also, children in this stage cannot see viewpoints from other people, resulting in egocentrism (Wittmer et al. 2012). Children that are egocentric will only understand concepts from their own perspective. For example, I was engaging in a puzzle with a two-and-a-half-year-old boy last year and he was showing me a puzzle piece but the colored side was facing him, and I could not see it. I have seen this similar situation happen with a five-year-old in a classroom when she was showing a classmate how to write a letter from the alphabet; however, it was in her direction and the student she was showing was unable to see well, because it was backwards for him. With this in mind, the students in my project may be challenged with the task of thinking beyond their own families.

With the gain in symbolic thinking, or representational thinking, most importantly language, children's capacity for understanding information around them increases. Between the ages of five and seven, children learn how to focus and use their cognitive abilities for specific purposes (Wittmer et al. 2012). For instance, children learn to pay attention when they are asked and can memorize lists of words or facts. These skills are vital for children starting school who need to learn new information, retain it, and apply it when tested. "Children this age have also developed a larger overall capacity to process information. This expanding information processing capacity allows children to make connections between old and new information"

(Wittmer et al., 2012, p. 20). During this age, Wittmer et al. (2012) explain, children's knowledge base also continues to grow and become better organized. The challenge of this project will be encouraging growth of children's understanding of "family" and introducing family diversity that differs from their own. Further building on Piaget's theory, the children should also be able to retain the information given to them about differing family structures. This is why presenting diversity among families is ideal at this point in the student's lives.

In addition, Newman, Roberts, and Syré (1993) suggest in their study that the four to six-year-olds and the Preoperational subjects had difficulty with ideas that families can include one parent with their child or siblings without parents. These children need the presence of other family members in the scenarios in order for them to qualify as a family group. Also, the four to six-year-old and Preoperational subjects were not as accepting of the situations of different types of families where the relatives did not co-reside. For instance, extended family members or a single parent living away. By ages two to five years, most children have developed skills to pay attention for continued periods, recognize previously seen information, recall old information, and recreate it in the present (Petersen, Puckett, & Wittmer, 2013, p. 20). For example, a child should be able to remember who is in their family and recognize that they can see the similarities and differences between his or her family and someone else's.

Since children in Kindergarten enjoy shared book reading and can engage with the book when the reader is asking questions, my plan is to read the books, and ask the children questions regarding the story and their own family in relation to the book. In addition, I will have Kindergarten students from the Dual Language Academy of the Monterey Peninsula participate in the project, which will be integrated into the existing curriculum. My goal is to broaden

Kindergarten students and teach them that there are many types of families. This is important for explaining diversity among families, building respect, and acceptance among children.

### **Consideration of Diversity**

The diversity in this project focuses on diversity in family types and broadening Kindergarteners' ideas of family to be more inclusive than just two parents and children. In addition, because the project will be conducted at the Dual Language Academy of the Monterey Peninsula, a significant portion of the participants will be mostly Latino and White, reflective of the student population who attend that school. Dual Language Academy of Monterey Bay has a race demographic of 361 students. Out of the 361 students, 284 students, or 78.7% of the student population identify as Hispanic. This percentage makes up the largest portion of the student body (Dual Language Academy Of The Monterey Peninsula in Seaside, California). Furthermore, according to the school's census, 9.4% of the school's students in attendance are identified as White, the Asian population of the school is 1.1%, those who identify as Black make up 5.8% of the population and students who are mixed or two-races make up 4.7%. The lowest population at the Dual Language Academy is Pacific Islander with .3%. Also, many of the families are military families or work for the military in the area, which may bring broader notions of "family" given that some may experience a parent being deployed and may reside with one parent or other relatives for a period of time.

As far as diversity goes, Watson and Amgott-Kwan (1984) make the argument that by nine years old, most children could define a traditional family. By twelve years old, most children could compare a traditional family with a childless couple or a single-parent family.

Family dynamics have changed and according to Gray, Franco, Garcia, Gesselman, and Fisher (2016), single parents make up approximately one-third of the United States population.

Furthermore, 27% of children in the United States under the age of 18 live with a single parent. I assume that those 27% have friends that are introduced to the single parent or divorced household. This possibly creates a larger group of children who are more open to different types of families and making them less judgmental.

Another study claims Mexican and French children understood family concepts. "Children's understanding of the concept of family undergoes important developmental changes during the elementary school years" (Diez-Martinez & Remigy, 1999, p. 109). Based on this, children's concepts grow and adapt as they grow older. To continue, Mexican children in the study tended to refer to family as blood related while the French children referred to families as having a legal-biological relation. When the children were asked a series of questions about families, they had predispositions about family dynamics based on blood relations or legal relations. The study concludes with stating that children are able to differentiate family roles based on what they see at home and what they are exposed to.

The students in the project I am pursuing are of diverse backgrounds. Mentioned earlier, there are families that are not the traditional nuclear types. I have not taken a survey of the Kindergarten classroom; however, it is possible that there are some children in the class that have siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles that could be primary caretakers.

### **Learning Outcomes**

Learning outcomes

1. Students will identify one or more ways their family is like other families and one or more ways their family is not like other families.
2. Students will indicate one cultural tradition that their family celebrates.
3. Students will describe one family structure different from the one in which they live.



My goal of this project is to introduce family oriented material to a class of Kindergarten students over the course of three days. I chose two books to read to the students and following up with worksheet activities. The books I chose are *The Family Book* by Todd Parr, *The Great Big Book of Families* by Mary Hoffman.

### **Method**

#### **Day 1**

The opening activity will include a large fill in the blank chart where I will write “Families” on the top, “have” on the left, “can live” in the middle, and “are” on the right. See Appendix A for an example. The students will verbally fill in the blanks under the headings, based on what they think families have in them, such as brothers or sisters. Then, they will tell me where they believe families can live, and finally, they will describe what characteristics families have in the third column of the chart. I will write their responses on the chart before I read *The Family Book*. The book is shown in Appendix B. After reading the book, we will return to the chart and add other words that are considered. My goal is to begin the project by having a clear perception of what the students know about families.

#### **Day 2**

We will begin Day two by reading *The Great Big Book of Families*, see Appendix C for an example, there will be an activity. Their mission will be to create a family that is different from the family they live with. The worksheet will be a way to give them a visual of a different family and will challenge their egocentrism. An example of this worksheet can be found on Appendix D. In order to be inclusive of diversity, they can color the people however they would like.

#### **Day 3**

On the last day, I will start by returning to *The Great Big Book of Families* because it shares ways that different families share different traditions or holidays. I plan to save that section specifically for the last day. After finishing the book, I will distribute a family tradition worksheet with a few lines underneath to write “My family celebrates \_\_\_\_.” Or, “In my family, we \_\_\_\_.” There will be scaffolding from their teacher, student teacher, and me. The Kindergarten students are capable of writing, but they will need assistance with the larger words. Also, the worksheet has an outlined area to draw a picture of the tradition or holiday correlating with their sentences. See Appendix E for an example.

### **Results**

Learning outcome 1 was: students will identify one or more ways their family is like other families and one or more ways their family is not like other families. We created a chart that included possible ways that different families live. There were two groups for this day. The first group consisted of 17 students and the second group had 15 students in attendance. I think the first group that I had on the first day was materialistic in describing families. They talked about what families have in regards to items such as money or video game technology. The second group was more open minded and explained that families can live in castles if they are royal, or in apartments, or houses. I provided the two groups charts in Appendix F and G, respectively. I do not believe the learning outcome was met because I realized during the lesson that I did not have a helpful way to record ways that the students could describe how he or she's family is like other families and one or more ways he or she's family is not like other families. If I had more time and was not rushed, I definitely could have asked students how their families compare and contrast to others.

Learning outcome 2 was: students will describe one family structure different from the one in which they live. In Appendix H, I have provided an example of how the participant created a family that differs from his own. The students invented a variety of family types. Some of these included, a man and woman, two fathers and a son, grandparents and grandchildren, and a house full of many families. Although I do not know every child's at home living situation, I feel that the lesson was successful since the teachers emphasized the instructions of making a different family and the teachers know the students families better than I do. Also, I noted that there were no nuclear families created. The assignment was successful and the learning outcome was met. The students created a family that was different than their own, with the help from the teacher and teacher's aide. They were able to remind the students to not make their own families that they have at home.

Learning outcome 3 was: students will indicate one cultural tradition that their family celebrates. The story that was read for this was *The Great Big Book of Families*. An image of this book can be found in Appendix C. I divided this book into two sessions because there were many pages that described traditions, holidays, and hobbies that family members celebrate. The activity that followed was a worksheet titled, "My Family Traditions" and can be found in Appendix E. In Appendix I, there is an example of a student's work provided. Overall, I think this was successful since the students all participated. Out of the thirty participants on this day, 66% mentioned different holidays, traditions, or hobbies than their peers. 16% described a unique holiday, tradition, or hobby such as Diwali, Earth Day, and Chinese New Year, going to the beach and visiting "Jump Around." The other 18% described holidays that were similar to their peers celebrations. There were three students that indicated Halloween was a holiday they celebrate, two students to mention Easter, five described Birthdays, and five wrote about

Christmas. The learning outcome was met because all of the students described a holiday, tradition, or hobby they partake in with their families.

### **Discussion**

The main reason I conducted this project was to introduce diversity and acceptance among young children, in regards to families being the subject. I find it important to educate young children about this topic because they are able to absorb the information I present to them. Overall, I am confident in confirming the success rate of my project. The results showed that the children in my study were open-minded and absorbed the information successfully.

Developmentally, I think egocentrism, as used by Piaget and others, played a large part in the project when discussing different family types. For instance, having the children create a family that was different than their own challenged their minds since they were trying to make their own family and had to be reminded to make a different one. You should explain how this is egocentrism and why this is a challenge for Kindergarteners--doing so will make this section really powerful

The 3 day lesson plan that consisted of reading stories and completing correlating worksheets and activities was developmentally appropriate. On the first day, I read *The Family Book* by Todd Parr and the students filled out a chart that described characteristics of a family. During the second session, I read *The Great Big Book of Families* by Mary Hoffman. The students built a family that was different than the family in which they live with. On the final day, I finished *The Great Big Book of Families* and the children used a worksheet to write and draw a picture about a holiday or tradition that they celebrate with a family. Kindergarten students enjoyed shared book reading and the corresponding activities and worksheets suited their academic abilities.

In order to include more diversity, I would have liked to bring the Crayola crayons that are specifically used for coloring multicultural people. Crayola has created packs of colors that are for coloring diverse people. The package contains hues of skin tone colors and it could have been appropriate to the activities. I could not find the packs of those crayons. I think if I could have used them, the students would have seen that the packaging has different colored people and would have colored their diverse families with the different colors. Most of the families that were made turned out to be Caucasian because many children did not color the faces or they used the peach color.

If I were to do this again, I would omit the cat and dog characters from the Build a Different Family activity since the students were eager to use them first, which was a distraction from the intent of the activity. In addition, I felt rushed while reading and doing the activities. I would have liked to have maybe 5 to 10 more minutes each day to allow the students complete the worksheets. In addition, in my eagerness to do the lesson, I forgot to utilize the worksheets the teacher uses at the beginning of lessons, is the biggest regret I have of the project. The teacher shared a worksheet, entitled Know, Want to Know, and What I Learned (KWL), and it is divided into three segments. The first segment asks the student to write down what they already know about the topic. The second segment asks what they want to know about the topic. The last segment asks them to explain what they learned about the topic. It to be used to analyze what the students started off knowing about the topic and finishes with understanding what they learned. I was planning on using the sheets, but I was nervous starting the lesson, and it slipped my mind. If I have used the worksheet, the first Learning Outcome would have been supported and successful in knowing what the student's learned. Finally, if I were to do this again, I would slow down and try to not be nervous. I was nervous my first day only because I have never taught a

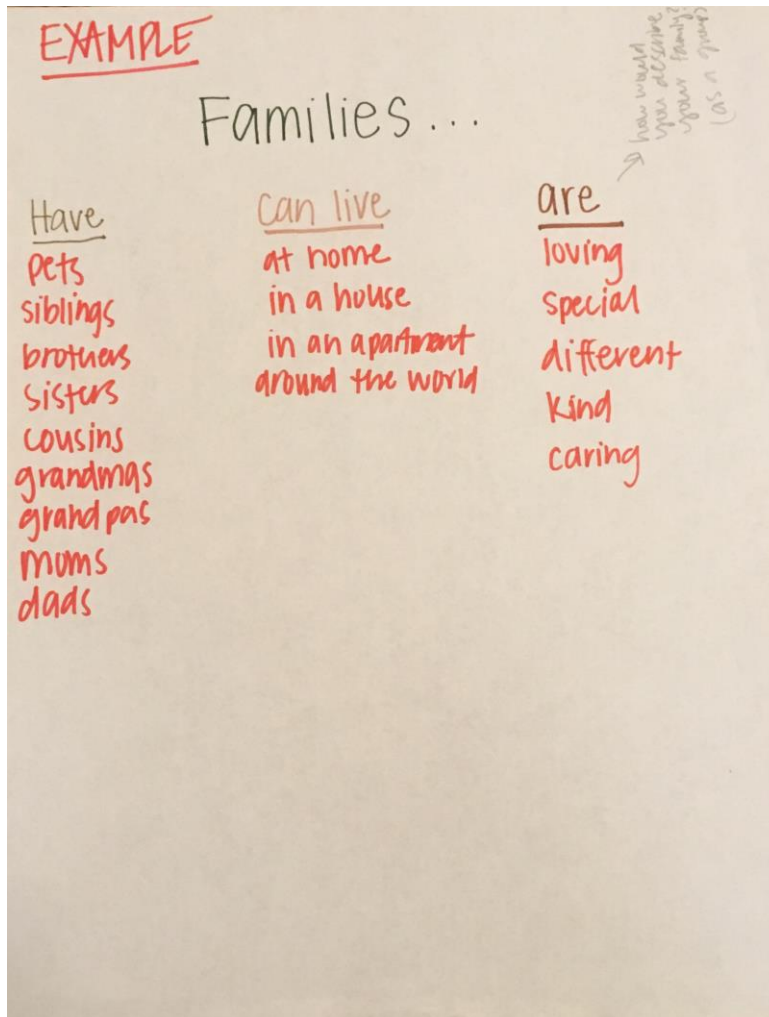
lesson to a class. I felt fine after I began the first lesson, but I think it went too quickly and it would have taken more time if I had used the KWL worksheets.

In conclusion, my Capstone project was successful, and I had high success rates. The results showed that the children were able to consider different family types.

## References

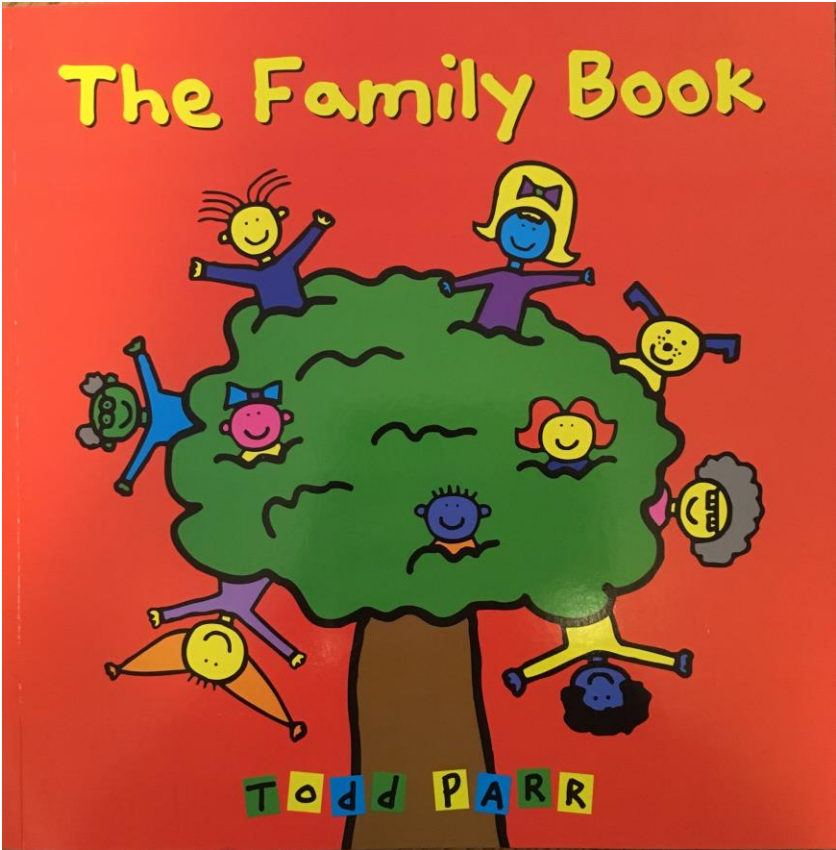
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Appendix A

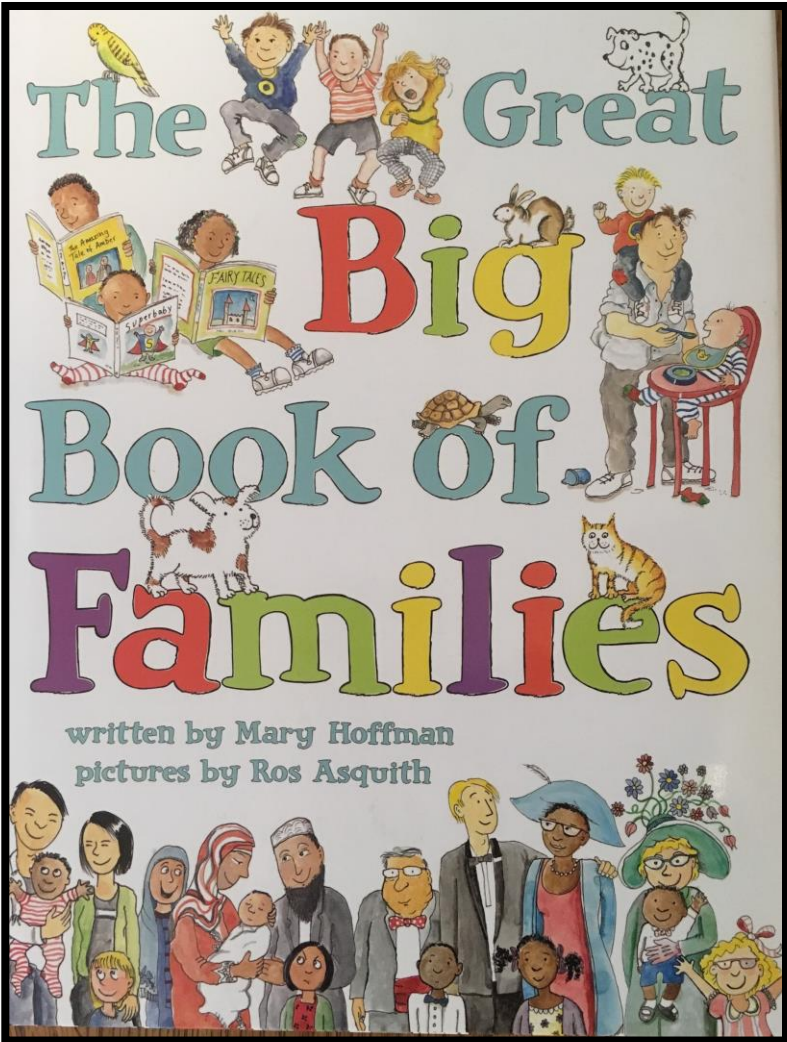




Appendix B

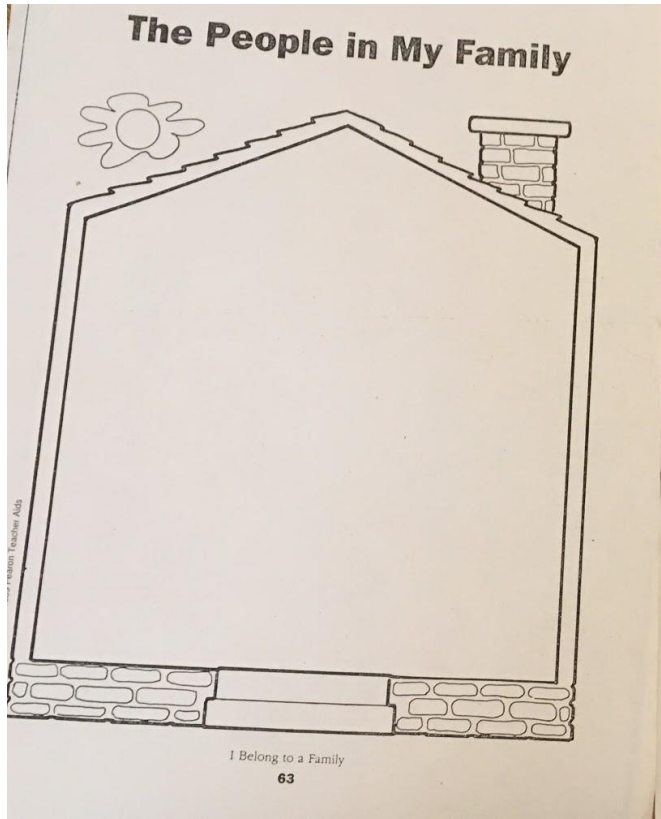


Appendix C



Appendix D

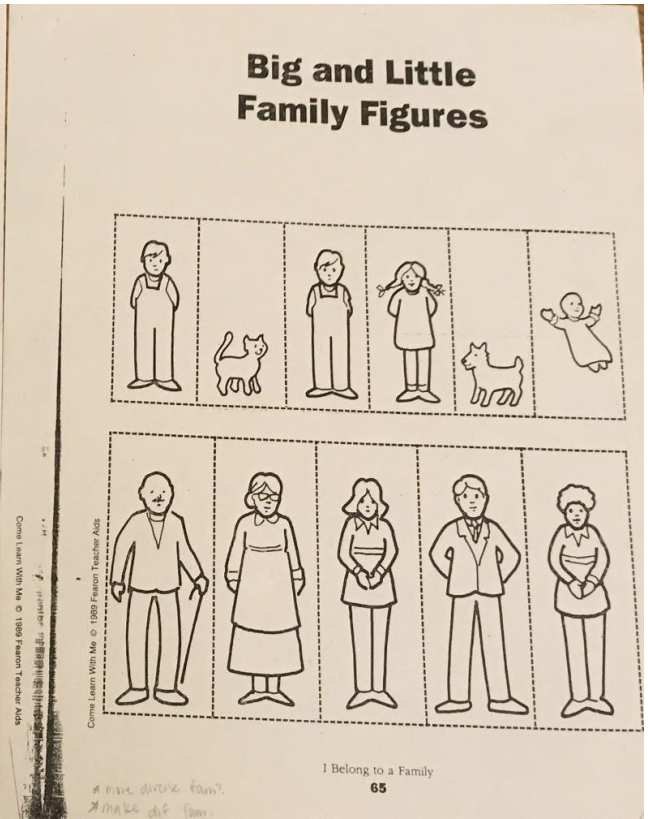
### The People in My Family



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I Belong to a Family  
63

### Big and Little Family Figures



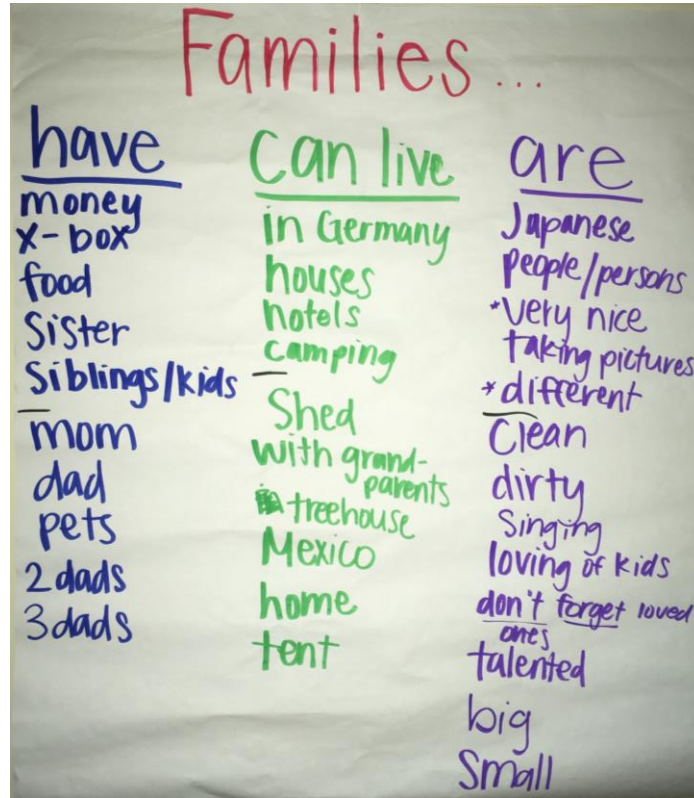
Come Learn With Me © 1989 Pearson Teacher Aids

I Belong to a Family  
65

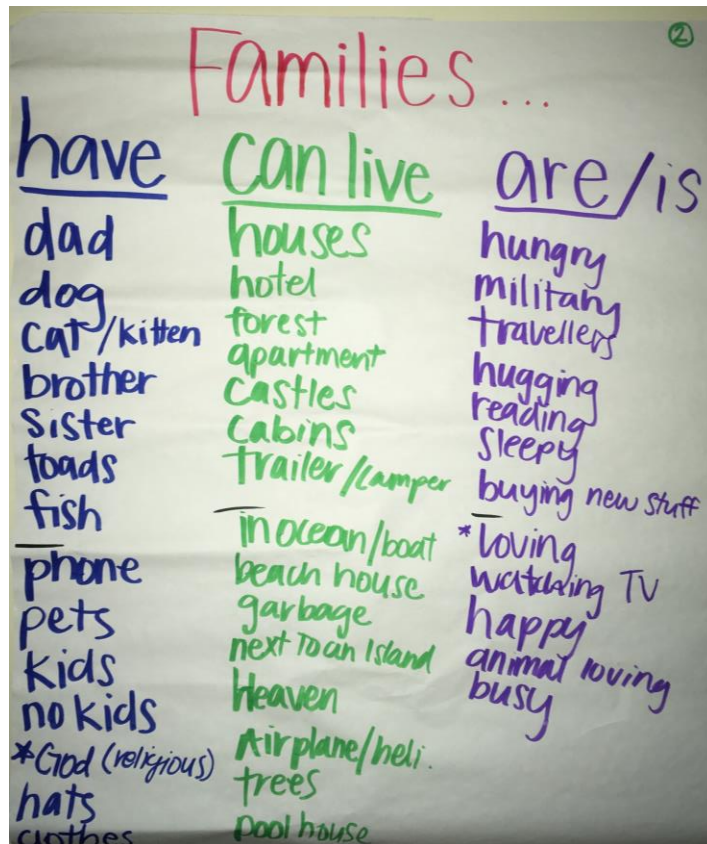
*A little girl's family.  
\*MAKE HER OWN*



Appendix F



Appendix G





Appendix H



Appendix I

