

Chicano Children's Literature

Using Bilingual Children's Books to Promote Equity in the Classroom

Laura A. Alamillo & Rosie Arenas

Introduction

As a child growing up in California, my parents raised my sisters and me in a traditional Mexican Spanish-speaking home, always acknowledging the American culture that surrounded us, in our neighborhood, our schools, and in our daily lives. It was a combination of these two cultures that determined my identity, knowing that I could switch back and forth between Spanish and English, Mexican and American, while I was in the comforting presence of my family at home on our ranch. However, it was very different at school. I was one of only two dark-skinned, Spanish-speaking students during my elementary school years and there was nothing at my school to validate either my culture nor my identity. (R. Arenas, personal anecdote, 2007)

My parents made a conscious choice to speak to me in Spanish and English. Because of my parent's desire to make me bilingual, I was afforded the opportunity to speak to my grandparents, aunts, and uncles, and later in life I could speak to bilingual children and families. My language and culture were affirmed at home, not at school. I cannot remember reading a book in Spanish at school let alone books with characters who looked like me or my siblings. It was not until my adult years when I began to seek out literature that reflected my experiences as a Chicana. (L. Alamillo, personal anecdote, 2007)

During the past few years, we have heard similar stories from Chicano educators, authors, illustrators, and others about their experiences in school as a bilingual

learner placed into settings that neither empowered them nor encouraged them to be proud of their heritage. In the few classrooms that did have literature books those books did not authentically depict the Chicano culture but rather stereotyped it, both in text and in illustrations.

It is because of this lack of authentic bilingual children's books and our own personal experiences that we are committed to promoting equity through the use of literature in the classroom. This article first sets the context by recalling a study conducted by Alamillo (2004) at a California elementary school. That study examined culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy in the classroom through the use of Chicano children's literature. Both the text and the illustrations found in recent publications and the role they played in the socio-cultural development of children were considered.

The California Context

An analysis of the California context reveals that federal and state educational policy limits the use of bilingual children's literature in the classroom. This lack of inclusion is examined in an elementary classroom in the Bay Area. The focal teacher described here sees a mismatch between what the literature in the prescribed curriculum presents and the cultural and linguistic experiences of the Mexican-descent students in her class.

California public schools are under a tremendous amount of pressure to improve reading and language arts scores. As a result of these pressures, such as the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) mandate, schools use scripted reading programs with pre-selected children's literature. In addition, school-mandated reading programs such as Accelerated Reader¹ have taken the place of authentic forms of children's literature.

Because of the lack of alternative forms of children's literature, authentic forms of multicultural children's literature are not commonly used in classrooms.

This situation was noted in Alamillo's 2004 study. It was found that bilingual, Chicano children were not given access to children's literature that connected them to their communities, traditions, and experiences because the teacher was mandated to use the scripted reading program. Specifically, during the 2002-2003 academic year, when the mandated reading program was observed, the focal teacher could not utilize children's books written by Chicano/a writers during reading and language arts time. This teacher expressed concern about not being able to use her selection of bilingual literature, stressing,

Other books are used during free reading time or when students finish their work. Otherwise, I spend almost two hours per day teaching the program. I have to use the selected literature.

Alamillo (2004) reported that not only did the teacher not have access to authentic forms of bilingual children's literature, but the required literature used in the program did not match the children in the classroom, either culturally nor linguistically.

Alamillo then spent time analyzing the literature used in the mandated reading program over a one-month span. The literature from the program was thoroughly analyzed through a critical lens. This lens allowed Alamillo to investigate how language and culture were represented in the literature. The authors of the literature were investigated with respect to their cultural and language background, connections to the text, and how they portrayed language and culture throughout the theme of the book.

Table 1 provides an analysis of the literature in the mandated program. The table

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was created based on Rudine Sims-Bishop's (1994) criteria for culturally authentic literature. The analysis of the language used in the mandated children's literature revealed that the literature represented Castilian Spanish or a version of Spanish from other Latin American countries. The focal teacher found this mismatch problematic, seeing a disconnect between the Spanish used in the text and the Spanish spoken by her students of Mexican descent.

As shown in the table, the language, racial, and/or ethnic background of the authors and/or illustrators did not match nor represent the Mexican-descent students in the focal classroom. It is important to note here that an author's racial and ethnic background should not be the sole indicator of whether a piece of literature is authentic; however, the racial and ethnic background of the author is a starting point for investigating cultural authenticity.

The majority of the students in this first grade, bilingual classroom were either born in Mexico or were first generation born in the United States. The information revealed in Table 1 clearly conflicts with prevailing research on multicultural children's literature since it indicates that an author's language, racial, and ethnic background does matter when children identify and/or relate with a book. These connections are especially important when children of color engage in discussion about a book.

Table 1 highlights the limitations of using only pre-selected literature that leaves distinct cultural and linguistic

experiences out of the classroom instruction and discussion. What message are we sending Chicano children who are not seeing themselves, their communities, families, experiences, and languages in the text they read in their classrooms? Are we indirectly questioning the validity of their language use, the language use in their homes, and their experiences living in the United States?

Our presentation of these issues at the National Association for Bilingual Education annual conference in 2006 drew interesting feedback from our audience. That audience, comprised mainly of Chicano/a teachers, indicated that they never had the opportunity to read Chicano children's literature in school. Similar to our experiences and those of the authors and illustrators selected in this research, it was not until college that any of us had access to Chicano literature that reflected our language and culture.

Theoretical Background

Children's literature intended for Latinos first appeared in the United States to meet the needs of Spanish language speakers during the late 1960s and early 1970s, but it soon became evident that although the literature was in Spanish, it was not representative of the majority of language-minority children in the U.S. While it was typically high quality literature, most of the authors were from Spain and Argentina, thus the form of the Spanish language in which it was written

was not appropriate for, nor were the illustrations descriptive of, the children in our U.S. classrooms.

Alamillo (2007) categorizes Chicano children's literature as distinct from Latino children's literature. In order to make the distinction between the two, it is crucial to understand the term Chicano. The term Chicano, grounded in the Chicano Movement of the 1960s, addresses the issues of identity and civil rights. It is a word meant to identify Mexican Americans with their indigenous heritage while at the same time seeking to eliminate racism (Rosales, 1996). So it is fitting that Chicano children's literature today stresses issues of social justice, as did the Chicano movement when it was initiated in order to achieve racial equality in society and higher education.

Therefore, the authors of Chicano literature address topics of social justice, such as immigration, racial discrimination, language prejudice, and other concepts traditionally not found in children's books. This Chicano literature presents issues that call for social action in our society. In addition to addressing issues of social justice, Chicano children's literature presents themes which aim to affirm and validate Chicano experiences in the United States. While these might appear to be similar to issues that other Latinos face, they are unique in the sense that this experience is more connected to the indigenous mother culture.

Since Chicano literature addresses issues of discrimination, it is appropriate to examine the literature in classrooms today

Table 1
Mandated Reading Program Children's Literature—First Grade Bilingual Classroom, Books used in Winter 2003

Title	Copyright & Publisher	Author and/or illustrator	Ethnic or cultural heritage of author	Language(s) used
<i>El Amigo Nuevo</i>	1995, Laredo Publishing, US	Maria Puncel & Ulises Wensel	Not Given	Spanish
<i>Gansa Tonta</i>	1992, Fondo de Cultura Economica, Mexico	Ellen Stoll Walsh	Not Given	Spanish
<i>Una Torta de Cumpleaños para Osito</i>	1988, Switzerland	Max Velthuij	Not Given	Translated from English to Spanish by Guillermo Gutierrez
<i>Quiero Un Gato</i>	1989, Ediciones Destino/ Barcelona, Spain	Tony Ross	Not Given	Spanish
<i>El Tesoro Escondido Del Capitan Tifon</i>	1989, Editorial Attontida Buenos Aires, Argentina	Korky Paul & Peter Carter	Not Given	Spanish
<i>La Cama de Plumaz de Agata</i>	1996, Santillana, US	Carmen Agra Reedy & Laura Seeley	Not Given	Spanish
<i>El Pano de Seda</i>	1993, Mexico	Alma Flor Ada	Cuban	Spanish
<i>Timoteo va a la Escuela</i>	1982, Altea Madrid, Spain	Rose Wells	Not Given	Translated from English into Castilian Spanish
<i>Viva! Una Pinata!</i>	1996, Dutton, US	Elisa Kelvin	Listed as born in Los Angeles	Spanish

in terms of equity. Currently, based on our observations of the literature used in many classrooms, the children's books available in reading programs fail to address either language or cultural diversity. There are some appropriate selections by Chicano authors and illustrators in the anthologies found in classrooms, but the texts and illustrations are edited, condensed, and therefore manipulated to create a false sense of authenticity (Ewing, 2008).

This highlights a matter of equity that is not being addressed. We believe that understanding the distinction between equal education and equity is essential in order to appreciate the importance of using Chicano literature in a culturally and linguistically diverse classroom. Sonia Nieto (2004) differentiates equal education from equity by explaining that equal education means only providing the same resources and opportunities, presented in the same way, for all students.

Similarly, Banks (2007) defines equity in this way:

Equity pedagogy is teaching strategies and classroom environments that help students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups to attain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively within and to help create and perpetuate a just, humane, and democratic society. This definition suggests that is not sufficient to help students to learn to read, write, and compute within the dominant canon without questioning its assumptions, paradigms and hegemonic characteristics. (pp. 92-93)

It is important to help students, when they are relating to literature, to become reflective so that they look at all the possibilities while responding to the literature. Furthermore, educators must also consider the skills, talents, and experiences that all students bring to their education (Moll, 2005) as valid starting points for further exploration of how equity is practiced in the classroom through the use of literature. We stress the importance of using culturally responsive children's literature in order to address and assure equity in a multilingual, multicultural classroom.

Using Cultural Knowledge

According to Gay (2000), culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy involves the use of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to assure that learning encounters are more relevant to and effective for the students. It teaches to and through the

strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming. Moll (2004) champions this idea as he identifies these prior experiences as the "funds of knowledge" that students and families possess when encountering new experiences.

This is how we motivate students to become engaged in learning—by empowering them and their families as resources of knowledge that can connect with the educational goals and outcomes of their schools. Banks (2007) has summarized several studies that support the use of culturally responsive pedagogy and concludes that when teachers understood the funds of knowledge their students possess, achievement increases and students are engaged as active learners in their education.

Another key point of culturally responsive pedagogy that Gay (2000) has mentioned is the "frame of reference," which comes from those early or previous experiences that have shaped the students' thoughts and ideas about the world, and specifically the knowledge that they possess of their world. Freire (1983) has called this knowledge, which informs the act of reading based on the frame of reference we each possess, as our way of "reading the world." He believed that the comprehension of a text requires the intersection of text with context.

In this way, students can truly see the author's purpose when juxtaposing it within the reader's frame of reference. By using culturally and linguistically responsive literature in the classroom, teachers are allowing students to experience these books, in both text and illustration, in a manner that allows them to read their world. Flor Ada (2003) states that, "Every child needs to reclaim and revitalize his or her sense of self," and this is what happens when authentic literature is used.

Seeking Authenticity

Authenticity is a term that many times is confused with accuracy. It is not easy for us to view reality from a cultural perspective that differs from our own, and thus we tend to look only at the factual information or at what is familiar to us as readers. However, Mo and Shen (2003) suggest that authenticity is not just accuracy or the avoidance of stereotyping, but that it also involves cultural values and issues and practices that are accepted as norms of the social group (p. 200).

Accuracy is merely reporting a series of facts. But authentic, culturally and linguistically responsive literature goes be-

yond just knowing about other cultures. In our view it is about authentically depicting one's own reality in children's books, true to one's own identity, reflecting and projecting the reality of humankind through the lens of the reader.

We argue that this type of literature must be looked at in terms of both the text and illustrations, since we are addressing not only literature for young adults but also picture books for children. Galda and Short (1993) agree when they say,

Since a picture book, by definition, is a book in which both illustrations and printed text are essential to the story, children must be able to 'read' pictures and text to understand the story in its fullest sense. (p. 506)

In seeking to understand stories representing Chicano culture, the notion of insider/outsider perspective comes in to play as well (Fox & Short, 2003). In this article, we frequently mention authors and illustrators who offer insider perspectives on the experiences presented. Authors such as Amada Irma Pérez, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Gary Soto, and illustrators Maya Christina Gonzalez, Simón Silva, and Carmen Lomas Garza, base their children's books on their own personal experiences.

Arenas (2008) stresses:

The stories that Chicano(a) authors and illustrators tell about their own childhoods, about who they are in this country, in this culture are very similar to our students' lives. As educators using children's books that reflect the Chicano culture of the students in our classrooms we must note that we need to carefully choose books that do this in positive ways. (p. 11)

The authors and illustrators mentioned above offer a unique and authentic perspective on the topics addressed in this article.

Looking at the Text

Chicano children's literature presents themes that represent the heterogeneity within the Chicano community, portraying especially the experiences of living in the United States. As we found from a review of such literature, there are consistent themes in Chicano children's literature, and to explore those themes we will first focus on the language used in the texts.

Initially it is important to note that Chicano writers are presenting authentic portrayals of the language varieties inherent to the Chicano community. For example, in *Chato's Kitchen* (Soto, 1995), Soto portrays a main character, Chorizo, as

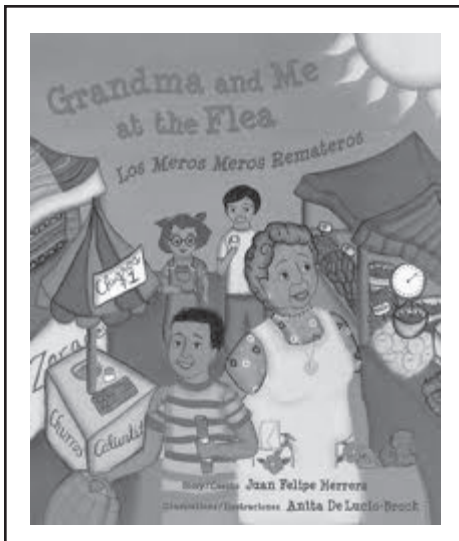
able to code switch from Spanish to English throughout the story line—"No, de veras, hombres. I'm ok" (p. 4). These authentic depictions of language variety are culturally responsive to language used in Chicano homes (Gay, 2007). The use of literary code switching in Soto's literature validates the bilingualism existing in the homes of Chicano students (Alamillo, 2004).

Literary code switching involves the alternating use of Spanish and English in the text. It is strategic and intentional. Soto grew up in Fresno and refers to his experiences growing up there in his literature, including the language diversity existing in homes. He represents the Chicano experience in Fresno by depicting authentic cultural and language practices in the text of his books. The use of code switching is evident in Soto's work. It is distinct and different from providing direct Spanish translations such as those found in most bilingual children's books.

The use of code switching or Chicano English represents authentic language practices. These hybrid language practices are evident in Chicano children's literature (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejada, 1999). The juxtaposition of English and Spanish is strategic and structured in its use, and can be described as more than code switching. It is a more systematic, strategic, and sense making process among those who share the code (pp. 287-288).

The notion of hybridity is also evident in Chicano children's literature and is found in *Grandma and Me at the Flea / Los Meros, Meros Remateros* by Juan Felipe Herrera (2002):

I smell toasty hot chocolate and my favorite—scrambled eggs with *nopalitos*, juicy cactus. After breakfast, I help Grandma



get ready for the flea market . . . I wrap Western pants and shirts into tight *burritos*. Grandma loads the clothes into her van with the sign on the side: *Los Meros, Meros Remateros* Fresno, California. *Vamonos!* I say. (p. 5)

In this passage, Herrera uses Spanish throughout the English text. He made strategic choices in the words he provided in Spanish. Obviously the Spanish use of the words give the passage a certain affect English could not provide.

In *My Diary From Here to There / Mi Diario de Allá Hasta Aquí* (Pérez, 2002) the use of the word *m'ija* is strategic as well:

Amada *m'ija*, I can see how worried you've been. Don't be scared. Everything will be all right. But how do you know? What will happen to us? I said. He smiled, *M'ija*, I was born in Arizona, in the States. When I was a big kid like you—my *Papá* and *Mamá* moved our family back to Mexico. (p. 11)

The use of the word *m'ija* suggests intense love and affection on the part of the parent. Children can relate to the use of the word *m'ija* by their parents, family members, and teachers who use term of endearment to identify them. There is a direct connection to the home when authors use this word and therefore it validates the home language and culture. The language used in Chicano children's literature represents the linguistic diversity in Chicano homes. Authors who portray this diversity are also portraying authentic language practices.

In the same study by Alamillo (2004), the children expressed connections to the use of hybridity in the text. When asked if they knew someone who spoke like the characters in the book, the majority of the students responded yes, they knew someone who spoke English and Spanish:

TEACHER: *¿Tú conoces a alguien quien habla como los personajes en el libro? / Do you know someone who speaks like the characters in the book?*

STUDENT: *Mi papi.* / My father.

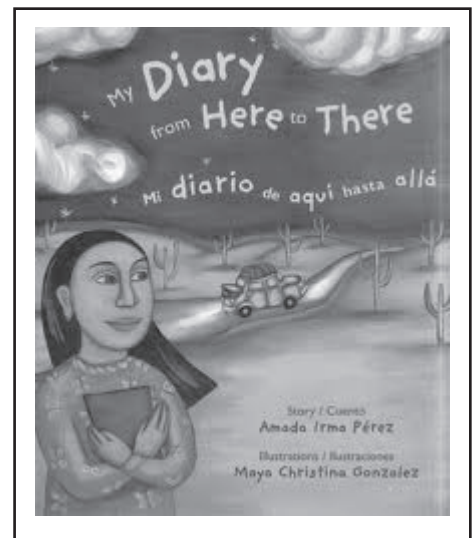
STUDENT: *Mis primos grandes.* / My older cousins.

STUDENT: *Mi amigo Kevin.* / My cousin Kevin.

STUDENT: *Mi abuelita.* / My grandmother.

STUDENT: *Mi hermano.* / My brother. (p. 118)

All of the students interviewed identified someone who was bilingual in their family or used code switching at home. Such literature reflects language as used at home and by various family members. Students identified with the content and



the languages presented. Clearly, Chicano children's literature presents authentic portrayals of the Chicano experiences in the United States.

Children are able to associate the languages in the text with the language of the children's book. By identifying someone who code switches at home, the children recognize their own voices as those voices are highlighted in published books by Chicano authors. The authors validate the home language by representing how people actually talk with friends and family.

In reviewing bilingual, Chicano children's books by Juan Felipe Herrera, Gary Soto, Francisco Alarcón, and Gloria Anzaldúa, Alamillo (2004) also found recurring themes throughout the literature. Alamillo began by looking at the language present in the text and then used Barrera and Quiroa (2003) and Sims-Bishop (1994) to identify criteria for looking at authentic children's literature.

Alamillo identified recurring themes such as border crossing, immigration, language, validation, and family relationships in Chicano children's literature. The border crossing theme was distinct from the theme of immigration because the story took place along the border. Anzaldúa's (1995) text, *Friends From the Other Side*, takes place along the U.S.-Mexican border and is one example of literature that addresses specific issues unique to the border crossing theme. Chicano children's literature represents experiences in the United States, as contrasted with literature taking place in Mexico. This is significant since many Chicano students may not have prior knowledge of experiences gained from living in Mexico.

In addition to the use of code switching in the text and the culturally relevant

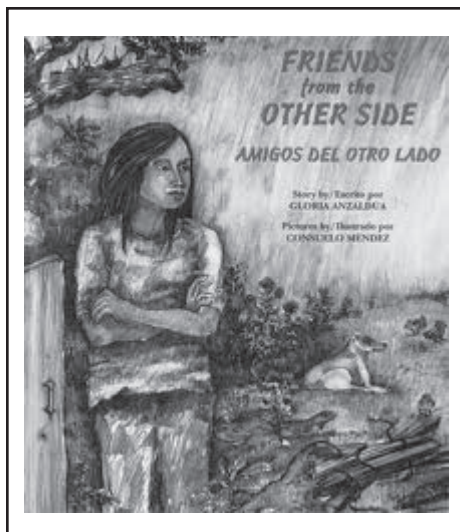
themes in the literature, Chicano children's literature also presents illustrations that students can identify with on a personal basis. These culturally relevant themes present images in which Chicano children can see themselves directly. It allows children to identify with the experiences presented and the language used in the text. The literature validates their "funds of knowledge" and directly affirms their unique experiences.

Looking at the Illustrations

The purpose of illustrations in children's picture books is not merely as entertainment but, as Marantz and Marantz (2000) stress, "But moving beyond the verbal to the visual, we want to look at how the art in picture books may expand children's understanding of others" (p. 13). This is what will initially attract the reader to the book.

So the importance of illustrations, as we look at Chicano children's literature, is for children to be able to view the illustrations as a vehicle to understand not just others, but particularly themselves. It is crucial that time be spent on "reading" the illustrations since they play such an important part in the story being told. The ability to read the images in a book gives meaning to those images (Shulevitz, 1985; Schwarcz & Schwarcz, 1991; Lacy, 1986; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Unsworth, 2001) and points to the importance of communication via the illustrations of children's books.

Upon examining children's book illustrators, however, we found that very few represent the Chicano way of life we have defined earlier in this article. Rather,



most illustrations in books that attempt to depict the Chicano culture, a culture that Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) describes as "borderland cultures," represent the merging of two cultures, forcefully or voluntarily. Such illustrations will not offer the Chicano student anything familiar.

For the purposes of this article, illustrators accurately representing the Chicano culture—George Ancona, Carmen Lomas Garza, Maya Christina Gonzalez, Bobbi Salinas, and Simón Silva—were chosen because they are among a relatively small group of Chicano artists who have had the opportunity to voice their motivation for depicting their culture in children's books.

These are artists and illustrators chosen by publishers to authentically depict the Chicano culture through their renditions of stories told by others about the Chicano experience. These artists look at their work as a way to seek their own identity. As Freire (1970) put it, "Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly" (p. 61). This re-examination has happened with every book these Chicano artists have illustrated.

We now introduce each of these five illustrators, offering brief descriptions of a few selected books they have illustrated, and describing their views about their work as children's book illustrators.

George Ancona

Children's book illustrator and author-photographer George Ancona, born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1929, describes the process of becoming what he is today as a journey to find himself, his identity, and his roots. To discover what he had *not* learned about his heritage while growing up in the United States, he set out upon a search, and in doing so he realized that there must be many children and young adults with the same questions he had about his home culture.

As he began work on his books, *Pablo Remembers: The Fiesta Day of The Dead* (1993), *Mayeros: A Yucatec Maya Family* (1997), and *The Piñata Maker/El Piñatero* (1994), Ancona was discovering his own identity. He describes this experience in the following words:

I think this is what I have to share, the joy of discovery. What has happened is that my life really goes into those books, whether it is a photograph or a sketch, but first it is a human experience—my experience relating to people that I'm meeting—that comes first. (personal communication, 2003)

As a Chicano artist, Ancona has been able to depict the culture more authentically now than he could before he had a point of reference to guide him. *Barrio: Jose's Neighborhood* (1998) is about a young boy's neighborhood in the Mission District of San Francisco and his daily experience of being bilingual and bicultural in a community that embraces multiculturalism. *Harvest* (2001) is about the contributions of immigrant families to the food industry and their retention of the home culture while participating in the majority culture. *Fiesta USA* (1995) depicts several cultural celebrations and how they have been adapted and incorporated into neighborhoods in the United States. These are books that authentically depict reality for Chicano children living in the U.S. today.

Ancona's goal of sharing his journey and his discoveries with children reaffirms what Marantz and Marantz (2000) meant when they said, "When children enjoy books because they relate to characters, identify with situations, and understand personalities or behavior, they come to the realization that there are others like themselves." In essence, this is what drove Ancona towards photography. In recoding the reality of his people, he found his own reality.

Carmen Lomas Garza

One of the most original Chicano artists is Carmen Lomas Garza. During the 1950s and 1960s while living and attending school in Texas, Lomas Garza was humiliated and excluded because she spoke Spanish and thus suffered through prejudice and discrimination. By the time she had completed high school she said, "I was confused, depressed, introverted, and quite angry" (Garza, 1994, p. 12). Even so, she continued her education at the university where her artwork was criticized for being, "too political, too primitive, and not universal" (Day, 2003, p. 180).

The Chicano movement of the 1960s helped Lomas Garza find her voice and strength as a Chicana and as an artist. It helped her have pride in her heritage and traditions and she finally felt liberated to be able to paint about her daily life with family and friends. She was one of the first published illustrators to depict the Chicano way of life in her paintings—not only to validate that reality for Chicano children and adults but also to provide a glimpse into the Chicano reality through her detail-rich illustrations.

Lomas Garza's illustrations depicted

elements of the Chicano culture that previously had never been addressed in children's books, such as folk healing, miracles, and religious icons and practices. Her books, *Family Pictures/Cuadros de familia* (1990) and *In My Family/En Mi Familia* (1996), represent Lomas Garza's life growing up in the 1950s, and *Magic Windows/Ventanas Mágicas* (1999) celebrates the art of cut paper or *papel picado*, depicting common themes. All of these books portray the Chicano way of life.

As Lomas Garza says,

We should not fear other cultures, we should embrace them, that's why my art shows the beauty of my people. My art is not for decor. My art is there to touch the soul. (Lomas Garza, 1991)

Maya Christina Gonzalez

Illustrator Maya Christina Gonzalez was surprised at not seeing illustrations that seemed familiar in books she found in her classrooms and in the library when she was growing up. She said,

As a child I would go looking for my face in my coloring books, in my storybooks, but I never found my round, Chicana face, my long dark hair. So I would go to that blank page in the back or the front of these books and draw my own big face right in where it belonged. (Gonzalez, personal communication, 2000)

Gonzalez has illustrated several books by Chicano authors such as Francisco Alarcón, including his series of four bilingual poetry books about his family and personal experiences, ranging in themes from migrant workers to his joy of discovery in the back yard in *Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems/Jitomates Risueños y Otros Poemas de Primavera* (1997), *From the Bellybutton of the Moon and Other Summer Poems/Del Ombligo de la Luna y Otros Poemas de Verano* (1997), *Angels Ride Bikes and Other Fall Poems/Los Ángeles Andan en Bicicleta y Otros Poemas Del Otoño* (1998), and *Iguanas in the Snow and Other Winter Poems/Iguanas en la Nieve y Otros Poemas Del Invierno* (2000).

Gonzalez is also the illustrator for Gloria Anzaldúa in *Prietita and La Llorona* (1994), a gentler version of the traditional Mexican folktale depicting La Llorona as a healer; and for Amada Irma Pérez in her three books based on her family memories entitled, *My Very Own Room/Mi Propio Cuartito* (2000) about a little girl who finally gets her own room away from her five little brothers, *My Diary From Here to There/Mi Diario de Aquí Hasta Allá* (2002)

tracing the author's journey from Mexico to California, and *Nana's Big Surprise/Nana, ¡Qué Sorpresa!* (2007) about how a grandmother's family helps her overcome grief in a surprising way.

Gonzalez has captured the Chicano spirit in her illustrations by including details that are part of the culture together with her bright palette of colors and lots of big, round, Chicano faces. She also authored her own book about finding color all around her during her childhood in the book, *My Colors, My World/Mis Colores, Mi Mundo*, (2007). She comments,

We belong everywhere. Our face is important. It is a mark of who we are and where we come from.

Bobbi Salinas

As a Chicana author and illustrator, Bobbi Salinas is committed to encouraging, motivating, and teaching her readers about the possibilities in life given the opportunity. Her books address the topic of equity through storytelling, in both the text and the illustrations. In her book, *The Three Pigs/Los Tres Cerdos: Nacho, Tito, and Miguel* (1998), Salinas retells the traditional tale while adding some stereotypical cultural details. Then she introduces Miguel, the third little pig. She portrays him as an intellectual working on his computer with an extensive library of multicultural books.

Salinas also wrote and illustrated *Cinderella Latina/La Cenicienta Latina* (2002) in which she sets the fairy tale in the present day Southwest, depicting "Serena" as a young woman who realizes that self-respect, courage, and humor are the keys to making your dreams come true.

As Salinas (1998) states,

I believe that when educating young people, we must provide them with truth and experiences that help them develop their critical minds. Through clear thinking and feeling, they will have the skills to grow to be literate, to have lives full of options, to be empowered, and to be contributing members of society. (p. 32)

This is her purpose in writing books for and about Chicanos—to empower them to have lives full of options.

Simón Silva

Lastly, artist Simón Silva, who grew up in a migrant farm worker family in the fields of Southern California from the age of eight, discloses humbly,

I grew up with a certain amount of shame

about who I was, and it wasn't until I came to understand and appreciate my culture that I was able to find true purpose for myself and my art. (Silva, 1997)

This did not occur until he attended college and began to learn about his home culture, a culture he was just beginning to embrace.

The illustrations he created for books such as *Gathering The Sun: An Alphabet in Spanish and English* by Alma Flor Ada (1997), a series of poems honoring the people that work in the fields, and *La Mariposa* by Jiménez (1998) about the author's experiences growing up as a migrant farm worker in the Central Valley and coast of California, brought him immediate attention as a Chicano artist. Having the opportunity to illustrate these books also enabled him to re-discover pride in his own background. Silva states,

My images are simplistic, powerful, beautiful, and about the Chicano culture...I have used these images—scenes I used to be ashamed of—to empower myself and other Chicanos. (As cited in Dorantes, 2003)

Self-Discovery of Identity

The five artists discussed above are only a few of those who authentically illustrate Chicano children's books. For them, illustration is not only an opportunity to visually portray the author's text, but it is one of self-discovery of their own identity and place in the world.

In other words,

The illustrators have the same vision, the same hope for the children reading their books—that Latino children see themselves in a positive way so it will make a difference in their lives and the lives of others. (Arenas, 2004, p. 25)

Recommendations

Highlighted here are two distinct ways at looking at Chicano children's literature. Through Alamillo's research we looked at the written text of the literature. The language used in the text should represent the children culturally and linguistically. Based on a study done at a California elementary school, Alamillo (2004) found that the literature used in the mandated Spanish reading program did not represent the Mexican-descent students either culturally or linguistically. Instead, the literature being used portrayed an experience unfamiliar to the children in the classroom.

Through Arenas' studies we then described the importance of also looking

Table 2
A Partial Selection of Exemplary Chicano Children's Books with Qualifying Elements

Title	Copyright Date	Author	Illustrator	Qualifying Elements
<i>Gathering the Sun: An Alphabet in Spanish and English</i>	1997	Alma Flor Ada	Simón Silva	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Bilingual book, English text/Spanish text ◆ Based on elements in the lives of migrant farmworkers ◆ Colorful illustrations represent the pride and beauty of the people who work the fields ◆ Chicano perspective
<i>From the Bellybutton of the Moon and other Summer Poems/ Del ombigo de la luna y otros poemas de verano</i>	1998	Francisco X. Alarcón	Maya Christina Gonzalez	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Bilingual book, English text/Spanish text ◆ Book three in a series of four seasonal books of poems ◆ Based on Alarcón's memories growing up in southern California ◆ Poems address issues relevant to the Chicano culture and depicts the blending of the traditional culture with the new ◆ Colorful illustrations depict the warmth and joy of Chicano families and children ◆ Chicano perspective
<i>Barrio: Jose's Neighborhood</i>	1998	George Ancona	George Ancona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Follows the life of a young Chicano living in San Francisco, CA ◆ Uses authentic language with a glossary at the end of the book ◆ Depicts a blending of cultures in school, neighborhood, and cultural events ◆ Photographs represent the daily lives of people and events in the neighborhood ◆ Chicano perspective
<i>Prietita and the Ghost Woman/ Prietita y La Llorona</i>	1995	Gloria Anzaldúa	Maya Christina Gonzalez	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Bilingual book, English text/Spanish text ◆ Uses authentic language ◆ Addresses traditional cultural elements of healing/curanderismo and how it is passed on through generations ◆ Variation of the traditional folktale and depicts La Llorona as a powerful woman spirit ◆ Warm illustrations authentically represent the people and land of the southwest ◆ Chicana perspective
<i>Family Pictures/ Cuadros de Familia</i>	1990	Carmen Lomas Garza	Carmen Lomas Garza	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Bilingual book, English text/Spanish text ◆ Paintings are based on Lomas Garza's memories growing up as a Chicana in Texas depicting the daily life, beliefs, & celebrations ◆ Text is a description of paintings ◆ Chicana perspective
<i>My Colors, My World/ Mis colores, mi mundo</i>	2007	Maya Christina Gonzalez	Maya Christina Gonzalez	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Bilingual book, English text/Spanish text ◆ Based on Gonzalez's memories growing up in the desert in California ◆ Text and illustrations depict a search for acceptance and beauty in a child's world ◆ Chicana perspective

(continued on next page)

Table 2
A Partial Selection of Exemplary Chicano Children's Books with Qualifying Elements (continued)

Title	Copyright Date	Author	Illustrator	Qualifying Elements
<i>Grandma and Me at the Flea/ Los meros meros remateros</i>	2002	Juan Felipe Herrera	Anita DeLucio-Brock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Bilingual book, English text/Spanish text ◆ Based on Herrera's memories growing up in central California ◆ Uses authentic language ◆ Addresses issues of Chicano culture and value of community ◆ Illustrations authentically represent the "flea market" with goods and people ◆ Chicano perspective
<i>La Mariposa</i>	1998	Francisco Jiménez	Simón Silva	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Based on Jiménez's memories growing up in a migrant family ◆ Uses authentic language ◆ Depicts a search for identity and acceptance in a new culture while retaining the native culture ◆ Illustrations authentically depict the farmworkers and setting of story ◆ Chicano perspective
<i>My Diary From Here to There/ Mi Diario de Aquí Hasta Allá</i>	2002	Amada Irma Pérez	Maya Christina Gonzalez	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Bilingual book, English text/Spanish text ◆ Based on Pérez's memories growing up as a young girl immigrating to the United States ◆ Addresses issues of immigration, leaving a familiar place and relocating to a new country ◆ Illustrations authentically and beautifully represent the people in the story ◆ Chicana perspective
<i>Nana's Big Surprise/ Nana, ¡Qué Sorpresa!</i>	2007	Amada Irma Pérez	Maya Christina Gonzalez	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Bilingual book, English text/Spanish text ◆ Addresses issues of death, the grieving process, and healing through a caring family ◆ Illustrations colorfully represent the hope for joy throughout the book, authentically depicting the people and events ◆ Chicana perspective

at the illustrations in literature. Examining the illustrator's perspectives, Arenas (2004) highlights Chicano illustrators' intentions when illustrating Chicano children's literature and identifies illustrators who intentionally illustrated authentic portrayals of Chicano/Latino characters.

As a result of collaborating in this research on text and illustrations, we have developed qualifying elements to determine the suitability of bilingual children's literature. By reviewing exemplary Chicano children's literature, we have identified examples of those elements in Table 2.

The elements used to qualify the se-

lections as exemplary Chicano literature include:

1. *Bilingual Text*—The story is written in English on one page and Spanish on the facing page or English on the top half of the page and Spanish on the bottom half of the page.

2. *Use of Authentic Language*—The language used includes code-switching with Spanish words within the English text, sometimes defining the Spanish word within the English text and other times standing alone.

3. *Authentic Cultural Representations through Text*—The text addresses themes

of the Chicano culture in realistic and relevant ways.

4. *Authentic Cultural Representations through Illustrations*—The illustrations use images that are representative of the Chicano culture through the use of visual elements such as color, style, and media.

5. *Insider Perspective*—The author or illustrator portrays the Chicano culture as a reflection of their own perspectives as Chicanos(as).

These elements can be used to critique and select literature, analyze cultural authenticity, and avoid stereotypes. The two

of us argue that readers must take into consideration both the text and illustrations when choosing appropriate literature for children. These considerations are crucial when selecting literature for children, since children are heavily influenced by what they read and see.

In addition, authentic portrayals of the Chicano community affirm and validate existing experiences in that community. Chicano children are affirmed when they see true images of their community and read authentic stories of their families. The utilization of such books will help children develop linguistically, cognitively, and academically, and can potentially be used to build awareness between Mexican born children and their U.S. born Mexican peers. The literature can break down stereotypes in the classroom and can be used to build acceptance for all groups.

The literature we describe and advocate is by no means only for Chicano children. Chicano children's literature is multicultural and it should serve as American literature for all students, depicting the lives of Mexican-descent children living in the United States.

Conclusion

As we have shared in our personal anecdotes, the effort to maintain our native language and culture was a conscious decision made by our families and by us as individuals. Our schooling contributed little to this effort. However, in light of the current cultural context in California, we believe that now, more than ever, it is crucial that literature used in the classroom represent the children in the classroom—for two primary reasons.

First, appropriately-selected literature will validate and empower Chicano children by representing them, specifically, as a unique language and cultural group, within the over-arching category of "Latino" students. Chicano children's literature is one tool to begin this process of validation.

Second, the literature used as part of the curriculum should authentically depict the Chicano experience to avoid stereotyping by children outside that culture. Alamillo (2005) sums up the importance of recognizing and learning about the Chicano culture when she says,

In this case, being Chicano/a is not just a label. It is an identity, an experience. It links one to social, political and historical movements. One does not say they are Chicano/as without thinking of what

comes with it: the language, the culture, community and family. It is a way of living. (p. 14)

In a classroom of bilingual, Chicano students, teachers must affirm existing cultural and language practices by using tools such as authentic Chicano children's literature. If appropriately selected and used, this literature will promote equity, drawing upon the funds of knowledge students bring to school and will provide that pathway by which Chicano children will be able to search and authenticate their own identity.

When schools begin to focus on culturally responsive pedagogy that includes validating the students' languages and cultures, then issues of inequity will begin to disappear. Teachers must find a way to go beyond what is mandated and take it one step further by creating a culturally responsive curriculum, which includes using appropriate literature, to address issues of social justice and action.

James Banks describes this process as "to know, to care, and to act" (personal communication, October 11, 2007). Schools must first allow students to care and know about their own issues and then bridge connections to other marginalized communities. The end result is to care enough about all issues and all communities, in order to see the connections and make changes that will be equitable for all children. Chicano children's literature can serve as an important tool in this process. It is not enough to simply use Chicano children's books. We must strive to use authentic literature in a way that will promote equity in the classroom.

Note

¹ Accelerated Reader is a guided reading intervention program that promotes independent reading practice, manages student performance by providing students and teachers feedback from quizzes based on books the students read, and closely involves teachers with student reading of text. Only two studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of this program and it was found that Accelerated Reader had no discernible effects on reading fluency, mixed effects on comprehension, and potentially positive effects on general reading achievement.

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