

## Compositional and interpersonal analysis of the picture book *Stella brings the family*: deconstructing affection<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This study attempts to carry out an analysis of the compositional and interpersonal metafunctions of the picture book *Stella brings the family* (2015). The analytical tools employed in this study are based on the model for reading visual narratives proposed by Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013) and on Kress and van Leeuwen's Visual Social Semiotics (2021), which are useful models for the analysis of multimodal texts. The compositional and interpersonal analysis intends to deepen the deconstruction of meaning in the picture book and how the characters express affection. The compositional analysis reveals that the visual and the written text are complementary and that the different focus groups highlight the characters. The types of themes and the layout foreground the protagonist Stella. In addition, from an interpersonal perspective, the analysis reveals that Stella has more physical contact with one of her fathers, which suggests that Stella has a closer relationship with him. The compositional and interpersonal meanings contribute to establishing a close connection with readers so that they identify with Stella's problem of not having a mother to celebrate Mother's Day.

**Keywords:** multimodality; picture books; compositional and interpersonal metafunctions; visual/verbal modes.

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## 1. Introduction

Picture books are an important resource to socialize children and to introduce them to literature and literacy (Painter, 2018). They are understood as social texts that establish relationships between the reality they describe and the social context that frames them, i.e., they are discourse, following Wodak (1997: 6): discourse “[...] constitutes situations, objects of knowledge and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It [...] helps to sustain and reproduce the status quo and [...] contributes to transforming it”.

The analysis of children’s picture books is important due to the central role they have in school curricula. These texts are important to help children express their feelings in the socialization process (Nikolajeva, 2014). This will also contribute to helping children understand their own emotions. In Nikolajeva’s words (2018: 110), “as picturebooks are likely to be the first kind of books that emerging readers encounter, they may potentially offer a powerful tool for understanding one’s own and other people’s emotions, in particular for pre-literate readers with a limited ability to make connections between the experiencing of an emotion and its verbal signifier”.

Literature for children has a key role in the way they develop their ideology and in the way they understand the world. In this sense, in the last decades, part of this literature has represented two-father or two-mother families and families in which there is a boy or a girl who does not behave as children from their sex would normally do. This foregrounds the importance of representing new family models and the behaviors of children who feel different.

Sex-role socialization is one of the areas where picture books can contribute. They help children create an affective-sexual relationship; they also help children establish their gender schemas by observing the different gender portrayals present in the visuals of the picture books they read (Campagnaro, 2015; Coats, 2018; Soler Quiles, 2015).

Of the books in which there are two-father families, we will concentrate on *Stella brings the family* (2015) because this book can be used to introduce the importance of the expression of emotions in the classroom; the way Stella expresses her emotions can be used as a model to highlight the importance of feelings and coping with different emotions while we are children. This book foregrounds not only two-father families but also other types such as two-mothers, one-mother and families in which there are people from different races.

The plot of the story is simple: Stella has two fathers. Her teacher organizes a Mother’s Day party, and this is a problem for Stella because she has no mother to bring to the party. One of her classmates suggests that she bring her whole family to the party. By doing so, Stella enjoyed the Mother’s Day celebration and sorted out her problem.

The main objectives of this paper are the following: a) to offer a compositional and interpersonal analysis of the book in order to deconstruct meanings; b) to explore how Stella establishes physical contact with her fathers in order to deepen the different characters' expression of affection, and c) to observe different relationships between Stella and her two fathers.

## 2. Theoretical background: compositional and interpersonal meanings

Contemporary societies are multimodal because communication takes place through different modes, which makes clear that it is not possible to create meaning just with one semiotic system (Jewitt, 2009; Lemke, 1998; Molina and Alonso, 2016; O'Halloran and Smith, 2011). That is the reason why social-semiotic theory pays attention to the different forms used to express meaning. In this sense, van Leeuwen (2014: 281) makes clear that "the term multimodality refers to the integrated use of different semiotic resources (e.g. language, image, sound and music) in texts and communicative events".

We follow a social-semiotic approach, based on a discourse-analytic framework such as the model of visual grammar proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2021). Their model is applicable to images of any kind including web pages, advertisements, news stories, diagrams or cartoon strips. They base visual grammar on the theory proposed by systemic functional linguistics (SFL) to analyse any text and on the three metafunctions, ideational, interpersonal and textual (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). The visual social-semiotics proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2021) assign representational, interpersonal and compositional meanings to visuals. This article will pay attention to both verbal and visual systems in order to observe how they contribute to the expression of meaning by analysing the compositional and interpersonal functions.

In the last decades, various scholars have done research on the relationship between the image and the written text in children's picture books, such as Lewis (2001), Painter (2007, 2008), Serafini (2010), Unsworth and Ortigas (2008), Moya Guijarro (2014), Moya Guijarro and Ruiz (2020) and Baguley and Kerby (2021). All these studies point out that although there are different relationships between images and written texts, they always interact in the process of creation of meaning.

In order to deconstruct meaning it is necessary to explore the relationship between the written text and the visual. This will allow an in-depth observation of the way(s) picture books present different social realities (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2014). In some picture books, the role of the visual predominates the written text, whereas in other cases there is a balance between both modes of expression (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 2018).

Non-verbal and linguistic modalities carry meaning and contribute to the way people understand a particular message. However, it is necessary to continue doing research on how both

modes interrelate and how the visual can add to the verbal. SFL has been used to analyse the text-image relation in children's picture books (Martin, 2008; Painter, 2008).

Scholars have highlighted the importance of multiliteracies and how children develop them from an early age in the last decades (Lewis, 2001; New London Group, 2000; Moya Guijarro, 2014, 2016; Moya Guijarro and Ruiz, 2016; Moya Guijarro and Ventola, 2021; Painter, 2007; Pinar and Moya Guijarro, 2016; Unsworth, 2014). Literacy and literacy pedagogy need to continue exploring the way visuals extend the meanings expressed by the written text.

### 3. Analysis of compositional and interpersonal relationships in *Stella brings the family*

#### 3.1. Compositional meanings

This picture book starts with an image of Elmwood Elementary School, where the teacher is waiting outside welcoming the children. Right after that we find Daddy and Papa holding Stella in their arms just before she comes to school. One of the fathers has dark hair (referred to as Papa on page 24) and the other is blonde (Daddy). There are only four pages where Stella appears alone with her two fathers, and in three cases she appears right in the middle (pages 6, 28 and 30). On page 9, Stella appears in a corner of the page, and the two fathers appear at the top inside a bubble. On page 16, apart from the fathers and Stella, her classmate Jonathan is in the visual. The two adults appear on the left and the two children on the right. When the whole family appears in the visual, Stella is also foregrounded by appearing right in the centre holding hands with her two fathers (figure 1).

#### FIGURE 1

Stella's family. Figure taken from *Stella brings the family* (2015), from Miriam Schiffer. © Chronicle Books



This picture book alternates placing the written text at the top and at the bottom of the visual. Although the verbiage is given more importance when placed at the top, the fact that it is written in small letters makes clear that the main emphasis is on the visual text throughout the picture book. The written text is integrated with the visual. The pattern observed is integrated expanded: instated: co-located.

Although we cannot see real bubbles, the written text appears symbolically in them, especially where it appears on top or next to the characters that say the words. There is a clear bubble in one of the last pages of the picture book, on page 29. Howie appears leaving school with his two mothers. As it happened with Stella at the beginning of the book, in this case it is Howie's face that shows that he is worried. The bubble is a clear example of a mental process because Howie is represented holding a Father's Day party card in his hands. This is a way of showing that children that belong to families with two mothers will also face Stella's situation when Father's Day arrive.

Regarding framing, the visuals in this book are unbound because the image extends in the page without any specific margin; the only boundary is the page edge. We agree with Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013: 105) in that, in this way, "the depicted characters are less constrained by their circumstances [...] and the story world is more opened up to the reader". However, pages 22 and 23 show the invitations prepared by Stella and her classmates to invite their families to the Mother's Day party, and in these case we find the picture of each family clearly framed. Although images are unbound because they extend right to the page edge, there are some frames created by the ideational content such as the school (p. 5 and 29), a door (p. 6 and 16), buses (p. 14) or the decoration used for the classroom (p. 18, 20, 21 and 24-27).

There are different focus patterns found in this book: in some cases, it is centrifocal; centred because in some pages the visual appears right in the centre of the space. This is very clear in the pages where Stella appears in the classroom sitting on a carpet with her classmates and the teacher (p. 7 and 8) and when children are playing outside the school (p. 14). This is also the pattern where Stella appears with her two fathers at the beginning and at the end of the story (p. 6, 27 and 30) (figure 2) and when Stella's classmate Howie appears represented with his two mothers (p. 29). It is significant that this example appears right before the final page where Stella is represented with her two fathers. In this way, this book not only foregrounds families like the one Stella has with two fathers but also the one in which a child has two mothers.

In other cases, the pattern is centrifocal; it is polarised because we observe the opposition of different depicted elements in the visual. For example, on page 9, Stella is represented on the right corner at the bottom of the page, and the two fathers appear washing and drying dishes on the left corner at the top of the page (figure 3). The same pattern is observed on page 11, when Stella appears playing football with her classmate Leon (the black one): Stella is foregrounded on the right corner of the page, and Leon appears further up, towards the left corner at the top of the page.

**FIGURE 2**

Stella in central position. Figure taken from *Stella brings the family* (2015), from Miriam Schiffer. © Chronicle Books

**FIGURE 3**

Stella observes her fathers. Figure taken from *Stella brings the family* (2015), from Miriam Schiffer. © Chronicle Books



However, the most common focus is itinerating aligned because “[...] the elements are nearly always organised in fairly regular ‘lines’” (Painter, Martin and Unsworth, 2013: 111). This pattern can be observed when Stella is working with her classmates in the classroom and they are all sitting in chairs (pages 10, 12, 13 and 18) (figure 4), when she is playing football with a classmate (p. 11) or is riding a bike with another one (p. 15), when she is with her fathers and with the whole family (p. 16 and 20), when the children appear with their families (p. 21-25), when Stella is talking to her teacher (p. 26).

**FIGURE 4**

Stella is sitting in the classroom. Figure taken from *Stella brings the family* (2015), from Miriam Schiffer. © Chronicle Books



The theme-rheme analysis shows that the themes are unmarked in most cases: 1) Subject in declarative clauses: Stella, Mrs. Abbott, we, each of you, Jonathan and Leon, Carmen, etc. 2) WH-element in a WH-interrogative, i.e., what, who and why in questions such as the following: “What’s wrong, Stella?”, “But who reads you bedtime stories like my mother does for me?” and “Why don’t you invite them all?”

However, there are some examples of marked theme that consist of textual themes, in particular, a thematic conjunction such as ‘but’, which is used six times, with examples such as “But Stella had two dads”. It is noteworthy that on several pages we find also textual themes that are adjuncts, and therefore they are called conjunctive themes; all of them have in common that they are adverbials of time and that they appear in a different color and the letter’s size is bigger than the rest of the verbiage, which highlights the time that Stella was worried: ‘That afternoon’, ‘The next day’, ‘All week’, ‘soon’, ‘later that day’ and ‘For Father’s Day’. There is also a marked textual theme that is a continuative, i.e., the filler *well* in the following sentence: “Well, that’s a long answer,” said Stella. Most of the themes are simple, as table 1 makes clear.

**TABLE 1**

Types of themes

THEMES	ABSOLUTE VALUES	VALUES IN PERCENTAGES
Simple theme	29	70,73%
Multiple theme	12	29,27%
Total number	41	100

Out of the 41 sentences in the picture book, Stella is the theme in fourteen, i.e., the protagonist of the story is the theme in 34,14% of the cases; she is the theme of a series of clauses in around one third of the story; the title of the book also makes clear that the story is about her. Stella is also the visual theme in sixteen pages out of twenty-six (61,53%) either by appearing on the right of the page, in the centre and by being foregrounded although she is on the left (see table 2). It is obvious that the written and the textual theme add a sense of coherence to the book and both present Stella as the protagonist. Moreover, Stella is also highlighted because we can see her whole body in all the visuals with the exception of pages 17, 27 and 30. Representing Stella on the right 43,75% of the times she appears in the visuals makes clear that she is the centre of attention by appearing on the most important part of the page, as table 2 makes clear.

**TABLE 2**

Position of Stella in the page

POSITION OF STELLA IN THE PAGE	ABSOLUTE VALUES	VALUES IN PERCENTAGES
Centre	6	37%
Right	7	43,75%
Left	3	18,75
Total number	16	100

Colours have a role in the expression of textual meanings. Characters in this picture book wear clothes of different colours, but red, yellow and blue are three colours present from the first visual to the last one. In this sense, we coincide with Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013: 35) in that “[...] repetition of a colour may be used cohesively as a kind of visual rhyme to link different parts of a narrative”. Papa wears a yellow pullover and blue jeans at the beginning of the book. Stella wears a red dress, and Daddy wears red trousers; the teacher also uses blue clothes.

These colours are also used in the clothes of Stella’s classmates. There is a change on page 11 when Stella is playing football with Leon because they both appear wearing a green t-shirt and red shorts, the uniform of the school team. After this event, Stella appears wearing a yellow dress. The classmates also wear different clothes but red, yellow and blue continue being the colours that predominate. In the next visual where Daddy and Papa are represented, their clothes are also different: Papa is wearing a yellow shirt and green trousers, while Daddy is wearing blue.

Finally, when the party takes place, it is Papa who appears wearing blue trousers and a red pullover, whereas Daddy is wearing yellow trousers and a blue shirt. The fact that the colours of Daddy’s clothes coincide with Stella’s (she is wearing a pink dress and a blue jacket) helps

to connect the two characters. Observing the clothes of the different people that go to the party, it is clear that red, yellow and blue are the three predominant colours. Colour is a social phenomenon and its use has a social effect in society (Pastoreau, 2008; van Leeuwen, 2011). Red is associated with passion and love, blue is associated with masculinity (Heller, 2004) and yellow, following Nodelman (1988: 61), is considered “the conventional color of cheerfulness”, and, therefore, its use associates cheerfulness with the Mother’s Day party.

### 3.2. Interpersonal meanings

In this section, I will observe how visual elements create interpersonal meanings in the book by focusing on image and gaze, social distance and intimacy, horizontal angle and involvement and vertical angle and power (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021). The aim is to observe if the characters are presented close to the audience or detached. The analysis of the 26 illustrations presented in table 3 shows the visual techniques used by the illustrator Clifton-Brown to create engagement with the children reading the story.

**TABLE 3**

Interactive features in *Stella brings the family*

IMAGE ACT AND GAZE	SOCIAL DISTANCE AND INTIMACY	HORIZONTAL ANGLE AND INVOLVEMENT	VERTICAL ANGLE AND POWER
Offer 25 (96,15%)	Close-ups 21 (80,76%)	Frontal 24 (92,39%)	High 1 (3,84%)
Demand 1 (3,8%)	Middle-shots 4 (15,38%)	Oblique 2 (7,69%)	Eye-level 25 (96,15%)
	Long shots 1 (3,84%)		Low 0
Total: 26 (100%)	Total: 26 (100%)	Total: 26 (100%)	Total: 26 (100%)

Regarding image and gaze, the analysis shows that there is a predominance of offer (96,15%) over demand images (3,8%). Concerning social distance and intimacy, the fact that most of the visuals are close-up reinforces the relationship between the audience, Stella, her classmates and her family and contributes to the identification of children with Stella’s problem. Close-ups foreground Stella’s feelings and generate involvement with her. Moreover, the number of frontal angles generates involvement between Stella, the other characters and the readers, which contrasts with the two examples of oblique angles which create a sense of detachment (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021: 135). With regard to vertical angle and power, there is a clear predominance of eye-level angles (96,15%) that contributes to involving the audience.

The book starts with a clear middle shot where readers can see Elmwood Elementary School with the teacher waiting for children at the door and three children arriving at school. There

is a fence in the foreground that establishes a distance between the world of readers and the one narrated in the story; children are seen from the back, which separates the world of the audience from that of the story.

After the fence, the children appear in the mid-ground and the teacher and the school in the background. The fact that the horizontal angle is used through obliqueness contributes to position viewers detached from the action presented in this visual. This is the only example of the vertical angle that shows that readers see the school from a high position.

The next visual is very significant because Stella appears with her two fathers in a close-up. Both fathers hug Stella right before she enters her classroom. In this case, the frontal angle used involves readers in the action; it seems that both fathers are introducing Stella to the audience. After this, Stella appears sitting on a carpet inside the classroom in two visuals. Both are examples of close-ups where the horizontal angle is used again to involve readers in the story. There are some significant differences between both visuals: in the first one (p. 7), the faces of all the children are seen although none of them looks directly at the audience; they all look happy.

In the second one (p. 8), we find the teacher telling children that they will have a celebration: “We’re going to have a celebration for Mother’s Day,” she says, “and each of you can invite a special guest”. In this visual, two of the children have their back to the audience because they are facing the teacher. Moreover, this visual is very significant because this is the first time that Stella is represented with a worried expression on her face. She appears at the bottom right corner of the page, i.e., quite close to the audience, and this is the only visual in the picture book where we can see her looking at the audience, clearly demanding an answer due to the fact that she faces the situation of not having a mother to bring to the Mother’s Day celebration because she belongs to a two-father family.

The next visual also represents Stella in the bottom right corner of the page, sitting on the school carpet, but at the top of the page, inside a bubble, we can see that she is thinking of her two fathers who are represented washing dishes at home. Stella is again represented close to the audience and again a frontal horizontal angle is used in order to make clear Stella’s problem, which is also shown with her facial expression and clearly expressed in the written text:

But Stella had two dads.

Everyone else had a mother. Howie had two!

Stella would be the only one without a mother  
at the Mother’s Day party.

Again there is a close-up when Stella is represented in her classroom thinking while she stares at her clay. The horizontal angle is used to see Stella from the side and to involve the audi-

ence in Stella's situation. Next, we find another close-up where Stella appears standing up on the right of the page, quite close to the audience. She looks distracted playing football with her classmate Leon. The next two pages show Stella and her classmates sitting inside the classroom while they eat their lunch. Again the horizontal angle is used so that readers can see children frontally. It is significant that Stella is reading a little note written by her daddy saying: "Your favourite. Love, Daddy". This note is important because it reinforces that it is Daddy who prepares her lunch, as Stella makes clear when her classmates asked her what happened to her. As we can see in the written text, Stella reinforces the reason why she is worried by repeating it:

All week, Stella's  
appetite was gone.  
"What's wrong, Stella?"  
Jonathan asked.  
"I have no mother to bring for the  
Mother's Day celebration."  
"No mother?" Asked Leon. "But who packs  
your lunch like my mom does for me?"  
"Daddy knows what I like", said  
Stella. "The problem isn't lunch. It's  
that I have no mother to bring for  
the Mother's Day party."

Horizontal angles are also used when children are represented leaving school. On page 14, Stella's classmates are represented smaller, whereas, on page 15, Stella and her classmate Jonathan are represented bigger when they are going home by bicycle. Readers can see both children frontally and quite close to the audience.

Page 16 is significant because Stella's facial expression changes when she arrives home with Jonathan and he proposes to invite all her family to the party. Stella seems relieved in this visual, and again the audience is involved because of the use of the horizontal angle in a close-up:

Jonathan asked,  
"Why don't you invite them all?"  
"What a wonderful idea!"  
Papa and Daddy said.

But Stella's worry is clearly reinforced in the next visual (p. 17) when she is in bed. Her facial expression clearly shows that she is worried and even frightened. This is one of the two visuals in the picture book where Stella appears alone. A close-up and a horizontal angle make readers close to Stella's feelings.

The same angle and the same social distance are found in the three following pages. However, there is a significant contrast between pages 18 and 19 because while Stella's classmates are represented facing the audience when they are crafting their invitations, Stella is represented alone with her back to the audience on page 19 (figure 5). There is a contrast also because while Stella's classmates appear working sitting at their desks, Stella is represented sitting on the carpet, on the left on the page, which gives importance to the party invitations for her family that appear towards the right.

### FIGURE 5

Stella is working alone. Figure taken from *Stella brings the family* (2015), from Miriam Schiffer. © Chronicle Books



There is also a contrast between the visual where Stella appears with her whole family, which follows the pattern of social distance and social relation common in the book, and the next visual where Stella's classmates appear with their families. In this case some of the family members are represented with a middle shot and there is an oblique angle, which highlights the connection of the audience with Stella and her family and to be more detached from the other families by using an oblique horizontal angle.

The two visuals where we find the different invitations to the party prepared by the children also follow the pattern of close-up and frontal horizontal angle (figure 6).

However, there is a change of pattern when the different characters appear having fun at the party: Leon appears foregrounded, much closer to the audience, while Stella, Papa and other

classmates appear in a middle shot but this time at eye level. This contrasts with the next page where we find Daddy and the rest of the adults that have gone to the party, again with a close shot and a horizontal frontal angle (figure 7).

### FIGURE 6

Invitations for the party. Figure taken from *Stella brings the family* (2015), from Miriam Schiffer. © Chronicle Books



### FIGURE 7

Having fun at the party. Figure taken from *Stella brings the family* (2015), from Miriam Schiffer. © Chronicle Books



Apart from Stella appearing alone in two visuals, Mrs. Abbott, the teacher, is represented alone resting at a desk to point out that she was very tired after the preparation of the Mother's Day party. She is reinforced with the pattern observed in most cases in the book: in a close up and a horizontal angle. After that moment, Stella appears talking to her; they both appear close to the audience and observed frontally. On the next page, Stella appears happy, leaving

school with her two fathers after the party. This visual and the last one of the book where Stella appears eating at home with her two fathers are close up, and the characters can be seen frontally thanks to the frontal horizontal angle. However, this contrasts with the visual between this two, where we can observe the fence that also appears in the first visual, clearly establishing again a distance between the action represented and the audience. Then Howie, Stella's classmate who has two mothers, appears in a middle shot, at eye level. This time, it is Howie who looks worried, thinking about the celebration of the Father's Day party, as we can clearly see in a bubble showing his thought (mental process).

**TABLE 4**Mood structure in *Stella brings the family*

MOOD STRUCTURE	ABSOLUTE VALUES	VALUES IN PERCENTAGES
Declaratives	36 (3 are exclamative)	85,72
Imperative	0	0
Interrogative	6	14,28
Total number	42	100%

#### 4. Discussion: the contribution of the picture book to children's expression of emotions and intercultural aspects

Stella is a useful book for children to go more deeply into the expression of emotions and contact. When the teacher mentions a Mother's Day celebration, there is a sudden change in Stella's facial expression because she looks worried (p. 8). A similar facial expression is on pages 9, 11, 15 and 17. This contributes to the naturalization of being worried. Then, at the end of the story, she is happy, which can help children understand changes in their feelings. The fact that the story has a happy ending and that Stella's feelings were equally of happiness and of worry in the book shows children that it is natural to have different feelings. Table 5 shows the main feelings.

**TABLE 5**Expression of emotions in *Stella brings the family*

EMOTIONS	ABSOLUTE VALUES	VALUES IN PERCENTAGES
Stella is happy	8	50%
Stella is sad/worried	8	50%
Other characters are happy	10	90,90%
Other characters look sad (Howie, Stella's classmate who has two mothers)	1	9,09%

Observing the different ways Stella establishes contact with her fathers suggests that they have different roles in the family and there are differences in their expression of affection and their construction of masculinity. It is significant that Papa appears on the right the first time that the three characters appear together, because this position contributes to the importance of this father. Moreover, this father's hand appears bigger in the visual, and it is clearly foregrounded by covering Stella's chest. Daddy's hand is smaller and is touching Papa's hand, giving him support in the action of holding Stella in a way. The fact that Stella's hand is touching Papa's hand shows contact and gives him more importance.

In addition, the next time the three characters appear together on page 9, Papa is the one who is washing dishes and Daddy is drying them. It is also Papa who appears looking at Stella in this visual while Daddy is represented with his eyes closed. In this sense, it is Papa who has a more active role in taking care of Stella. On page 16, it is he who appears sitting down holding Stella's hand, which is very clear sign of affection, while Daddy is standing up right behind the other father, in a protective posture. This visual where one father is sitting down and the other is standing up also evokes the roles of traditional families in which one family member, normally the mother, expresses affection more openly. Papa and Stella are clearly joined by vectors and they are situated at the same level, whereas Daddy appears behind both characters.

Again, there is a closer connection between Papa and Stella on page 20, when Stella appears with her whole family. Although both fathers appear holding her hands, Stella is closer to Papa and her body appears covering part of his body, which again suggests that Papa is closer to Stella and has a more active role in taking care of her. Daddy is the first one mentioned in the written text and the one represented on the right, which contributes to foregrounding him.

The fact of Papa being more affectionate and closer to Stella while Daddy is more serious is clearly reinforced on pages 24 and 25 when they are at the school celebrating Mother's Day. It is Daddy who appears with adults in the party (p. 25), which contrasts with Papa who appears playing with Stella and her classmates (p. 24). This is an example of the double-page spread, considered to be a single layout: the left/right division of the page coincides with new information being given. The fact that Stella is sitting on his back and he is surrounded by children makes clear that he likes being close to children and that he is able to establish good relationships with them. Daddy appears in a corner having a drink, observing how the other characters dance.

On page 25, it is significant that there are two lines of adults: the ones foregrounded are Daddy, Howie's two mothers and Leon's black mother, i.e., mothers and fathers of different races of same-sex couples. However, the adults in the background are Carmen's mother, Jonathan's grandmother and Nonna. Families with adults from the same sex are also highlighted

because the page before the last page of the book represents Howie with his two mothers; Howie appears thinking about what will happen when it is Father's Day. This is then represented as one challenge that children who have two fathers or two mothers face.

On page 28, it is Daddy who appears holding Stella on his shoulders and Papa appears walking next to him, on the right, holding Daddy's arm. Generally, in heterosexual families, it is the father who carries children on his shoulders because, generally, the father is stronger than the mother is. If we transfer this to the family pattern presented in this picture book, we assume that it is Daddy who is stronger and that is the reason why he is represented carrying Stella. Consequently, it is assumed that he is the one with a more masculine role.

Finally, the last time Stella appears with her two fathers, she is in the middle of the visual, clearly connected by vectors to her fathers, which is also the same pattern observed the first time Stella appears with Daddy and Papa at the beginning of the picture book (p. 6). However, there are two very clear differences between the visuals: the first one is the position of the fathers: in the first visual Papa appears on the right and Daddy on the left. In the last visual it is Daddy who appears on the right holding the food to be served while Papa appears on the left side of the table holding Stella's hand. The second difference is the fact that in the first visual there is physical contact between Stella and the two fathers, whereas, in the last visual, Stella is only holding her right hand with Papa's left hand.

Moreover, the fact that it is Daddy who appears sitting at the right of the table the last time that the three characters appear together on page 30 gives him more importance, because the right is the more important part of the information. This nuance can also be connected with the traditional place where men would sit in heterosexual couples, normally at the head of the table, in the prominent position. In addition, Daddy appears wearing a blue shirt, and the fact that this colour is normally associated with men contributes to reinforcing Daddy's connection with more traditional aspects of masculinity because he is portrayed as more serious than Papa.

It is noteworthy that both fathers have different roles when the Mother's Day party is taking place: Papa appears playing with children, Stella sitting on his back while he is crouched down. Daddy appears with the adults who have gone to the party. However, both fathers share the importance in visual discourse because both of them appear on the right, the highlighted position, on three occasions: Daddy on pages 9, 20 and 30, and Papa on pages 6, 16 and 28.

In fact, Papa is a clear example of a father who expresses affection, and therefore he illustrates one of the characteristics of new masculinities by portraying a father in a two-father family connected with affection and tenderness. However, Daddy is also portrayed involved in taking care of Stella because, when Stella tells her classmates that she has no mother, they ask her some questions about things normally done by their mothers such as packing lunches, reading bedtime stories and kissing. As we can see in Stella's answers, Daddy is the

only one mentioned in one of the answers, which makes clear that it is Daddy who prepares Stella's lunch. The answers after that make clear that both Daddy and Papa are both involved in taking care of Stella:

“No mother?” Asked Leon. “But who packs your lunch like my mom does for me?”

“Daddy knows what I like”, said Stella. “The problem isn't lunch. It's that I have no mother to bring for the Mother's Day party.” (p. 13)

“No mother?” Asked Howie. “But who reads you bedtime stories like my mothers do for me?”

“Daddy and Papa read stories to me,”

“But who kisses you when you are hurt?” Carmen asked. (p. 14)

“Well, that's a long answer,” said Stella.

“I get lots of kisses when I'm hurt either from Papa or Daddy or Nonna or Aunt Gloria or Uncle Bruno or Cousin Lucy. But I still have no special guest for Mother's Day.” (p. 15)

Most of the examples make clear that Stella is represented closer and having more contact with Papa throughout the book due to the fact that he looks at her while the other father does not (p. 9), he holds her hand (p. 16 and p. 30), part of her body covers part of him (p. 20) and she is sitting on him (p. 24). The fact that Papa appears closer to Stella and there are more examples of physical contact between them makes clear that, of the two fathers, he is the one showing more affection and being more tender. He is also presented playing with Stella on page 24 while she is sitting on his back. In contrast, Daddy is presented as stronger because of holding Stella on his shoulders (p. 28) while they are walking.

Although it is clear that this book is about a girl with two fathers, it also makes reference to other types of families: on page 21 Howie appears with his two mothers on the right of the page, which contributes to giving them importance. It can clearly be observed that one of the mothers is black and the other one is Asian; in this way, apart from introducing couples of the same sex, it is also foregrounded that they can have different cultural backgrounds and different races. Next to them, we find Jonathan with his grandmother, because his mother could not come. Next to Howie and his mothers, we find Leon with his mother; they are both

black, which again introduces intercultural aspects in the picture book. The first time there is a reference to intercultural aspects is on page 7, the first time Stella appears with other children in her class and one of them (Howie) is Asian and another (Leon) is black. Howie also appears with his two mothers on page 29. In both cases, it is clear that Howie looks like the mother of Asian origin, which is a sign of this being the biological mother.

There is no doubt that *Stella brings the family* does not only contribute to normalising families with two fathers, but also to foregrounding multicultural families in which different ethnicities and different expressions of sexuality are present. Consequently, this book is not only one example of a gender progressive ideology but also of a multicultural ideology where racial differences are seen as positive and natural.

The portrayal of people not only with different sexual orientations but also with different ethnic backgrounds will broaden children's cosmopolitan knowledge and respect for human beings that are part of minorities. Following Sunderland and Mclashan (2012: 162), "a general observation (especially in the 'realistic' books) is an emphasis on ethnic diversity, which acts both as a metaphor and an extension of a positive embracing of gay sexuality to other identities and to social diversity and inclusion more widely".

Diversity and interculturality are foregrounded in the picture book and in the children's ideology, which highlights global literacy and the development of cosmopolitan skills in children (Baesler and Lauricella, 2014). Consequently, respect for multicultural values and diversity will facilitate students' growth as global citizenships opens to different realities such as families created by members of the same sex and families of people from different races.

Ideologically, this book gives children an example of how problems such as the one that Stella had can be overcome. Therefore, not having a traditional heterosexual family does not mean that children cannot participate in traditional celebrations such as Mother's or Father's Day. In this sense, children are guided to understand different types of families. Introducing books that refer to the reality of children from same-sex parents families makes the curriculum inclusive and helps children overcome the fear of people not understanding their type of family (Rowell, 2007; Sunderland and Mclashan, 2012).

Using this picture book in the classroom will facilitate students' appreciation of and respect for cultural diversity while they learn that cultural differences enrich their lives. This will lead to peaceful coexistence inside and outside the classroom, which can enrich students' lives while they learn. Consequently, social consciousness is highlighted from an early age, and students are exposed to different types of families. Promoting an integrated ideology from an early age will help students reject any form of discrimination, in particular sexual or racial. It will also support integration and diversity in order to build a more open society that leaves prejudices behind.

## 5. Conclusions

The different compositional and interpersonal meanings analysed show that the multimodal text *Stella brings the family* contributes to identifying the reader/viewer with Stella and her problem although the utilization of offers does not establish a close relationship with the reader. The use of the eye-level angle implies that children are at the same level as is Stella and they can identify with her.

This is a very clear example of a picture book in which the text and the social context surrounding it are clearly interrelated, due to the fact that different types of families are presented. Children reading this book will not only learn to respect families with two fathers but also families in which there are people from different ethnic groups and, therefore, different cultural backgrounds. In fact, presenting plural families from the sexual and the racial point of view highlights that twenty-first-century society promotes the integration of different types of families in which different models of multiculturalism, ethnicity and sexuality are normalised and presented as a product of the time.

Foregrounding gender diversity and race in this picture book helps children broaden their social consciousness because they are exposed to different types of families. Consequently, representing types of families that are a minority makes them visible. They also highlight the difficulties that children belonging to these families have to face when a situation like the one described in this book (having to celebrate Mother's Day at school having two fathers) is presented.

This picture book fights the hegemony from the family type and racial point of view at the same time in that it favors the coexistence of different family models in a plural society. Students reading this picture book will learn that there are different models of coexistence and that all of them are correct, respectful and accepted. In fact, this book is pedagogical in the sense that it contributes to students being open and respectful of differences.

Thanks to this book, students will learn to develop skills that allow them establish relationships in a global world where different types of families are becoming normalised. Hopefully, the ideology transmitted in this picture book will contribute to social transformations, because if students learn effectively the competences presented in them, they will be active agents in the process of social transformation. Students will be aware of how unequal relationships between human beings affect social structure and will give importance to the models of sexual and racial integration presented in the picture book.

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