School Experiences of Children Raised by Same-Sex Parents, and their Families: A Review of Literature.

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ABSTRACT

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This research carries forward a systematic literature review that will delve into the experiences of same-sex parents and their children in the foreign and local society and school setting. After having looked into such experiences, the researcher puts forward practices which have been implemented successfully overseas and which may be implemented in the same manner in local schools and classrooms. Some of the main practices include celebrating family week/day instead of mother’s/father’s day, introducing lesbian and gay- friendly themed literature in the classroom, displaying gay and lesbian-friendly material in school corridors and classrooms and altering the way of addressing parents through school circulars so that the vocabulary used is more inclusive. According to the annual review conducted by ILGA-Europe (2015), the local setting seems to be developing at a good pace as Malta finds itself in the third position in relation to the human rights granted to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals. Developments leading to such results include the legalisation of civil unions between same-sex couples, joint adoption rights, and a bullying policy addressing homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools (ILGA-Europe, 2015). Nevertheless, there is still more which needs to be done when it comes to the local educational setting. The researcher acknowledges the various limitations which she encountered when carrying out this dissertation, mainly, the lack of available local research on the topic.

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KEYWORDS: SAME-SEX PARENTS CHILDREN IN SAME-SEX FAMILIES INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES
Declaration of Authenticity

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this dissertation. I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, my work does not make unauthorised use of the ideas and techniques of others. I proclaim that I have done my best to appropriately reference all the material, ideas, and techniques used throughout this dissertation. Furthermore, I certify that this is an original copy of my work, in accordance with the regulations of the University of Malta.

______________________
Katrina Lautier

May 2016
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my late grandfather Michael for believing in me as a young girl and for being my constant motivation all throughout this learning journey.
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First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Ms. Ruth Baldacchino B.A. (Hons)(Melit.),M.A.(Hibernia), without whom this dissertation would not have been possible; for her patience, guidance and for lending her expertise.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In recent years, the number of issues concerning lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people have risen drastically in Malta. This period saw its peak two years ago when the Civil Unions Act of 2014 made civil unions available to same-sex couples after a bill was voted for in parliament. The passing of this bill provides equal civil marriage rights to both opposite-sex and same-sex couples. It also brought forward an even more controversial issue regarding the adoption of children by same-sex couples (Malta Independent, 2014). The researcher thus feels that such events and issues, as well as the possibility of teaching children raised in a same-sex family, entails further research about the subject not only in education but also in various areas of society.

1.1 Research question and its purpose

Throughout this dissertation, the researcher intends to look into the experiences of same-sex parents and their children in the primary classroom by reviewing existing literature. Through the research question, the researcher’s main objective is to establish how educators and authorities can welcome children coming from same-sex parents in the school and the classroom by promoting equality through an inclusive education for all.

What inspired the researcher to focus on this area of research was the introduction of civil unions between same-sex individuals which recently stole the limelight in local newspapers and television stations. The researcher believes that the ‘feared’ change, where children’s parents may be both men or women, is, by now, present in classrooms as these are already characterised by a number of children whose parents are in a relationship with someone of the same-sex after having left their opposite-sex partner. Today we live in a pluralistic society. Homosexual individuals should not be constrained from enjoying the same rights as heterosexuals, and educators are amongst those responsible for instilling the value of acceptance towards diversity and the value of equality in pupils who will
be the new generation. Discussions about LGBT individuals should no longer remain a controversial issue as these already form part of our society. When it comes to this dissertation, the researcher decided to narrow the research by excluding any information about the situation of transgender and bisexual individuals, thus allowing this research to be more focused and specific in relation to lesbian and gay families.

1.2 Terminology

For the purpose of this dissertation, the researcher uses concepts and terms related to the field of education and sexuality. Below, a list and a brief definition of the most occurring concepts and terms in this dissertation, is provided.

- **Inclusive education** - this is an “education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 4). Stubbs (2008) rightly so, claims that inclusive education entails “changing the system to fit the student, not changing the student to fit the system. It locates the ‘problem’ of exclusion firmly within the system, not the person or their characteristics” (p. 8).

- **Sexual orientation** - this term refers to the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted. Categories of sexual orientation typically have included attraction to members of one’s own sex (gay men or lesbians), attraction to members of the other sex (heterosexuals), and attraction to members of both sexes (bisexuals). (American Psychological Association, 2012, p. 11)

- **Homosexual** - this term refers to “an adult whose fantasies, attachments, and longings are predominantly for persons of the same gender” (Reiter, as cited in Harvey, 1996, p. 81).
• **Heterosexual** - this term refers to a person who is physically and emotionally attracted to someone of the opposite sex.

• **Transgender** - “Transgender is an umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity (sense of themselves as male or female) or gender expression differs from that usually associated with their birth sex” (American Psychological Association, 2006, p. 1).

• **LGBT** - this acronym stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender.

• **Family constellations** - this term refers to the different family structures that exist in society. Thus, it focuses on the members and the relationships within a family. Family constellations include traditional heterosexual families made up of a male father and a female mother, single parent families, divorced/separated families, adoptive families as well as homosexual families consisting of parents of the same-sex.

• **Same-sex/rainbow families** - both terms refer to a family made up of two people of the same sex living under the same roof, and in the case of this dissertation raising a child. Children may come to belong to this family through various ways such as adoption, surrogacy, artificial insemination, sperm donations or else from previous heterosexual relationships (Solodnikov & Chkanikova, 2010).

### 1.3 Structure

Throughout the chapters of this dissertation, the researcher reviewed existing research on the topic under study in order to show how the Maltese setting can adjust to such situations. The chapters offer the reader a historical overview of same-sex families and lesbian and gay individuals, both in Malta, as well as overseas. Furthermore, the researcher discusses the situation of same-sex parents and their children in the local education system and as a consequence provides practical examples of how our schools and classrooms can be more lesbian and gay-inclusive.
In Chapter two, the researcher presents a brief literature review on issues related to the topic of the dissertation and the research question. The composition of this chapter resulted from the reading of a number of foreign and local journal articles in order to gather information related to same-sex families. In this chapter, the researcher will discuss in brief the history of same-sex families, effects of same-sex parenting on children, the local situation of same-sex couples and children of same-sex parents in the classrooms.

Chapter three is dedicated to the methodology and the methods used to carry out this research. The researcher chose to carry out a systematic literature review for this dissertation. A more detailed explanation of what such a method entails is also given in this chapter. Furthermore, the researcher will explain the main reasons behind choosing such a research method from amongst others available.

Chapter four will include further analysis and discussion about some of the emerging issues mentioned in chapter two as well as others related to the topic. Above all, in this chapter, the researcher gives major importance to putting forward inclusive school and classroom practices which were implemented successfully overseas. A section of this chapter will be particularly dedicated to gay and lesbian-themed children’s literature. Particular attention is given to this as, so far, the introduction of such books, seems to have been identified as the sole action taken by the Maltese education system in order to make more inclusive classrooms, even though, this too has been unsuccessful. The concluding chapter provides an overview of the research, further recommendations, and school and classroom implications.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter explores the different perceptions individuals have regarding same-sex parenting. Reference to available research studies and literature will, however, contradict the everyday hypothesis about lesbian and gay parenting. Such hypothesis may include the idea that same-sex parenting has a negative impact on children exposed to it and may be viewed as unnatural as it goes against the teachings of the Church. The researcher will look at how attitudes regarding same-sex couples evolved both in Malta and in other countries, whilst keeping in mind the lack of data available in the research area. Furthermore, this chapter briefly covers research regarding the implications of same-sex parenting in education and how educators and education settings can cater for gender and sexual orientation diversities.

2.1 History of same-sex families

The starting point would have to be that of defining the term sexual orientation and as a result, homosexuality which is one of the main topics throughout this research. The American Psychological Association (APA) (2008), defines sexual orientation as “an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes” (p. 1). Furthermore, the APA (2010) explains that sexual orientation is a more accurate term to use rather than homosexual as the latter brings connotations of “negative stereotypes, pathology, and the reduction of people’s identities to their sexual behaviors” (p. 74). Therefore, specific terms such as gay men and lesbians are more appropriate.

Children are brought into same-sex families mainly through four ways:

1. The child was born in a previous heterosexual relationship which one of the homosexual partners might have had;
2. The child is adopted by same-sex couples or lesbian and gay individuals where the law permits;
3. The child is conceived through IVF or carried to term by a surrogate mother;

4. In the case of lesbians, the child is conceived via a sperm donor bank or a sperm donor. (Solodnikov & Chkanikova, 2010; Lamme & Lamme, 2001; Ryan & Martin, 2000).

Shockingly enough, the reality today, in the 21st century, is still one where laws assume that homosexuals are not adequate parents. As a result, those who separate from their heterosexual partner to get into a homosexual relationship tend to lose custody of their child (Berk, 2009). Ryan and Martin (2000) explain how traditionally, the definition of family was determined by two factors: biological links and legal rights of parenthood. However, they continue to explain how, nowadays, due to the diverse family constellations that characterise our societies, the factors that determine the meaning of family, are the actual intention to be parents and the actual undertaking of the responsibilities and functions of parents.

In 1989, Denmark became the first country to recognise same-sex relationships through "registered partnerships" (p.395) followed by its Scandinavian neighbours, Norway and Sweden (Stacey, 2002). With regard to heterosexual couples becoming parents and constructing their own families through the upbringing of children, the late 1980s saw a boom in the number of children living with same-sex parents in the United States with an increase to between six to fourteen million (Stacey, 2002). Later on, during the 1990s, the number of children in 1rainbow households continued to increase as same-sex couples in a number of US States were allowed by the law to start adopting children. As a result “the population census conducted in the United States in 2000 revealed that 34 percent of lesbian couples and 22 percent of gay (male) couples were bringing up children to the age of eighteen” (Solodnikov & Chkanikova, 2010, p. 39).

1The term rainbow households refers to “families formed by one or two same-sex attracted persons raising a child or children” (Hočevar, 2014, p. 83).
Same-sex families differ also amongst themselves as they are either ‘closeted’ or else ‘out of the closet’ (Lamme & Lamme, 2001). Coming out of the closet is defined by Adams (2010) as the term used to refer to the instance when individuals validate their “nonheterosexuality by way of discourse or action” (p. 236) such as by kissing someone of the same-sex or simply exclaiming their sexual orientation in public. On the other hand remaining in the closet entails for homosexual individuals to not disclose their sexuality (Adams, 2010). Lamme and Lamme (2001) found that children coming from closeted homosexual families are more likely to fear harassment and loss of friends as well as fear their parents’ maltreatment and loss of jobs because of their sexual orientation. On the other hand, children raised in families who are out of the closet feel the constant need of explaining their family situation, are more likely to become representatives of the gay community as well as learn how to defend their family constellation (Lamme & Lamme, 2001).

Same-sex couples might choose to remain in the closet for various reasons. Same-sex parents might fear that their disclosure will negatively affect their child custody as in some countries parents might lose custody simply because of their sexual orientation (Ryan & Martin, 2000). Furthermore, the authors continue by explaining that lesbian and gay parents fear the discrimination and social rejection both of themselves as well as of their children; they assume that their child’s peers might not want to play at their house as their heterosexual parents might not allow this or else that their children might be excluded from party invitations and sleepovers (Ryan & Martin, 2000). Ryan and Martin (2000) continue to explain that lesbian and gay people postpone their disclosure due to lack of protection in employment and housing that they experience in some countries because of their non-normative sexual orientation. Nevertheless, coming out of the closet has limitless advantages as it “facilitates free discussion in the classroom about family diversity”, “furthers the social integration of a child with sexual minority parents” (p. 208) and helps to engage children in issues relating to difference and tolerance (Ryan & Martin, 2000).
2.2 Effects of same-sex parenting

Regardless of their sexual orientation, children in same-sex families become part of the LGBT community and “as such, they likely face a homophobic, heterosexist and anti-gay society, particularly at school” (Lamme & Lamme, 2001, p. 66). With regard to the effects of same-sex parenting on children’s wellbeing, many studies serve to contradict the prejudices and stereotypes many individuals have in relation to the upbringing of children by same-sex couples. Many argue that it is not right for children to be raised by a couple of gays or lesbians as it is against the norm, it is against God’s teaching and as a consequence, children’s development will be negatively influenced. Such utterances are used by people in today’s society as an excuse for their discriminatory beliefs. The main concern is that children of same-sex parents will be stigmatised as a result of their parents’ sexual orientation (Berk, 2009).

Recent research studies compared children belonging to same-sex families to those belonging to traditional heterosexual families on the basis of several dimensions, including self-esteem, adjustment, sexual orientation, identity development, and psychological symptoms (Hart, Mourot, & Aros, 2012). No differences were identified in each of these dimensions between the two groups (Hart et al., 2012). Through their study Crowl, Ahn and Baker (2008) concluded that “children raised by same-sex and heterosexual parents were found not to differ significantly in terms of their cognitive development, gender role behaviour, gender identity, psychological adjustment, or sexual preferences” (p. 398). Furthermore, various studies show how, in many cases, lesbian and gay parents have “better relationships with their children than did heterosexual parents” (Crowl, Ahn and Baker, 2008, p. 398; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Stacey & Biblarz, 2001; Potter, 2012).

Researchers such as Baumrind (as cited in Fedewa & Clark, 2009) demonstrate that what is important is the parental style rather than the parental status variables; in other words, what matters the most is the parents’ warmth, control, discipline practices
and responsiveness amongst other variables and not the parents’ socio-economic status, ethnicity, race or sexual orientation. Tasker (as cited in Berk, 2009) explains how the majority of the studies show that the incidents of bullying and teasing are rare, mainly due to the fact that same-sex parents and children of homosexuals are careful about the information they reveal to others regarding their family situation.

While appreciating such positive research findings, one still cannot neglect the unfortunate reality whereby the majority of the children belonging to same-sex families experience fear of being ostracised or bullied at school because of their parents’ sexual orientation (Fedewa & Clark, 2009). Because of such reasons, many parents and children hold back from disclosing their sexual orientation with school staff and administration (Fedewa & Clark, 2009; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Lamme & Lamme, 2002). Furthermore, when Hart et al. (2012) conducted interviews with children belonging to same-sex families who were still in the closet, most of the replies involved words with negative connotations such as ‘sad’, ‘lonely’, ‘ashamed’ and ‘worried’. Children involved in this study also explained how “they would intentionally not invite friends over, avoid conversations and questions about their families, and would actively advocate against both same-sex parents attending school events” (Hart et al., 2012, p. 279). People’s concerns with regard to children brought up in same-sex families include the idea of affliction when it comes to gender identity, inclination towards a particular sexual orientation and effects on the physical and mental wellbeing (Solodnikov & Chkanikova, 2010).

2.3 Local situation of same-sex couples

One must acknowledge the limitations regarding the research around this area of study in the local setting. Locally the ‘modern’ history of gay and lesbian couples can be traced back to 1973 when Prime Minister Dom Mintoff decriminalised homosexuality (sodomy) after it was treated as a taboo and as a sin by the Catholic Church in Malta (Balzan, 2014; Caruana, 2003). As a response to Mintoff’s decision, Archbishop Michael Gonzi issued a pastoral letter against the decriminalisation of homosexuality whereby he
refers to a homosexual person as “marid jehtieg kura u għajnuna” (Gonzi, 1973, Pastorali ta’ l-isqifiżet) : a sick person needing cure and help.

Rich (as cited in Paula & da Silva, 2014) writes

When those who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you . . . when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing. (p. 40)

The researcher feels that such words shed a light on how LGBT individuals and their families felt over the years, having authorities deny their existence. Such a denial must have led to a feeling of ostracisation, a sense of being different in a negative way, a feeling of lack of belongingness and discrimination amongst others.

Until 2010, Malta sill ranked very low in gay rights followed by Poland, Latvia, and Cyprus, which were considered to be the least tolerant on an equal basis with the Vatican City (Camilleri, 2010). Nevertheless, recently, in 2015, Malta now finds itself within the top three countries together with the United Kingdom and Belgium when it comes to the human rights situation of LGBTI people in Europe (ILGA-Europe, 2015). This was achieved due to the various developments that took place in Malta in the recent past. Malta was in fact described as “the first European country ...[that] constitutionally outlaw[ed] discrimination based on gender identity; legalised civil unions for all couples, including joint adoption rights; and proposed aligning legal gender recognition procedures to the highest human rights standards” (ILGA-Europe, 2015, p. 111). The first step forward was taken back in 2008, precisely during the national general election, when the Malta Gay Rights Movement (MGRM) put forward a petition signed by over 1,000 Maltese citizens calling for the formal recognition of same-sex couples, the criminalisation of bullying related to sexual orientation as well as a clear strategy addressing such bullying in schools (Malta Gay Rights Movement, n.d.).

On the 14th of April 2014, same-sex couples were granted the right to civil unions after a bill was successfully passed through the Maltese Parliament with thirty-seven
votes in favour, thirty abstentions and zero votes against (Malta Independent, 2014). This same bill gives the same rights and obligations to same-sex couples as heterosexual couples (Malta Independent, 2014). With the passing of this bill, same-sex couples also acquired the right to submit applications for child adoption as a couple, as till 2008 they could only ask for adoption as individuals (Briguglio, 2014; Zaimov, 2014). Even though time passed and the church has moved on, what Archbishop Michael Gonzi exclaimed in his pastoral letter back in 1973, was similarly argued by Archbishop Charles Scicluna in 2014, who stated that civil unions “did not provide what’s best for the children” (Zaimov, 2014, “Malta legalizes same-sex unions”). With regard to adoption by lesbian and gay parents, he maintained that “this does not reflect the order established by God in creation and may expose the children eventually entrusted to such adoptive parents to adverse effects” (Zaimov, 2014, “Malta legalizes same-sex unions”).

In the education system the issue of lesbian and gay intolerance is dominant most of all in Church Schools. This has been shown recently by the Malta Union of Teachers who was in a disagreement with the Curia after the latter published a draft document on school staff appointments whereby one of the appendices is entitled ‘Practicing Catholic as a requirement for eligibility and selection of staff in Church Schools’ (Vella, 2014). Furthermore, Vella (2014) explains how a church school used more or less the same words as requirements as it offered the vacancy of an assistant head and PSD teachers. Such a statement might impede “the employment of divorced teachers, gay [or lesbian] teachers, or even single parents who have children out of wedlock” (Vella, 2014, “Top teaching posts”), as teachers and staff in Church schools are required “to adhere, in the substantive life choices that they make, to the teaching of the Catholic Church” (Curia, n.d., p. 16). All of this has negative implications on children of same-sex parents as there is a lack of role models or people who can positively comprehend what they and their families are going through. On this matter, Lamme and Lamme (2001) explain how children with same-sex parents “may feel that they are surely the only one in their situation and might be especially grateful for the chance to talk with someone who understands” (p. 68).
2.4 Children of same-sex parents in our classrooms

Studies show that, due to stigmatisation, one cannot have an accurate measure of the number of pupils in our classrooms who are raised by same-sex parents. However, previous studies suggest that in the US “1.5 million to 14 million children have at least one gay or lesbian parent” (Fedewa & Clark, 2009, p. 313). This quota continues to emphasise the need for studies such as this about the research area.

Anyone who has anything to do with children’s education, from authors writing children’s literature, to anyone who tutors future teachers and teachers themselves, must be aware and keep in mind that schooling is for all children and not just for a stratum (Smolkin & Young, 2011). Children’s painful feelings are not the consequence of their family’s constellation, but of their teacher’s assumption that every child has a father and a mother (Burt, Gelnaw & Lesser, 2010). Shockingly enough, the research carried out by Kosciw and Diaz (2008) shows that LGBT-parented children are not only ill-treated by same-age peers but “39% heard homophobic remarks from teachers or other school staff in their schools” (p. 15). The extreme heterosexist practices, precisely the discriminatory attitudes characterising society are the main reasons behind the high percentage of maltreatment of which LGBT youth and LGBT families remain victims. Such a climate leads to higher rates of depression as well as suppressed identities within pupils and their families (Smolkin & Young, 2011).

Research shows that children’s educational development depends not on their parents’ sexual orientation, but very much on their parents’ involvement in the school setting as well as the home-school relationship (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Potter, 2012; Fox, 2007). The nature of the partnership between the home and the school depends on the school climate which McBrien and Brandt (as cited in Fedewa & Clark, 2009) define as “the value, cultures, safety policies, and organizational structures that determine how a school will operate” (p. 315). Fedewa and Clark (2009) explain how a positive school climate will result in positive home-school relationships which will lead to a higher level
of academic achievement amongst the pupils and a reduction in behavioural problems. They continue by arguing that unfortunately this is not the case when it comes to same-sex families who may feel unsafe and unwelcome in the school setting. Although there is limited research on same-sex parents’ home-school partnership and children’s outcomes, one needs to remain aware of the reality whereby these children often find themselves in a context that is adverse towards sexual minority families (Fedewa & Clark, 2009).

Same-sex parents, as well as their children, are under constant stress when it comes to disclosing their sexual orientation. In order to lessen this anxiety, it is paramount that educators find ways on how to establish an inclusive classroom setting which caters for the requirements of same-sex families (Style, 1996). Style (1996) talks about a school curriculum which serves as a window and a mirror to children. When the curriculum acts as a window, it helps children to understand the experiences and perspectives of others who have different ideologies, whereas when the curriculum acts as a mirror it validates the pupils’ experiences, it reinforces their value and self-worth and it provides space for their voices (Style, 1996). This can be executed through a variety of practices as can be seen later on in this dissertation. A simple practice could be that of including textbooks and reading books which depict same-sex families (Eccleshare, 2012; Rowell, 2007; Emfinger, 2007; Burt et al., 2010).

Adults in the school setting usually refrain from teaching and speaking about rainbow families and sexual orientation issues because they view such topics as inappropriate and irrelevant to young children’s lives (Sapp, 2010). What they fail to understand is that all the adults, which children are surrounded with, serve as role models and therefore they play an important role in communicating the idea that all individuals should be treated equally in a respectful manner regardless of their sexual orientation (Sapp, 2010; Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Educators should teach children about multiple sexualities and diverse family structures as from early childhood. This is necessary because if such teachings are postponed to when the children are at a later
stage of their education, then the aim of teaching at this point would be that of “unlearning prejudice instead of preventing it” (Sapp, 2010, p. 33).

2.5 Conclusion

After analysing the literature mentioned in this chapter, it is evident that the sexual orientation of the parents, or rather the attitudes that people have towards the sexual orientation of parents, highly impacts the children’s sense of belonging and safety at school. Critical evaluation of local situations and research highlight the discriminatory and intolerable nature of the Maltese population as a whole. Furthermore, it shows that even though outlined areas have undergone improvements there is still much more that needs to be done for Maltese educational settings to become inclusive of all. What educators fail to realise is that the practices used to embrace same-sex families, such as the lack of biased language used in classrooms and in school forms, may also be extendable for the acceptance of other family constellations such as single-parent, adoptive and extended families (Lamme & Lamme, 2001).
Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Qualitative research and systematic literature review

For the purpose of this dissertation, a qualitative research method was chosen. The researcher systematically reviewed literature available around same-sex families and their inclusion in everyday classroom life. This research method was chosen because the researcher believed that a possible case study in this area of study might have been too difficult to conduct due to the limitations in the local setting. Stigmatisation might discourage same-sex parents to disclose their true sexual orientation and thus the number of children raised in same-sex families is unknown when it comes to the local setting. It is important to differentiate between a simple narrative review and a systematic literature review which is the one used in this research. The former involves simply narrating what has been found previously by other researchers in the area of study, whilst the latter is more concise as it is “based on a clearly formulated question, identifies relevant studies, appraises their quality and summarises the evidence by use of explicit methodology” (Ryan, 2010, “Guidance notes on planning”).

Qualitative research is mainly concerned with “how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). Morse (2005) agrees, and explains how qualitative inquiry is based “on the collection of stories, narratives, and descriptions of others’ experiences” (p. 859). Such definitions of what qualitative research is, sustain its validity of use for the purpose of this study which is concerned with the experiences of same-sex families and their children. Strauss and Corbin (1990) explain how the use of qualitative research methods is ideal when the researcher wants to understand better any phenomenon about which little is known so far, as in the case of the topic of this dissertation. Qualitative research also differs from other research methods, especially from quantitative research, when it comes to its outcome data. This is because such a research method is not concerned with numbers but rather working with multiple data collection techniques such as texts, as is the
case of this dissertation. Nkwi, Nyamongo, and Ryan (as cited in Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013) explain how “qualitative research involves any research that uses data that do not indicate ordinal values” (p. 3). In other words, Strauss and Corbin (as cited in Hoepfl, 1997) discuss that unlike quantitative research methods, qualitative research involves “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (p. 48). The benefit of such a characteristic is that it allows flexibility when it comes to data collection and analysis techniques (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012) as through qualitative research, interviews and observations can be used as much as narratives and literature reviews.

Preference towards the use of qualitative research rather than quantitative methods depended on its ability “to more fully describe a phenomenon” (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 49). This quality is not only important for the sake of the researcher's perspective, but it also enables the researcher to convey the message in a more clear and understandable way to the reader (Hoepfl, 1997). This is because "if [researchers] want people to understand better than they otherwise might, [then they should] provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 120). When linking this to qualitative research, this refers to the rich reports which usually result from such a research method giving detailed insights into the participants’ experiences which may be in line with those of the reader (Hoepfl, 1997).

The three main types of data used throughout qualitative inquiry are text, images and sound (Guest et al., 2012). For the purpose of this research, the text was the main form of data used. Text as a form of data can serve two purposes. On one hand it can be used for linguistic analysis where the researcher is concerned “with the structure and meaning within the text and words themselves” (Guest et al., 2012, p. 9). On the other hand, as in the case of this research study, it can be used “as proxy for experience” (p. 9) whereby the researcher is “interested in individuals’ perceptions, feelings, knowledge, and behaviour as represented in the text” (Guest et al., 2012, p. 9). This form of written text analysis
is referred to by Tesch (as cited in Ryan & Bernard, 2000) as the “sociological tradition” (p. 769) and as the name itself implies, it is mainly used in the social and health sciences. Although the research question for this dissertation is concerned with education, the researcher carrying out this research study will not limit the search to the educational setting but will also take into account studies concerned with society.

In relation to the approach, a qualitative inquiry is mainly concerned with two opposing approaches: the exploratory approach and the confirmatory approach (Guest et al., 2012). The researcher undertook the exploratory approach which is content-driven and which involves carefully reading and rereading data, “looking for keywords, trends, themes, or ideas in the data that will help outline the analysis” (Guest et al., 2012, p. 7). When put into practice this means that the researcher did not start off her research with a ready-made hypothesis which is meant to be confirmed. Rather the researcher was driven by the topic of inclusion of same-sex families in the classroom and read the available sources in order to analyse the present situation in foreign countries as opposed to the local Maltese setting to see how the latter can be ameliorated. After such an analysis, the researcher was able to put forward valid ideas which can be implemented in the local scenario.

Throughout this research study, the researcher did her utmost to limit the element of bias, however, it should be acknowledged that in some instances the evidence of the researcher’s perspective is inevitable. In order to address such subjectivity, all ‘bias’ is supported by research findings on the issues in discussion. Aware of opposing perspectives and arguments, the researcher refers to such research to build stronger arguments in the analysis. This research focuses predominantly on theories and literature that recognise and support same-sex families and their upbringing of children.
3.2 Method

The research question for this dissertation is ‘What are the school experiences of same-sex parents and their children, and how can local schools and classrooms become inclusive of this social group?’ As the research question implies, the population under study throughout this dissertation was that of gay and lesbian couples and their children as well as the behaviour of the surrounding heterosexual community at school. The choice of the subject was driven by the recent introduction of civil unions between same-sex couples in Malta. The integration of such a law in Maltese society triggered several issues of concern, including that of the adoption of children by same-sex couples with the expressed fear that children would be brought up in non-normative family structures. These issues urged the researcher to carry out a dissertation in the area of education in order to show how the local setting can implement policies and practices that offer a more inclusive education system. The researcher took a social perspective. Through prior research, she tries to argue against the unfounded negative beliefs that people in society hold regarding children living under the custody of same-sex parents.

The researcher read journal articles, books, websites and online articles from local newspapers in order to gather information about the history of same-sex families in Malta and abroad; how, where and when they began to emerge, be seen and recognised. Other information gathered also includes that about hands-on practices which can be implemented in schools and classrooms in order to create a more lesbian and gay-friendly and inclusive educational environment. Such practices include lists of local and foreign books portraying same-sex families and their use in the classroom. As expected, information about and emerging from the local setting was limited and more literature was found about the situation and practices overseas. Even though the researcher gathered most of the information from previous qualitative research studies, nonetheless the researcher still looked at a number of quantitative research studies. Such studies
include the Eurobarometer (2009) which was used to see how gender discrimination evolved during the last years in Malta. The researcher decided to narrow the research by excluding any information about the situation of transgender and bisexual individuals, thus allowing this research to be more focused and specific. When conducting this research the main keywords used were: ‘gay parents’, ‘lesbian parents’, ‘LGBT families’, ‘same-sex parents’, ‘same-sex families’, ‘homosexual families in Malta’, ‘children of same-sex parents’, ‘children of same-sex parents in the classroom’ and ‘children of same-sex parents in the school’.

When researching information, the researcher only made use of texts and information which were either in English or in Maltese. Texts in Maltese were translated for the purpose of this dissertation. Moreover, extra effort was made to use primary sources rather than rely on secondary sources since it is more beneficial to use primary sources because “primary documents have not been filtered through interpretation or evaluation by others” (Minnesota Humanities Centre, n.d., p. 1) and thus this decreases the possibility of misconceptions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to such sources of information as non-human and whilst they mention their advantage of being always available, often at low cost, they also question their representativeness, objectivity, validity as well as the possibility of being deceptive.

3.3 Limitations

The researcher recognised various limitations while carrying out this research. Two of the main limitations include the fact that the sample size is small as well as the lack of prior research studies on the topic. Previous research and literature on same-sex families and children is still lacking, especially in the local setting; because of this the researcher had to rely heavily on foreign research. One of the main reasons causing this small sample size could be the fear of stigmatisation and thus the decision of not disclosing one’s sexual identity. After
completing the dissertation, the researcher also outlined a limitation related to the measure used to collect data as this study did not involve a local case study or first-hand research but the researcher relied solely on already available studies. Linking to this, the researcher acknowledges the need for future researchers to adopt other methods of data gathering such as interviews and case studies.

The researcher also identified “the narrowness of family structures under study” (Rosenfeld, 2010, p. 757) as another limitation. Because of this, the dissertation itself might have been discriminatory as it does not include research and practices related to bisexual and transgender individuals. When it comes to the research collected, the researcher is aware that not all the classroom and school practices outlined can be easily put into practice in our schools and classrooms because of pressure which can be external to both the teacher and the school. Furthermore, school and classroom practices other than the ones outlined in this study may also be available; however, while conducting the research the researcher kept in mind that Malta is still developing in relation to lesbian and gay-friendly schools and thus the researcher put forward the practices which, according to her, might be possible to implement in the present situation of the country.

The desirable aims of this study might be limitations themselves as they seem too much of a utopia. As Young (1990) explains, “the ideal of the just society as eliminating group differences is unrealistic” (p. 191). It is not easy to change the traditional and discriminatory mentality which many individuals in the local society, including teachers, hold. On a final note, researching about sexual orientations, precisely children raised in same-sex families, may give rise to ethical issues. Linking to this, the researcher acknowledges and respects other studies which are present and which might put forward a different perspective than the one communicated through this dissertation.

Having mentioned all of the above limitations, the researcher still managed to conduct a valid research study as she managed to overcome the limitation of small local sample size by widening her research to contemplate others
conducted overseas. Furthermore, the researcher considers Malta as an ever developing country and thus believes that most of the practices put forward through this dissertation can be implemented well in local schools and classrooms with a little bit of willingness and contribution from educators and education authorities.
Chapter Four: Discussion and Analysis

This chapter will look at previous literature and research studies in order to shed light on the local situation. Being a systematic literature review, this research uses available literature in order to help adopt practices which were successful overseas, to the local setting. This chapter underlines various practices on how to create inclusive learning environments while providing aid to teachers in such settings. Furthermore, the discussions in this chapter look into the experiences of same-sex parents as well as same-sex parented children, both in their personal life as well as in the school setting.

4.1 Life experiences and situations of same-sex families

In her speech back in 2010, Hilary Clinton (as cited in Smolkin & Young, 2011) explained how “men and women are harassed, beaten, subjected to sexual violence, even killed, because of who they are and whom they love [and] in some places, violence against the LGBT community is permitted by law” (p. 218). Research shows that homophobic and heteronormative practices are still dominant in today’s society as Carroll and Itaborahy (2015) outline 76 countries that criminalise homosexuality. Discrimination towards homosexual individuals occurs through active means such as verbal or physical assault, passive means such as a lack of discrimination laws as well as at multiple levels, such as state policies and classroom rules in the education setting (Jeltova & Fish, 2005).

The education system, just like other social institutions, seems to be “steeped in the more traditional family model, and despite efforts to adapt to the needs of changing and diverse family structures” (Jeltova & Fish, 2005, p. 18), it still finds itself lagging behind societal realities. The reason behind this is that the school, as well as other social systems, “strive to maintain the status quo” (Jeltova & Fish, 2005, p. 21) which in this case is heteronormativity (Jeltova & Fish, 2005; Fox, 2007). This sad reality sheds a light on the urgent need for an inclusive education whereby educators help children, who will
be future adults constituting future societies, to appreciate different ideals of the family which are not within the normative boundaries of heterosexist families (Kelly, 2012). The school system seems to be turning into a place of discrimination and exclusion not only for the children themselves but also for their same-sex parents. Research suggests that non-heterosexual parents in the school community are constantly facing hostile environments whereby they have “to deal with general discomfort and ignorance” (p. 17) as well as have their parental skills questioned simply because of their sexual orientation (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). This feeling of exclusion and invisibility on behalf of same-sex parents results in negative family-school relationships as parents who feel less able to participate in their child’s school were found less likely to be involved in parent-teacher associations or to volunteer for school activities (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Burt et al., 2010; Fox, 2007). Furthermore, such parents may feel that they have less access to school information or educational resources for their children or may not have the same rights to voice problems or concerns than other parents, which in turn, could have negative consequences for student academic performance. (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008, p. 20)

Ryan and Martin (2000) explain how, in the school setting, heterosexual families are open, homosexual families are not. This unfair reality, therefore, entails a need for school policies which ought to tackle issues related to the diverse family orientations as homosexual families in the school setting have the desire to enjoy the same openness, support, and encouragement as heterosexist families (Ryan & Martin, 2000). Terreni, Gunn, Kelly, and Surtees (as cited in Kelly, 2012) agree with this, explaining how, through their study, they found that lesbian and gay headed families were continuously looking for inclusion in education and schools. Lesbian and gay parents who participated in this study explained how their belongingness in the school setting would increase by the presence of gay and lesbian teachers, other same-sex families and resources reflecting their family structure (Kelly, 2012). Schools and society are both characterised by various obstacles that hinder the fair treatment of same-sex families. On a social level, one might find obstacles such as homophobia, prejudice, and taboos which manifest themselves
through stereotypical views of homosexual families, myths about such individuals, poor school-family communication as well as avoidance or prohibition of sexuality discourse within and outside the curriculum (Jeltova & Fish, 2005).

When it comes to children, Lee and Duncan (as cited in Kelly, 2012) explain how “the attitudes of others have a significant influence on children’s developing sense of self and wellbeing” (p. 289/290) and as a consequence, teachers holding positive attitudes to sexual differences are essential in early childhood education. Since classrooms are headed by teachers, they are the ones who play the most important role in building an inclusive classroom environment for all. There are various misconceptions on behalf of teachers that lead them to adopt an attitude of negligence towards same-sex parents and their children. Such misconceptions include teachers’ beliefs that the number of children belonging to same-sex families is limited and therefore, there is no need for adjusted practices, teachers’ discomfort in discussing matters of sexuality and gender with their pupils as they fear the questions which may arise and teachers’ beliefs that topics associated with sexual orientation do not belong to the primary classroom (Smolkin & Young, 2011; Ryan & Martin, 2000; Burt et al., 2010; Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2014).

Stacey (2002) argues that there is no one definition of same-sex families. She continues by arguing that a family is just a family and doesn’t gain a diverse meaning just because one or more of its members are homosexual. Stacey (2002) explains how same-sex families are also in some cases referred to as queer families. One has to start by seeing the reason behind the use of such terms when referring to rainbow families. In the past, the term queer was used to refer to same-sex families as odd and as being part of a marginal and deviant population (Stacey, 2002). One can’t not point out the untrue nature of such statements after understanding that the needs, values, and relationships of homosexual individuals are not distinguishable from those of heterosexuals (Stacey, 2002). However, despite these similarities, homosexual parents and their children, unlike heterosexual ones, often still end up victims of prejudice because of their sexual orientation (Patterson, 2005). Such prejudices may result in negative outcomes.
concerning family life. Homosexual parents leaving a previous heterosexual relationship are in danger of losing physical custody of their children or else have restrictions on visitation (Patterson, 2005). Patterson (2005) continues by explaining that on the other hand when they have not been previously in a heterosexual relationship, they might be prohibited from adopting.

In order to change and ameliorate the situation of same-sex families, society and the education system need to undergo a change whereby the physical environment reflects the idea that diversity is welcomed and promoted (Jeltova & Fish, 2005). Furthermore, Jeltova and Fish (2005) argue that when it comes particularly to the school setting, it needs to take a proactive stance in order to prevent harassment and intervene as appropriate when discrimination takes place. Only through such practices can same-sex families perceive the surrounding environment as welcoming and supportive.

4.2 Inclusive school practices

In relation to gender discrimination in education, Spring (as cited in Ryan & Martin, 2000) explains how “conflict occurs as different groups attempt to have the educational system serve their own interests and ideologies” (p. 215). In this case, the groups outlined are the dominant heterosexual families as opposed to the stigmatised same-sex families. Teaching enables educators to instil in pupils the ideologies of respect, tolerance, and equality in relation to social diversities such as sexual orientation. Emfinger (2007) states that “teaching provides a new lens through which to see the world... a way to let students know that everything is possible” (p. 26). This capability of teaching and communicating equality is not something which educators acquire overnight. Because of this, researchers emphasise the importance of providing teachers and school personnel with appropriate anti-bias training through which they can learn how to separate their personal beliefs and prejudices from the needs of homosexual parents and their children (Ryan & Martin, 2000; Lamme & Lamme, 2001; Burt et al., 2010). The need of such training is rightly so justified as Lipkin (1993) exclaims that “if
school personnel attempt to bring about change without proper training, there is a great risk of failure. The least homophobic teacher may be incapable of answering accurately the most basic questions about homosexuality” (p. 105).

The role of educators entails that they cater for all types of families. However, research indicates that most of the teachers create classroom environments in which there is the "dominance of heteronormative practices" (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2014, p. 1267). While this goes against programmes, policies, and experiences that could aid and reflect the lives of children belonging to homosexual families (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2014) it also reflects the fact that teachers, just like other people in society, find it difficult to discuss a sexual identity which “relates to ‘otherness’ as opposed to the pervasive discourse and dominant culture of heterosexuality” (Kelly, 2012, p. 288). ‘Othering’ is defined by Young (as cited in Gewirtz, 2006) as the process by which dominant meanings of a society (in this case heterosexism) render the perspectives of another group (in this case homosexual families) invisible while also stereotyping that group. Precisely this is referred to by Young (as cited in Thomas, 2007) as cultural imperialism, which “involves the universalisation of a dominant group’s experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm” (p. 75).

Various policies and laws demand that diversity of students and families “must be respected and catered for” (p. 1269) in education settings (Cloughessy & Waniganayake, 2014). One such document includes the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which amongst other things, affirms that

States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.(UNICEF, 1989, p. 4)

In relation to this, Kosciw and Diaz (2008) explain how the presence of harassment on the basis of their parents’ sexual orientation deprives children of their right to education
as research shows that students who are bullied and harassed are more likely to skip classes and miss school days. There seems to be a sort of a chain reaction between the school climate and the educational outcomes as a better school climate for same-sex parented children resulted in them obtaining better educational outcomes (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008).

At school, children raised by homosexual parents are constantly exposed to homophobia, heterosexism, and an anti-gay society. When dealing with this unsafe reality, the first step educators can take in order to develop an inclusive school environment is that of informing themselves about the lives and issues of homosexual individuals. Lamme and Lamme (2001) agree with other researchers that the provision of diversity training for all school personnel is indispensable. Teachers are the pediment of the classroom and it is their job to ensure an inclusive environment for all. This calls for the inclusion of study units related to the issue of lesbian and gay-friendly classrooms within education courses at the University of Malta which would aid student teachers to cater for same-sex families. It is only when the school personnel are informed about such issues and thus become empathetic towards the experiences of homosexual families that communication between school and home can initiate (Fox, 2007). Emfinger (2007) uses the words “our text selves” (p. 25) as she compares educators to the authors of books. This is because teachers, through their behaviours and use of language in class may convey messages just as the authors of books, which might not always express inclusion. Because of this, educators ought to ask themselves questions related to their pedagogical practices in order to carry out “an honest assessment of [their] own practices, beliefs and attitudes” (Emfinger, 2007, p. 25). Only through such an assessment can educators transform and improve their inadequate behavioural practices (Emfinger, 2007). When carrying out a self-examination through answering questions, teachers might realise that unintentionally, their behaviour might have been discriminatory in the confront of children coming from same-sex families and even though they consider themselves as supportive of diversity, this might be limited to race and ethnicity (Paula & da Silva, 2014).
Apart from providing school staff with training, schools must also be characterised by anti-bullying and anti-discrimination safe-school policies that are to include precise procedures concerned with reporting and addressing homophobic incidents (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008; Kelly, 2012). Research shows that when schools were characterised by such safe policies, with protection against bullying and harassment, students and parents reported a lower frequency of maltreatment and fewer negative experiences (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). It is the role of all educators to banish all sorts of bullying. Fox (2007) argues that teachers need to make it a point that name-calling and the use of derogatory terms related to sexual orientation are not permissible. However stopping name-calling is not enough; children need to understand why what they’re doing is wrong and thus, teachers ought to find the time to explain the meaning of the terms used through name calling and discuss why, when used disparagingly, they are offensive (Fox, 2007).

There should also be the establishment of a pro-gay curriculum whereby pupils become informed about different cultural groups (Lamme & Lamme, 2001; Ryan & Martin, 2000; Burt et al., 2010; Adams & Persinger, 2013; Kelly, 2012). Inclusive school and classroom practices are countless; it simply takes the courage of the school personnel to put them into practice (Lamme & Lamme, 2001). Office walls, classroom displays and school corridors may be used to display pro-gay materials such as rainbow stickers (Lamme & Lamme, 2001; Paula & da Silva, 2014). Teachers and administration should not fear the interpretation heterosexuals might have of such materials as it may be viewed differently by different people (Fox, 2007). Homosexuals might interpret two same-sex individuals as two mothers and two fathers whereas heterosexual parents might see them as a mother and a sister, a father and a friend or two uncles amongst others (Fox, 2007; Paula & da Silva, 2014). An inclusive curriculum also entails the positive portrayal of different family forms as leading a happy and a successful life.

School celebrations should no longer be restricted to mother’s day and father’s day. Ideally, instead, schools are to celebrate family day (Paula & da Silva, 2014; Burt et al., 2010; Fox, 2007) as well as LGBT pride week (Lamme & Lamme, 2001). Children’s
parents deserve to be treated as equally important even if in some cases the child might not have a biological link with either one of the parents (Lamme & Lamme, 2001). Furthermore, instead of continuing to make reference to parents as a mother and a father, both in teachings related to the family as well as through school forms, schools must start putting into use terms which are more gender neutral such as addressing families as guardians and/or caregiver (Paula & da Silva, 2014; Fox, 2007; Ryan & Martin, 2000; Lamme & Lamme, 2001). Fox (2007) argues that just having the term family in school forms is not enough as parents might assume that the person forwarding the form was thinking of a family made up of two heterosexual partners. Ideally, the administration is to explain that a family may consist of a mother and a father, two mothers, two fathers and so forth to include all types of family constellations (Fox, 2007; Ryan & Martin, 2000). With regard to enrolment forms, the administration should request the names of parents or guardians rather than the name of the mother and the father (Fox, 2007). Furthermore, the space provided for parents to write their names should be large so that it “doesn’t indicate a specific number of people” (p. 278) and therefore does not discriminate against families consisting of two separated parents who had a previous heterosexual relationship and a possible homosexual partner (Fox, 2007).

The classroom environment should represent the diverse identities of the children and deliver the idea that all family structures are important. Educators should make available male and female persona dolls of various ages that will allow children to represent different family situations in their play (Paula & da Silva, 2014). Fox (2007) agrees with this practice as he explains how the provision of various female and male dolls will encourage children to role-play their distinctive family experience in the play area. As Burt et al. (2010) rightly so explain “the purpose of anti-bias education is to enable teachers to support all children’s families and to foster in each child fair and respectful treatment of others whose families are different from the child’s own” (p. 101).
4.3 Gay and lesbian –themed children’s literature

Chapman (as cited in Rowell, 2007) affirms that “literature has the power to touch the hearts and minds of readers of all ages” (p. 24). As explained in the literature review, the curriculum should serve as a mirror and as a window for the children exposed to it. As such, the curriculum, books made available in classrooms and school libraries should serve the same purposes. Children require that their life experiences are validated and mirrored at their school. In other words, media present in classroom libraries and media centres, such as books, magazines, movies, and internet sites, should reflect the children’s lives (Emfinger 2007). Furthermore, Emfinger (2007) states that “quality media affirms emotions and mirrors life experiences” (p. 25). However the reality doesn’t seem to abide by this as the life of children belonging to same-sex parents is usually absent in books. This exclusion of the world of lesbian and gay-parented children is mainly due to the fact that a large number of people consider homosexual individuals and their relationships as morally wrong (Smolkin & Young, 2011). Rightly so, most of the early childhood settings are well equipped with books dealing with multiculturalism and racialism and this same attitude should be adopted with regard to books dealing with diverse family constellations (Rowell, 2007).

The lack of such literature contributes to the persistent heterosexist practices that characterise both our society at large as well as our school setting. Such heterosexism is defined by Hermann-Wilmarth (2007) as “a feeling or belief that people who are non-heterosexual are (or should be) invisible and unimportant” (p. 349). Sapp (2010) compares and contrasts children’s picture books written between 1972 and 2000 and those written between 2001 and 2007, with the hope of seeing positive changes when it comes to the storyline, the images and the depictions of homosexuals in the latter. The books under study do not deal only with the topic of same-sex parents but, the themes extend to adoption, biography, gender variance and children’s sexuality (Sapp, 2010).
Table 1: books written between 1972-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William’s doll</td>
<td>1972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver Button is a sissy</td>
<td>1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orca’s song</td>
<td>1987</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prince Cinders</td>
<td>1987</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heather has two mommies</td>
<td>1989</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daddy’s roommate</td>
<td>1990</td>
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<tr>
<td>Families: A celebration of diversity, commitment, and love</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belinda’s bouquet</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria goes to gay pride</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you feel if your dad was gay?</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The duke who outlawed jelly beans and other stories</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The daddy machine</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The day they put a tax on rainbows and other stories</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The paper bag princess</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two moms, the zark, and me</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncle what-is-it is coming to visit!</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinder Edna</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One dad, two dads, brown dads, blue dads</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My two uncles</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Year</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too far away to touch</td>
<td>1995</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amy asks a question: Grandma, what’s a lesbian?</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daddy’s wedding</td>
<td>1996</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zack’s story: Growing up with same-sex parents</td>
<td>1996</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sanctuary: A tale of life in the woods</td>
<td>1997</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sumorella: A Hawai’i Cinderella story</td>
<td>1997</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lucy goes to the country</td>
<td>1998</td>
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<tr>
<td>123 a family counting book</td>
<td>2000</td>
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<tr>
<td>ABC a family alphabet book</td>
<td>2000</td>
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<tr>
<td>All families are different</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hello, Sailor</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King and King</td>
<td>2000</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(Sapp, 2010, p. 33-34)

Table 2: books written between 2001 - 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pugdog</td>
<td>2001</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Harvey Milk story</td>
<td>2001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Going to fair day</td>
<td>2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>Felicia’s favourite story</td>
<td>2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>My house</td>
<td>2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>The sissy duckling</td>
<td>2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>The white swan express: A story about adoption</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All families are special</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How my family came to be- daddy, papa and me</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The family book</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King &amp; King &amp; family</td>
<td>2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>The boy who cried fabulous</td>
<td>2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>And Tango makes three</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Antonio’s card/La tarjeta de Antonio</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emma and Meesha my boy</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kate and the beanstalk</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Koalas on parade</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>The rainbow cubby house</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sleeping Bobby</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>2006</td>
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<tr>
<td>The different dragon</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parrotfish</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Sapp, 2010, p. 34)

Children’s books linking to the issues of homosexuality do exist, however, most of them “focus on parental sexuality and family structures rather than families engaged in day-to-day activities” (Emfinger, 2007, p. 25). This agrees with what Sapp (2010) found from his research; that is that the books listed in the first table were very much based on what is going on in society with the aim of augmenting the visibility and awareness of homosexual individuals. Because of this characteristic, such books lack the aesthetic qualities that are necessary in order to get the children wanting to read the books over and over again (Sapp, 2010). This agrees with Spitz’s (as cited in Sapp, 2010) argument
that such books, which “deal didactically with real-life situations” (p. 34), will “be short lived because they lack the aesthetic qualities necessary to engrave themselves onto children’s hearts” (p. 34). In other words, books such as these fail to portray gays and lesbians as normal people engaging in normal everyday activities (Emfinger, 2007).

Sapp (2010) explains how the books written by Johnny Valentine are an exception to the books found in table one. Valentine’s books are all fairy tales and thus the author succeeds in intriguing and attracting children to such books more than his contemporaries (Sapp, 2010). The effectiveness of fairy tales can be summarised in Bettelheim’s (as cited in Sapp, 2010) belief “that fairy tales speak to a child’s unconscious fear, give body to their unconscious anxieties, and relieves them without ever letting them come to conscious awareness” (p. 35). In early childhood settings educators find themselves exposing children to fairy tales most of the time. Traditional fairy tales can be successfully replaced by fairy tales of a homosexual nature, such as the one written by Linda de Haan, ‘King & King’ which presents the fairy tale of a prince whose mother, the queen, demands the marriage of the prince who consequently meets another prince, Prince Lee and falls in love (de Haan & Nijland, 2003). The irony is that educators expose children all the time to storylines revolving around a prince and a princess. However, when a same-sex couple was introduced in such a fairy tale, the book ended up being one of the most banned of all times (Sapp, 2010). Most of the books in the second table are still about gay and lesbian families. In these publications, however, the parents become secondary characters and the story revolves around the child (Sapp, 2010). Such books succeed in capturing homosexual families in usual “family life experiences involving children, pets, family outings and celebrations” (Rowell, 2007, p. 25).

The books outlined in the tables above may be used effectively in a variety of ways throughout teaching. Following the examples of schools overseas, local schools may start introducing book series related to rainbow families in their reading schemes. A practical example of this may be the Australian series written by Harding and Harding entitled ‘The Learn to Include Easy-to-Read Series’ (Sapp, 2010). One of the main issues which children of same-sex parents undergo is related to their parents’ sexual
orientation disclosure. Children might experience anxiety with regard to the issue as they fear intolerance and maltreatment from their peers, their teachers, and other school personnel. A book which can be successfully used in class in order to help children who find themselves in this situation is the one written by Rigoberto Gonzalez, ‘Antonio’s Card’ which narrates the story of a young boy who likes writing and as mother’s day approaches, decides to come out at school about having lesbian mothers after his peers made fun of his mother’s partner, Leslie (Gonzalez, 2005).

Picture books dealing with homosexual families may be effectively used in cross-curricular teaching which Parker, Heywood and Jolley (2012) define as “teaching as a conscious effort to apply knowledge principles and/or values to more than one academic discipline simultaneously” (p. 694). Rowell (2007) talks about the book ‘1, 2, 3: A Family Counting Book’ which may be used successfully when dealing with the concept of counting with young learners as it portrays different countable objects on its pages as well as the diverse families carrying out counting activities. Similarly, she mentions the book ‘One Hundred Is a Family’ which may be used for helping children create their own graph based on the number of family members of their own distinctive families (Rowell, 2007). Books available also include those which can be incorporated into science lessons. Such a practical example includes ‘And Tango Makes Three’ which, while portraying two male penguins raising Baby Tango, it also offers children information about penguins and zoos (Rowell, 2007).

The subject in the curriculum which might be the most popular in dealing with family matters must be that of social studies. Rowell (2007) refers to this curriculum area as the one “expanding children’s horizons by recognising and respecting similarities and differences amongst individuals and groups” (p. 28). Rowell (2007) continues by providing the reader with examples of books which may be utilised in social studies lessons. Such books include ‘All Families Are Special’ which allows children to talk about the distinctive features of the families outlined in the book as well as then describe, write and talk about the special people in their own family (Rowell, 2007). Since a number of children belong to homosexual and heterosexual families through adoption, the
presence of books dealing with this issue is indispensable. While books such as ‘How My Family Came to Be - Daddy, Papa and Me’ and ‘The White Swan Express: A story about Adoption’ cater for this need, the latter may also be successfully used in class in order to teach children about other countries, in this case China as through this book children can point out things which are different from those in their country such as cutlery, writing and clothing (Rowell, 2007).

Educators take into account various considerations and factors when choosing textbooks for their classrooms with diversity being one of them, but most probably not the determining one (Smolkin & Young, 2011). Temple, Martinez and Yokota (2011) explain how books such as those mentioned previously are important because they “portray what it means for children when their parents have a partner of the same gender” (p. 131). The inclusion of such books in the school curriculum has the indispensable function of making out of the classroom, a safer, just, welcoming and supportive environment both for same-sex parents as well as their children (Rowell, 2007). Furthermore, Sapp (2010) explains how “one size does not fit all when it comes to the human condition” (p. 39). This implies that the availability of such literature is important for same-sex parented children to see it as mirroring their lives as much as for heterosexual-parented children to whom such books open windows upon realities which they are not knowledgeable about and through which they “learn about and gain respect and acceptance for other types of families” (Rowell, 2007, p. 25). The instances of homophobia relating to sexual orientation are countless in school settings, therefore, such stories portraying situations which are similar to those of same-sex families will help to open up discussions around the area promoting anti-bias language and actions (Rowell, 2007).

4.4 Malta’s situation regarding same-sex families

Before the bill for civil unions between same-sex couples passed in 2014, it was evident that legally and in discourses put forward by national policy makers, marriage
was considered as being exclusively possible between a man and a woman. Through the Malta Gay Rights Movement’s Position Paper on Marriage Equality, Falzon (2012) gives practical examples of such narrow discourses as he refers to the then President of Malta George Abela who talked about the essentiality of marriage being constructed by a man and a woman as he focused on the procreative element of marriage. The then Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi, amongst other policy makers, also agreed with Abela as during a meeting with the Cana Movement he “confirmed the government’s view that a family is based on a permanent marriage between a man and a woman” (Falzon, 2012, p. 13).

Through such speeches and comments, it is evident that the Catholic Church and its encompassing beliefs still prevail in Maltese society despite processes of secularisation. Camilleri (2003) emphasises the difficulties encountered by LGBT individuals as they attempt to create an identity in a society in which up till now “religion was the substance of culture and culture was the form of religion” (p. 87). Rightly so, in relation to the topic under study, Bradford and Clark (2011) define a society such as that in Malta, as one “that retains some traditional characteristics, particularly the code of honour and shame, although mediated by aspects of modernity” (p. 179). In such a society “in which heteronormative sexuality remains dominant” (p. 179), stigma becomes one of the main characteristics and features (Bradford & Clark, 2011). Given Malta’s small size, Mizzi (1994) defines Malta as a face-to-face community in which honour and shame function most effectively; because of this he argues that “if [one’s] behaviour deviates from the norm [one] cannot move to another part of the community and start again. [One’s] reputation will follow and catch up with [one] very quickly” (p. 375). In a country like Malta whereby citizens “retain a relatively strict sexual/moral code” (Bradford & Clark, 2011, p. 180) same-sex families and homosexual individuals will inevitably be stigmatised, discriminated against and not allowed to participate fully in society.

Due to the dominant power of faith and the Catholic Church, homosexual individuals who hold this faith themselves, will find it hard to accept and act out their true identity. As through the Church’s teachings, homosexuality is portrayed as an
antagonism, homosexual individuals who have learned to adhere to the Church’s creeds face “the incompatibility of two simultaneously held cognitions” (p. 186) and this creates a sense of dilemma and instability (Bradford & Clark, 2011). In fact, one of the LGBT interviewees taking part in the narrative study conducted by Bradford and Clark (2011) exclaimed how she felt that “being religious and gay did not match” (p. 186).

Even though, according to the research carried out by the Eurobarometer in 2009, gender discrimination in Malta was 69% less widespread than five years before (European Commission, 2009), Malta is still considered a country whereby the perception and experience of discrimination is still high (Pisani, Cassar, & Muscat, 2010). When it comes to the local education system, its backbone is the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) which recently substituted the previous National Minimum Curriculum (NMC). As a starting point, the NMC was already hinting at the need for inclusivity in our local schools as two of its six principles were gender and sexual orientations (Pisani et al., 2010). The then NMC explains how our local education system requires a shift from the traditional charity approach to minorities and those who have been discriminated against, into the realm of real equality of opportunity and empowerment, where all children, parents and the educational community may engage in a healthy exchange of ideas and dialogue, leading to a more accepting and cooperative society. (Pisani et al., 2010, p. 6)

Recently, the Ministry for Education and Employment came up with a framework entitled ‘Respect for All’ which includes a policy with regard to addressing bullying behaviour in schools. This document defines sexual bullying as “any bullying behaviour, whether physical or non-physical, that is based on a person’s sexuality or gender” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014, p. 13). While appreciating the presence of such a document, one cannot refrain from complaining about the limitations as it neither addresses LGBT families nor does it provide strategies against homophobic bullying.

When it comes to legal documents and policies, the ‘Trans, Gender Variant and Intersex Students in Schools Policy’ which forms part of the framework mentioned above
reflects and refers to the recently amended Article 32 of the Constitution of Malta which “contains anti-discrimination provisions on the grounds of sex, sexual orientation and gender identity amongst others” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015, p. 10). Furthermore, chapter nine of the Criminal Code of Malta (1854), under Article 82A, protects individuals from hate crime and hate speech based on gender identity and sexual orientation. Precisely this Article explains how

Whosoever uses any threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour, or displays any written or printed material which is threatening, abusive or insulting, or otherwise conducts himself in such a manner, with intent thereby to stir up violence or racial hatred against another person or group on the grounds of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, colour, language, ethnic origin, religion or belief or political or other opinion or whereby such violence or racial hatred is likely, having regard to all the circumstances, to be stirred up shall, on conviction, be liable to imprisonment for a term from six to eighteen months. (Criminal Code of Malta, 1854, p. 51)

4.5 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, the researcher managed to elaborate on the main ideas of this dissertation which were briefly presented to the reader earlier through the literature review. This chapter managed to answer the research question in relation to both the experiences of same-sex parents and their children locally and overseas as well as when it comes to actual school and classroom gay and lesbian inclusive practices. Through this chapter, the researcher feels that she has managed to reach most, if not all of the aims of this dissertation. Having said this, the researcher still believes that more research ought to be carried out in this area of study locally. The next chapter will serve as a way for putting forward suggestions and recommendations.
Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary

Through this dissertation, the researcher carried out a systematic literature review by looking into research related to the inclusion of children belonging to same-sex families into the classroom. The researcher discussed some of the negative effects that same-sex parenting might have on children as well as presented various research studies which argue against the possible existence of such effects. An overview of the developments within the local context provided some insight into the experiences of and attitudes towards lesbian and gay people in Malta. The longest part of this dissertation was dedicated to inclusive practices which were put into practice overseas and which can be equally effectively implemented locally. Nevertheless, one needs to keep in mind the realities and limitations in Malta that may result from a lack of research on the subject matter, and the persisting stigma still present in Maltese society.

5.2 School and classroom implications

When it comes to classroom implications, the researcher analysed and discussed a number of actual practices which may be implemented in the local setting. Such practices included making available books which no longer portray one type of family, but books that show and expose children to families made up of two mothers and/or two fathers too. The research also showed the importance of the school administration and their sensitivity in addressing different families, such as when sending written communications home, when the school as a whole celebrates family week rather than mother’s day or father’s day and when schools put up posters and pictures related to non-traditional families on boards in the corridors and the classrooms (Paula & da Silva, 2014; Fox, 2007; Emfinger, 2007; Burt et al., 2010; Lamme & Lamme, 2001).
5.2.1 The Curriculum

The first step towards improving the inclusivity of children coming from same-sex families in the classroom is, without any doubt, increasing their visibility in the curriculum. The curriculum may be defined as

the plans made for guiding learning in the schools, usually represented in retrievable documents of several levels of generality, and the actualization of those plans in the classroom, as experienced by the learners and as recorded by an observer; those experiences take place in a learning environment that also influences what is learned. (Glatthorn, Boschee, Whitehead, & Boschee, 2012, p. 4)

On a local level, the NCF does take into account diversity as one of its main principles as “it acknowledges and respects individual differences of age, gender, sexual orientation, beliefs, personal development, socio-cultural background, geographical location and ethnicity” (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012, p. 32). Furthermore, this document speaks about “respecting diversity in all its forms”, “promoting an inclusive environment” and putting forward “policies and practices that address the individual and specific needs of the learners and learning community” (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012, p. 32). When the same document mentions diversity as one of the main cross-curricular themes, it talks about providing “every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in society which enable them to respect, understand and show solidarity among individuals, ethnic, minority, social, cultural and religious groups and nations” (Ministry of Education and Employment, 2012, p. 38).

A curriculum which addresses issues related to LGBT people not only provides a sense of safety at school among LGBT students or children coming from rainbow families, but it also makes all other students including heterosexual students and those having heterosexual families to feel safe too (Russel, Kostroski, McGuire, Laub, and Manke, 2006). As a confirmation of this, the researcher looked at the results which Russell et al. (2006) collected from the Preventing School Harassment survey, which they conducted in diverse California school districts. The results collected show how “78% of students
who learned about LGBT issues reported feeling safe” furthermore “in schools where the majority of students (more than 50%) report learning about LGBT issues in the curriculum, students reported ... less LGBT bullying at school” (p. 2). Linking to this, one of the local policies states that it aims at promoting “the learning of human diversity that is inclusive of trans, gender variant, and intersex students, thus promoting social awareness, acceptance and respect” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015, p. 6). However, when looking at the practical nature of such policies and curricular documents, the researcher found it difficult to outline actual examples of inclusive school practices which may be implemented locally. Thus, research such as this, as well as others which may be conducted in the future should be made use of as a baseline in order to construct a list of actual school and classroom practices which may be possible to implement in the local setting.

5.2.2 The Policies

“Having a policy or procedure for reporting incidents of harassment in school is an important tool for making schools safer for all students” (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008, p. 94). Safe school policies that list sexual orientation and gender identity as categories for protection may result in providing children belonging to same-sex families with protection against bullying and harassment linked to their family constellation (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Linking to this, the study carried out by GLSEN (2008) shows how students who attended schools with such a policy reported less negative experiences linked to being maltreated by teachers and other students (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008). Furthermore, it was not only the students who claimed the benefits of having a safe school policy, but even the “parents themselves reported a lower frequency of mistreatment in school when the school had a comprehensive policy, and were less likely to feel unacknowledged as a LGBT family” (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008, p. 19). As harassment may also occur on behalf of heterosexual parents whose children attend the same school of children with same-sex parents, the school administration should also consider having “policies and practices about appropriate and acceptable conduct for parents at school”
(p. 117) as well as “offer educational programs for parents in the school community that include information about LGBT families” (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008, p. 117).

On a local level, schools do have bullying and behaviour policies and the Ministry for Education and Employment did recently, in 2014, come up with a policy that addresses bullying behaviour in schools. While one must appreciate the fact that such a policy acknowledges sexual bullying as a type of bullying which takes place in schools, and even gives examples of such bullying, the policy itself fails to give practical examples of how to deal with such bullying to heads of schools, teachers as well as pre-service teachers who may encounter such situations during their teaching practice. Nonetheless, it gives a very good definition of what is intended by sexual bullying and how it can be manifested and thus it aids educators to know what to be on the lookout for. The researcher thus believes that while such policies are a step forward towards achieving safer school environments, the state needs to provide school staff with more hands-on and practical examples of how to deal with bullying situations related to sexual orientation and/or gender. This, together with teacher training, would make it more possible to decrease bullying in schools as after identifying bullying hotspots, staff may be assigned to monitor these areas and take immediate corrective actions if they witness any form of bullying or harassment (Teaching Tolerance, 2013).

A school’s anti-bullying policy or code of conduct needs to provide the school and the staff with explicit guidance on safeguarding target students. The following is a list of guidelines, which often result in a strong anti-bullying school policy. Thus, such a policy should:

• Include specific prohibited language which is used in “harassment based on nonconformity to gender norms, gender identity and gender expression”.

• Provide “examples of harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation”.

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• “Evaluate the effectiveness of your school’s anti-bullying program annually using student and staff surveys”.

• “Designate an anti-bullying coordinator as well as an anti-bullying task force”.

  • Communicate effectively and often with students, parents or guardians and the community about school climate issues such as bullying. Post the name and contact information for your schools’ anti-bullying coordinator in the office, on the school website and in the student handbook.

• “Ensure that reactions to reports of harassment do not further stigmatize students who were targeted for their real or perceived LGBT identities”.

(Teaching Tolerance, 2013, p. 3-4)

Having mentioned safe-school policies does not imply that these are the only form of policies which are required in our education system in order for children of same-sex parents to feel safer and included at school and in the class. One hopes that research such as this, as well as other futuristic ones, help encourage the state to put forward other policies that encourage schools to be equipped with more inclusive resources such as LGBT children’s picture books as well as for teachers to teach using a cross-curricular approach about diversity, including topics that talk about race, religion, gender and sexual orientation. The reason behind the need for such policies emerges from a recent event which took place in local schools whereby a small number of books dealing with LGBT issues aimed to be distributed by the Education Ministry in some State Schools had to be quickly removed because a small number of parents complained against the provision and availability of such resources in schools. Having a policy such as the one recommended by the researcher will explain to parents how, having such books in schools is not a choice but rather a need for education, just like the purpose of having other books.
5.3 Recommendations

The researcher recommends that further research is to be carried out in the area of same-sex families in educational settings in Malta. The fact that on a local level the research surrounding the issue of children belonging to same-sex families is scarce does not mean that this same reality exists solely overseas. The ever-increasing number of foreign research related to this area of study can serve the local setting not only by providing examples which one can follow after having analysed their success overseas but may also serve as the first stepping stone towards thinking of inclusive educational practices which will suit the local context. One is to appreciate that, although not always successful, efforts are being made such as the distribution of children’s LGBT pictures books in some schools. The researcher believes that prior to implementing such practices in schools, the public ought to be further educated about the issue, and therefore stresses the importance of strengthening school-home relationships. In this case, the researcher recommends that prior to distributing such books, meetings by professionals should be carried out with parents informing them about the content of these books, the way they will be used in the classroom as well as the aim behind the use of such books. Furthermore, the parents ought to be made aware of the fact that their children’s true sexual orientation will surely not be affected by what is read in a children’s picture book.

Another group of individuals who ought to be educated further in this area are the teachers. The National Curriculum Framework itself acknowledges that “the ongoing professional development of teachers to update their knowledge and skills-base is viewed as indispensable for the continued effectiveness of the profession” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2012, p. 44). Research shows how the root of the problem of a lack of inclusivity in the school setting is found within the training provided to educators. It is confirmed that “teachers and administrators of early childhood programs had little training (and, in most cases, no training) in working with parents who are LGBT” (Fox, 2006, p. 278; Paula & da Silva, 2004). Research has shown that the “provision of in-
service professional development may have an important impact on staff’s ability to respond to bullying in schools” (Kull, Kosciw & Greytak, 2015, p. 29). On a local level, talking from personal experience, the researcher does not recall being exposed to any form of education about ways to deal with, and include in the classroom, children coming from same-sex families and their parents, throughout her training years at university. Therefore, it is recommended that ongoing training related to this area should be given both to pre-service teachers during their tertiary education as well as to in-service teachers who are not equipped with the right skills to deal with children belonging to same-sex families and their same-sex parents. It is also important that such training helps “to improve rates of intervention regarding bullying and harassment and increase the number of supportive faculty and staff available to students” (Kosciw & Diaz, 2008, p. 21).

5.4 Concluding Thoughts

Practical suggestions and realistic examples provided through this dissertation were aimed at helping the establishment of a more inclusive local educational setting. It is only through such practices and establishment that our education can transform from one behaving in line with traditional politics and the politics of assimilation into one characterised by a politics of difference as described by Young (1990).

Traditional politics is characterised by the devaluation and exclusion of individuals on the basis of their group attributes as it states that “people have different natures, and some natures are better than others” (Young, 1990, p. 156). An assimilative ideal is an improvement to traditional politics as it entails equal treatment for everybody. Nevertheless, such an ideal still results in exclusion as treating everybody in line with the same principles, rules and standards involves denying the reality and desirability of social groups (Young, 1990). Having a politics of assimilation in our schools means that the school setting is as it is and does not change according to different needs; all children are accepted in the school as long as they behave in conformity with the school culture. A
practical example linking to the topic of this dissertation is that assimilative schools accept children coming from same-sex families however they refrain from exercising any of the practices suggested previously in order to enable the full participation of such children in the school. In such school settings children are in danger of starting to devalue their own culture or even hide it and end up adopting identities which are completely alien to them.

A 21\textsuperscript{st} century education system ought to show that children “should be treated as individuals, not as members of groups” (Young, 1990, p. 157). Society at large, and the school setting in particular, should be one in which the “gender of an individual would be the functional equivalent of eye colour” (Young, 1990, p. 158). Through their practices educators are to transform the children’s educational needs from a concept of “I want” into one of “I am entitled to” as explained by Pitkin (as cited in Young, 1990, p. 185). A school exercising the politics of difference will not only allow access to children coming from different social groups but will implement the necessary changes so as to cater for their differences; in such a school children not only enjoy equality of opportunity but also equality of outcome.
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