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Transformative Translanguaging Espacios

Latinx Students and their Teachers Rompiendo Fronteras sin Miedo

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9 Critical Translanguaging Literacies and Latinx Children's Literature: Making Space for a Transformative and Liberating Pedagogy

Luz Yadira Herrera and Carla España

Introduction

There is increasing attention to and availability of children's literature that represents the varied cultures, languages, ways of being and experiences of children in the United States. A popular infographic based on data compiled by University of Wisconsin's Cooperative Children's Book Center showed that in 2018, only 5% of children's books published in that year depicted Latinx characters (Huyck & Park Dahlen, 2019). This percentage had increased slightly from 2.4% in 2015 (Huyck *et al.*, 2016). Although there have been some gains since then, there is still a lot of work to be done to increase the opportunities, publication and integration into curriculum of literature written by Latinx authors that authentically represents Latinx experiences.

In this chapter we focus on children's literature that depicts the dynamic language practices – using features of English and Spanish – of bilingual Latinx children and their families.[1] Latinx writers of children's literature use translanguaging, as Pérez Rosario (2015: ii) notes, 'as a means of affirming or negotiating cultural identity.' Sometimes it is also used to represent 'culturally specific traditions and customs,' where an English translation does not make sense (Pérez Rosario, 2015: ii). But translanguaging for bilingual writers goes beyond these simple uses, sometimes explicitly showing how their repertoire is not bound by the separation of English and Spanish. Bilingual authors use their entire

repertoire for creative, critical and meaning-making purposes. We particularly focus here on how this literature can create opportunities for educators to engage in critical pedagogical practices that sustain (Paris & Alim, 2017) Latinx bilingual students by developing what we call their *critical translanguaging literacies*, that is, their ability to use their entire repertoire, regardless of the language of the written text, to critically examine their histories and lives in US society.

It is important to note that just because children's texts are written solely in one language, it does not mean that bilingual students engage with these monolingually (García & Kleifgen, 2019). When bilingual students read monolingual texts, they are still actively drawing from their entire semiotic repertoire to make meaning (García, 2020; García & Kleifgen, 2019). That is, even when they read a text printed all in English, bilingual children will still make connections, infer and extend their understanding of the text by engaging their entire meaning-making repertoire, their translanguaging. However, we argue here that to develop *critical translanguaging literacies*, Latinx bilingual children need to engage with texts in which translanguaging is used in order to open up a space for them to question their histories, experiences and lives, their language and cultural practices, and the ways in which these have been silenced and stigmatized. In this chapter, we chose to highlight works that have been recently published by Latinx authors – texts that explore and grapple with complex and multi-layered topics with characters and stories brilliantly crafted. Many of these books also have a Spanish edition available. However, for this chapter, we focus on the original version of these works, which primarily use features of English but because of their critical content and the translanguaging practices they show on the printed page, lend themselves to supporting teachers in enacting a critical translanguaging literacies pedagogy.

Our Positionalities

We have drawn from our experiences as Latina women and educators to design literacy instruction for Latinx bilingual students that uses temas and textos that raise not only their literacy and biliteracy awareness, but also their critical consciousness. Luz is a bilingual Mexicana, born in Mexico and raised in an immigrant community in Los Angeles. She taught bilingual and multilingual students in New York City, some of whom were newcomer immigrant students, others of whom were US-born but were designated as 'English Language Learners.' Carla was born in Viña del Mar, Chile, and began her K-12 schooling in New York City, where she was labeled an 'English Language Learner.' She began teaching in transitional and dual language bilingual programs as a middle-grade educator. In our experiences as teachers, and regardless of the language policy of the type of school program in which we were teaching, we have always

supported the children's language practices and their multiple/multimodal literacies. We have made room for bilingual read-alouds. And we have advocated for the acquisition of children's literature about Latinx people for the schools' bilingual libraries, knowing that these textos are important to expand Latinx children's experience in shared and guided reading, as well as writing. The seeds of what we today call a critical translanguaging literacies pedagogy were planted long ago in our own teaching practice.

Characteristics of a Critical Translanguaging Literacies Pedagogy

Centered on using meaningful children's literature that reflects translanguaging practices (García, 2009), a *critical translanguaging literacies pedagogy* can enable educators to:

(1) explore and make connections between the stories that students read and their families' journeys;
(2) affirm students' community language and literacy practices;
(3) sustain children's complex and dynamic language practices, identities and cultures; and
(4) critique unjust social structures and racism that dehumanize language-minoritized students.

These practices can be transformative and liberating in the teaching of all children, but they are especially meaningful for minoritized bilingual children.

A critical translanguaging literacies pedagogy rests on the use of bilingual children's literature, particularly what Duyvis (2015) calls 'own voices' literature. This is literature by authors from minoritized groups, writing from their own experience for a variety of purposes. For instance, this 'own voices' literature can be used to guide or begin discussions on identity by using texts to rethink, reimagine and recreate ways of being that tackle tensions, shame or internalized notions of deficiency which have been projected onto language-minoritized communities. Educators can use these mentor texts to spark creative student writing, such as memoir writing and narratives that represent authentic characters with their respective voices in meaningful situations. The use of 'own voices' literature can also lead to project-based learning around topics such as racism, identity, intergenerational connections, family and community knowledge, (im)migration, family separation, gender inequalities and foreign policy. Engaging children in project-based learning that is centered on meaningful topics and 'own voices' literature can create opportunities for families to participate in the classroom community, reading and integrating family/community knowledge. Using bilingual children's literature in instruction can also support teachers' and students' study of

language use in texts and in lives. Most importantly, it enables noticing how this literature 'leverages community funds of knowledge' and builds 'critical language awareness' (Alamillo, 2017: 151, 161).

As Sims Bishop (1990) reminds us, books can be mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors, and reading can be a powerful guide for self-affirmation, and so it is vital that children see positive reflections of themselves as they engage in literature. With literature that authentically reflects the varied cultural and linguistic practices of Latinx communities, children can make connections as they see representations of self, family, local community and social issues in larger society and across other texts. This also enables children to move beyond making connections with the reading to producing authentic writing and engaging in other culminating projects. Teachers and students can then resist monolingual standards in storytelling, as well as expand ways of remembering the stories of caregivers, community members and ancestors, and honoring new ways of being, new ways of remembering and new ways of resisting.

A critical translanguaging literacies pedagogy focuses on *what* Latinx bilingual students are communicating as students draw from their entire linguistic repertoires when engaging in the classroom. It also focuses on *how* the students share their ideas, taking a dynamic approach to language use and not a deficit approach that would view students from the perspective of lacking English or lacking Spanish. Students can then take more risks without fear of their language practices being monitored or constantly policed to meet monolingual standards. In this way, students can engage more deeply with the content, since they will no longer have to worry about getting the language 'wrong.' In the next section, we show how we can do this by designing our teaching and learning experiences around what we call 'the three Ts: temas, textos and translanguaging' (España & Herrera, 2020).

Temas, Textos and Translanguaging: The Three Ts of a Critical Translanguaging Literacies Pedagogy

We use a critical translanguaging literacies framework in thinking about the design and implementation of lessons that include *temas* that sustain our students' cultures, histories, identities and language practices, *textos* that stand in solidarity and affirm these, and *translanguaging* that honors and supports students' languaging in the teaching and learning experience (España & Herrera, 2020). For topic selection for curriculum design to be authentic, the lives of bilingual Latinx children must be understood within the present socioeconomic and sociopolitical structures. Bilingual Latinx students' present realities are intricately connected to historical injustices, and their socio-emotional responses reflect the tensions of living at the intersections of identity negotiation in a world that sometimes makes it seem as if it does not want them to thrive.

Choosing textos that interrogate temas, issues and systems of injustice, that use translanguaging, and that delve deeply into questions of identity, racism, oppression, language and culture, can open up the possibility of a powerful approach to teaching and learning. Making space for translanguaging literacies as communicative practices and to make meaning of textos with critical temas allows the entire classroom and school community to examine the ways in which language and power operate in textos and in our lives.

Translanguaging in Children's Literature: Redefining Latinidad by Challenging the Use of Italics

Latinx children's literature authors are increasingly engaging with translanguaging literacies. Their dynamic use of Spanish and English is coupled with complex bilingual Latinx characters, including Black and Indigenous Latinx, whose languaging does not explicitly consist of separate Spanish or English language features. These complex language practices are a visible part of Latinx identity. By doing so they are forging a more expansive view of Latinidad (Rosa, 2019).

From a Dominican teen in Elizabeth Acevedo's (2018) *The Poet X*, to David Bowles' (2018) 12-year-old Mexican American protagonist in *They Call Me Güero*, to Aida Salazar's (2019) Oakland-based story with a protagonist that identifies as Black, Puerto Rican and Mexican in *The Moon Within*, we see how Latinx identity and dynamic language practices are nurtured, contested and redefined at several intersections. Isabel Quintero's (2019) award-winning book, *My Papi Has a Motorcycle*, begins with: 'My papi has a motorcycle. From him I've learned words like carburetor and cariño, drill and dedication' (Quintero, 2019: 1). Spanish words burst from the pages with signs on storefronts and speech bubbles with words in Spanish from Papi and the rest of the family. This dynamic use of language is a part of the characters' lives, from family relationships to connections with a changing neighborhood.

It is noteworthy that many of these Latinx children's authors do not always italicize words in Spanish when writing in English. For example, Isabel Quintero does not use italics. Whether or not to use italics in writing is a recurring point of discussion in the world of children's literature (this includes middle-grade and young adult [YA] novels). The decision to italicize or not impacts how a character's Latinx identity and language practices are interpreted. Some authors who choose to italicize words in Spanish point to the primary school age range of their audience, and argue that younger readers need this signal. Others take a clear stance to not use italics in their writing unless it is for emphasis, which is, as they often point out, how any writer would generally use italics.

Publishers and editors have a lot to do with this decision, and several authors are increasingly advocating for their bilingual writing to reflect

their bilingual lives and intersecting Latinx identities. When asked, 'How do your characters represent authentic language practices?' at the Bank Street College 2019 'Diverse Voices in Latinx Children's Literature Mini-Conference,' award-winning middle-grade author, Pablo Cartaya, acknowledged the role that his editor played in this decision: 'I told her, I don't want to italicize the Spanish,' to which she replied 'Oh my God, I would never do that!' (Gribble, 2019). Cartaya proceeded to advocate for more Latinx editors and publishers, and noted that these are needed, 'if we are going to change the way we perceive language and use language, and make it okay; stop othering it' (Gribble, 2019). Hilda Eunice Burgos, a middle-grade author, answered the same question about authentic language practices as Cartaya, and shared how her editor said that italicizing wasn't a common practice anymore (Gribble, 2019). The examples of children's literature below, from picture books for young readers to YA novels for older teens, reveal a varied use of italics.

Author and illustrator Juana Medina (2016) italicized words in Spanish in *Juana and Lucas*. She wanted to support readers who are making their transition from picture books to this beginning chapter book, but she also decided that the italics helped her emphasize the main character's connection to her language practices in Spanish and hesitation to learn English.

The *New York Times* bestselling author and 2019 Newbery medalist, Meg Medina, writes texts for readers across primary, intermediate and secondary settings. Medina's *Mango, Abuela and Me* (2017) and *Tía Isa Wants a Car* (2011), picture books for young readers, italicize words in Spanish, highlighting translanguaging in family communication. However, in Medina's (2018a) Newbery Award-winning middle-grade text, *Merci Suárez Changes Gears*, expressions in Spanish such as 'fulana de tal' (Medina, 2018a: 15) 'son la candela' (Medina, 2018a: 21) and 'Ave María' (Medina, 2018a: 51) are not italicized, but embedded in rich dialogue and character description. At the 2018 National Council of Teachers of English Annual Meeting, Meg Medina (2018b) shared that by writing books bilingually without italics, authors show confidence and trust in their readers' abilities to navigate a text and make meaning. Readers in schools do the same with these texts, developing their own translanguaging literacies.

Daniel José Older, a middle-grade and YA *New York Times* bestselling author, regularly addresses this issue during conferences and school visits and to his nearly 50,000 Twitter followers. In a 2014 YouTube video with over 25,000 views, the author satirically re-enacts what it might sound like to readers when reading texts in English that include italics when using Spanish (Older, 2014). He changes his persona, toggling between his 'normal' self to a stereotypical version of himself (a fedora-wearing, cigar-smoking, guitar-playing Latino with an exaggerated intonation when using Spanish). Older navigates his persona across named

languages to convey a clear image of what happens when authors italicize, illustrating how othering it can be. He ends the video by returning to his 'normal' self and states: 'That's not what happens; that is not what we sound like; that's not what anybody sounds like. But when we put italics in a sentence, that is what it looks like, and that is what it reads like' (Older, 2014). Older (2014) is reminding us to use italics in the way that any writer would, which includes using italics for emphasis only, and not creating a false distinction between named languages when this separation does not reflect the languaging reality of bilingual Latinx speakers.

Textos y Temas

Although we especially encourage the use of mentor texts in classrooms with Latinx children, these textos are very important for monolingual white children who need to understand the lives and practices of bilingual Latinxs and become better listeners. These books engage with temas that are of utmost importance for Latinx students – (im)migration, borders, colonial relations, documentation, family, important Latinx figures, culture, language. We begin with picture books that can be used with young children in lower elementary classrooms, but which can be embraced by educators across all grade levels (we highly encourage this!). We highlight: Yuyi Morales' (2018a) *Dreamers* [*Soñadores*, in Spanish (2018b)]; Duncan Tonatiuh's (2018) *Undocumented: A Worker's Struggle*; and Anika Aldamuy Denise's (2019a) *Planting Stories: The Life of Librarian and Storyteller Pura Belpré* [*Sembrando historias: Pura Belpré: bibliotecaria y narradora de cuentos*, in Spanish (2019b)].

We then discuss texts that can be used with older children in upper elementary grades, starting with Sarai Gonzalez and Monica Brown's (2018) *Sarai* series, *Juana and Lucas* by Juana Medina (2016), and Angela Dominguez's (2018) *Stella Díaz Has Something to Say*. We continue by highlighting middle-grade novels that can be used with young adolescents: Meg Medina's (2018a) *Merci Suárez Changes Gears* [also available in Spanish, *Merci Suárez se pone las pilas* (2020[2] [3])]; David Bowles' (2018) *They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems* [*Me dicen güero: Poemas de un chavo de la frontera*, in Spanish (2020)]; and *Me, Frida, and the Secret of the Peacock Ring* by Angela Cervantes (2018). Lastly, we discuss YA literature that can be used in secondary schools, and focus on three key texts: Edgardo Miranda-Rodriguez's (2018) comic book series, *La Borinqueña*; Isabel Quintero's (2014) *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* [*Gabi, fragmentos de una adolescente*, in Spanish (2020)]; and *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo (2018) [*Poet X*, in Spanish (2019)].

Readers can find growing resources to learn about the latest Latinx reads through the various organizations dedicated to 'diversifying' the canon, most notably DisruptTexts, We Need Diverse, Latinx in Kidlit and Latinx in Publishing. There are also organizations like the American

Library Association (ALA), which sponsors the Pura Belpré Award, and its affiliate, REFORMA. Another great resource is Texas State University's Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award. Besides the websites and blogs named above, we recommend following the work of scholars who write about Latinx children's literature such as Laura Jiménez and Marilisa Jiménez García. Especially Jiménez García's recently published book, *Side by Side: US Empire, Puerto Rico, and the Roots of American Youth Literature* (Jiménez García, 2021).

Picture books for young children in lower elementary grades

In her widely celebrated picture book, *Dreamers*, Yuyi Morales (2018a) depicts her own immigration story. She tells the story of the power of public libraries and the impact that they had on her life and that of her young son as new immigrants in the United States. She shares a message of hope as she writes affirmations for those who might need to feel that they belong: 'We are stories. We are two languages. We are lucha. We are resilience. We are hope. We are dreamers, soñadores of the world' (Morales, 2018a: 27). In her book, Morales writes freely. She draws from features of Spanish and English between and within sentences, as bilinguals often do. Seeing fluid language practices reflected in this book can be affirming to bilingual children, their families and their communities. The content of the book along with the powerful message, and the language used to convey it, will resonate with many readers, especially with immigrant and Latinx families.

Duncan Tonatiuh's (2018) picture book, *Undocumented: A Worker's Fight*, follows Juan, a Mixteco immigrant in the United States who is caught between wanting to provide for his growing family and calling out the injustices in his workplace. He joins his coworkers in demanding a fair wage, despite the threat that he faces as an undocumented worker. His tío, as Tonatiuh (2018) writes, reminds him that he's an 'idiota,' that he's about to have a child and is jeopardizing his ability to provide for him. With everyone organized in solidarity to demand a fair wage, they are finally successful in persuading the boss to pay back their owed wages and to pay them a fair wage moving forward. The book ends by showing Juan in his expanding role as a labor organizer and helping other workers similarly fight to get fair wages and decent working conditions.

Inspired by Mixteco codices, the book opens and closes like an accordion. It has Tonatiuh's signature illustration style – a style also seen in Mixteco codices. In his illustrations, Tonatiuh uses a mixed media design approach by scanning images of hair for the hair of his characters, and pieces of cloth for the characters' clothes, giving it a textured appearance. It is noteworthy that he uses a Mixteco character for his book, given the vast underrepresentation of Indigenous people in children's literature. In the story, Juan grew up in a village where people do not speak Spanish, only

Mixteco, which highlights Mexico's own multilingual identity. Tonatiuh does not use Mixteco in the narration of Juan's story, but he does use features of Spanish which show up as italicized in the first mention in the book. Tonatiuh's writing typically features Mexican stories, history and culture, and even though they are published mostly in English, he creates translanguaging spaces strategically through the use of key words in Spanish.

In Anika Aldamuy Denise's (2019a) *Planting Stories: The Life of Librarian and Storyteller Pura Belpré*, readers are introduced to Belpré's journey from Puerto Rico to New York City, where she became the first Puerto Rican librarian for the New York Public Library. Belpré wrote the stories she heard growing up, folk tales from Puerto Rico that were absent from books in the library. The 'cuentos folklóricos' (Denise, 2019a: 1), 'cuentos she carries' (Denise, 2019a: 2), from Puerto Rico to New York, continued to be a part of her 'nueva vida' (Denise, 2019a: 3). Denise repeats the word 'cuentos' in Spanish and, unlike Tonatiuh, Denise does not use italics in the English version of the book (the book is also available in a Spanish edition). With the repetition of 'cuentos,' we are reminded that stories and storytelling are key to Belpré's life, sustaining her during the transition from Puerto Rico to the mainland United States.

All three texts can be used to develop lessons on meaningful topics that center Latinx children and their communities. These books address issues of belonging, (im)migration and identity, as well as showing some of the struggles involved in the journey to the (mainland) United States and their lives afterward. The authors represent these characters' experiences as bilingual Latinx people as they engage in translanguaging throughout the text.

Books for children in upper elementary grades

In *Juana and Lucas* by Juana Medina (2016), we meet Juana and her dog Lucas while getting to know their city of Bogotá, Colombia. We follow along as Juana faces several challenges in school. One of these challenges is learning English, but Juana loves to read and is motivated to learn as she prepares to visit Florida with family. When her mother insists that it is time to go to bed and that the lights be turned off, Juana is not ready to stop reading; she continues: 'Thank goodness my *abuelo* gave me a flashlight to use in case of an emergency. Having to turn the lights off and stop reading *inmediatamente* is definitely an emergency' (Medina, 2016: 6). A favorite of teachers and students in late second grade and early third grade, *Juana and Lucas* not only supports readers as they transition from picture books to chapter books, but also integrates translanguaging throughout the story.

Like Juana Medina, Angela Dominguez (2018) uses Spanish throughout her book, *Stella Díaz Has Something to Say*. Stella speaks Spanish with her family, her school's librarian, and sometimes throughout her day

in school, even when her speech teacher corrects her for this practice: 'Once a week, I leave my regular class for speech class. Speech is where I learn to speak *properly*. This means how all the letters and words are supposed to sound in English' (Dominguez, 2018: 36). The book continues, '"No Spanish right now, Stella." She always says that when I accidentally say a word in Spanish' (Dominguez, 2018: 38).

This text not only shows translanguaging practices, as a child uses features of Spanish and English across home, school and gatherings with friends, but also does not shy away from presenting the tensions in how language practices are welcomed or shamed by people in authority in schools. How do children perceive their bilingual language practices? How do their families interpret their navigating of language spaces across different settings? How do teachers, administrators and school staff perceive children's bilingualism? What language policies are implemented and how do these impact children?

In Sarai Gonzalez and Monica Brown's (2018) *Sarai* series, Sarai Gonzalez is a 4th grader with a big family and a big heart. In the first book in the series, *Sarai and the Meaning of Awesome*, her grandparents have to move, and Sarai comes up with ideas to help them buy their house. Sarai's parents are from Perú and Costa Rica; they all live in New Jersey, and their bilingual identities shine through in family conversations and community events. Tata and Mama Rosi, Sarai's grandparents, call their grandchildren (three girls) 'nietas,' and family conversations include sayings in Spanish. Spanish is completely integrated into the content across the different scenes. Readers sometimes see a translation of a saying within the text: '"Barriga llena, corazón contento," Tata says. "Full stomach, happy heart." That's one of his favorite sayings. But how can I have a happy heart when Tata and Mama Rosi are going to have to move?' (Gonzalez & Brown, 2018: 20). The author's use of bilingual language practices also gives the reader a glimpse into other aspects of the characters' identities.

We learn more about Sarai's Peruvian/Costa Rican/New Jersey family as Sarai and her cousin plan for their lemonade stand. We learn more about Perú, about how important it is to Sarai, and how this aspect of her identity even makes it onto the signs they create for their stand: '"Limonada," Juju says. "We'll make the signs in English and Spanish." "Wait!" I say. "I just thought of something that rhymes with limonada – chicha morada!" Chicha morada is a special drink made out of purple corn from Peru. I love it, and I bet our neighbors will too' (Gonzalez & Brown, 2018: 62).

Sometimes, inclusion work in curriculum and pedagogy centers on holidays and foods, lacking a depth of understanding of children's family, community and bilingual practices. In these texts, although we may read about life in Bogotá in Medina's *Juana and Lucas*, we also read about the albóndigas in *Stella Díaz Has Something to Say*, and the alfajores and

chicha morada in *Sarai and the Meaning of Awesome*. The authors' purposeful use of translanguaging shows depth of family relationships and character identity formation as they navigate growing up as bilingual and bicultural beings.

Books for young adolescents in middle school

Merci Suárez Changes Gears, Meg Medina's (2018a) middle-grade novel, has received numerous awards and recognitions, such as the prestigious Newbery Medal. In this novel, Merci attends an affluent Florida private school on a scholarship and has to work extra hard to keep it. She is part of an intergenerational family household and gets worried that something seems odd about her grandfather, her Lolo, but no one seems to want to talk to her about it. In this excerpt, Merci narrates what happened when Lolo loses his wallet, but as it turns out, he had just dropped it while gardening, and has not been robbed as he had previously claimed: 'When Abuela found his billfold in the bed of lantana he'd been weeding that afternoon – Ay-ay-ay! ¡Qué escándalo! Her volume button got stuck on high, and the whole block could hear her yelling about how he had to pay more attention' (Medina, 2018a: 21).

The author typically uses language fluidly in her books, and in *Merci* it is no different. She represents a US Latinx family with all of its nuances, linguistic and otherwise. Readers are not provided with translations for the words or phrases she uses in Spanish, and these are not otherized in any way. All of her words coexist harmoniously, again, genuinely reflecting how many bilingual families engage with translanguaging.

David Bowles' (2018) novel in verse, *They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems*, details Güero's life as he navigates middle grade and his border identity. As he returns to the United States from visiting his family in Monterrey, Mexico, he remembers the affection from his grandparents and feeling 'recharged', not just by the love, but also 'cultura' (Bowles, 2018: 88). Like Meg Medina, Bowles uses features of English and Spanish throughout this book. Words are not italicized or relegated to a specific character's dialogue – a common bilingual writing approach. As such, the author completely embraces his own border identity. The narrator shares his feelings toward Mexico – what it means to him, and how he feels after he leaves. It also reveals the emotional despedida from his grandparents, and even though he has to say goodbye to them, they are always with him in some way. Anyone who has various places to call home, or whose beloved family members live far away, can relate. The emotions are high, and the author languages freely, without the borders imposed by English or Spanish, to convey these deep feelings.

These examples reflect varied translanguaging practices within the Latinx community. For many in the Latinx community, the language called Spanish comes in small ripples, and not waves. This has to do with

oppressive societal practices or schooling that have never supported bilingual Latinx identities. Latinx children's authors represent this reality. In Angela Cervantes' (2018) *Me, Frida, and the Secret of the Peacock Ring*, we meet Paloma, who from the first chapter is shown to have a Spanish vocabulary book as she practices saying phrases during her trip to Mexico City. Cervantes sets up this tension with speaking in Spanish and traveling to Mexico over her summer break, as Paloma tells her mother, '*No quiero México. Tengo miedo de camarón*' (Cervantes, 2018: 8). Her mother is initially confused by hearing her daughter say that she is afraid of shrimp, but then Paloma clarifies that she doesn't like 'change' (Cervantes, 2018: 8). She tells her daughter that 'change' is 'cambio' and applauds Paloma for her efforts. Paloma was not raised speaking Spanish since her Mexican father passed away when she was very young. Yet, this trip connects her to this part of her identity, her past, and reshapes her present and future.

The young adolescents' literary texts that we have considered in this section offer a glimpse into the complex cultural and linguistic variability of US Latinx youth. We see Merci, whose identity is shaped and informed by her experiences with her extended family. We encounter Güero grappling with his border identity as he fully participates in both of these two worlds as one. And we also encounter Paloma, who yearns to reconnect with an important part of herself.

Books for adolescents and young adults

YA literature is a genre that keeps growing in popularity, drawing the attention not only of young adults, but of adults as well. A market research study revealed that over half of YA readers are over 18, with the largest group being in the 30–44 age range (Book Business, 2012). The three texts that we highlight here have certainly drawn the attention of more than just teenagers.

In Edgardo Miranda-Rodriguez's (2016) comic book series featuring the first Afro-Latina superhero, *La Borinqueña*, Marisol Rios de la Luz leaves her studies at Columbia University in New York City for a semester of environmental studies in Puerto Rico. Marisol not only connects with family on the island, but also gains superpowers from Atabex, a Taíno goddess. Miranda-Rodriguez uses fluid language practices throughout Marisol's encounters with family, friends, ancestors and the environment. In *La Borinqueña #1*, readers are introduced to Marisol's family and home in Brooklyn, New York. When Marisol leaves home to go to her undergraduate campus, she yells '¡Bendición!' and her parents respond in Spanish with '¡Que Dios te bendiga!' (Miranda-Rodriguez, 2016: 9). When she finally prepares to leave for her studies in Puerto Rico, Marisol's mother gifts her a ribbon from a frame that reads: 'El Grito de Lares, el 23 de septiembre 1868.' The mother tells Marisol: 'It's been framed since

your father and I first met, negrita. Pero sirve mejor ahora contigo' (Miranda-Rodriguez, 2016: 14).

In *La Borinqueña #2*, Marisol considers Puerto Rico her home and continues to see the injustices across Puerto Rican communities in New York and on the island of Puerto Rico. Spanish words are interspersed not only to show how people communicate but to also shed light on injustices. 'Ay Pedrito, lo único que le pediría a Yemayá es que nos brinde un hogar seguro, ahora que FEMA nos ha abandonado en esta ciudad,' Julio tells his partner, right before they flee from homophobic and xenophobic attacks (Miranda-Rodriguez, 2018: 2). Marisol then arrives in full superhero disguise having turned into La Borinqueña. She tells Pedro and Julio, 'You can be Puerto Rican, American, and free to love. Love always wins. That's your right.' Julio responds: 'Gracias por todo negrita, con todo mi corazón' (Miranda-Rodriguez, 2018: 3).

During a moment of tension, Marisol and her friend Lala meet students at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras campus, the day before a march. Puerto Rican identity, colonization, recovery and language practices are at the center of the conversation with Puerto Rican university students, with protest signs that read: 'Puerto Rico No Se Vende' and 'Puerto Rico Se Levanta' (Miranda-Rodriguez, 2018: 48). When Marisol introduces herself to the group, her accent is questioned by her peers: 'Y ese acento, ustedes son Nuyorquinos, ¿verdad?' and they then continue in English, assuming that Marisol and Lala will not understand Spanish very well: 'Let me stop you right there, and I'll tell you this in English so you understand me better' (Miranda-Rodriguez, 2018: 40). In these examples, Miranda-Rodriguez shows that Latinidad is linguistically complex. Although the characters are all Puerto Rican university students, they use language differently depending on the context in which they have lived. Marisol is immediately faulted for having 'that accent' and viewed as not being authentically Puerto Rican but being Nuyorican. Language is used to highlight tensions having to do with identity, privilege, race, social class and colonization.

In *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces*, Isabel Quintero beautifully writes the story of Gabi, a high school girl learning to love herself as she is, developing her gift of poetry writing, and finding the balance between her friendships and relationships with her family and with boys. Gabi negotiates her relationship with a drug-addicted father and a mother who constantly criticizes her weight and imposes her ideas of what it means to be a 'good' girl. In navigating her complex world, Gabi draws from her entire linguistic repertoire as she writes in her journal and letters to her Papi that she never sends. She misses her dad who disappears from their lives for days or weeks at a time, without knowing when or if he will be back, or if he will still be alive. We see how Gabi uses her language fluidly in her diary, letters, poetry, and her everyday dialogue with the important people in her life, especially her mother.

In one scene, Gabi goes to Tijuana where she hopes she can get her prom dress made – it does not go well. The seamstress has made the dress too small and the design is nothing like she expected. Gabi thought she looked like a piñata. And when she was stressed, she thought about food: 'I thought about all the food I would eat later as we drove back, straight past the juggling kids, the fruit vendors, covijas por veinte dólares, the crippled, mangled and poverty-stricken populace quien nos despedía de México lindo y querido' (Quintero, 2014: 224). As she describes all the food that would make her feel better after a humiliating experience with the seamstress, she manages to critically reflect on her surroundings as she is leaving Tijuana. With a 'México lindo y querido,' Quintero gives a nod to a famous traditional song by that same name that Mexicans and non-Mexicans alike can widely recognize and sing along with. The song reflects a deep love and patriotism for Mexico – a Mexico that also has impoverished people, struggling day-to-day, and in this case selling their goods to those waiting in line to cross the border to the other side. Gabi uses her language fluidly as she describes her feelings and her surroundings, which anyone who has made this trip by car across the border will recognize. In an interview led by a high school student, Quintero says that Gabi has a lot of herself in her, and describes the book as being 'semi-autobiographical' (Teen 365 at PCPL, 2018). Quintero is the daughter of Mexican immigrants and lives in southern California.

Finally, we highlight *The Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo, a standout YA novel of 2018 that won numerous awards, including the National Book Award for Young People's Literature, the Printz Award and the Pura Belpré Award. In her book, the author develops a complex character in Xiomara, with all the nuances of adolescence. We see Xiomara, the main character, navigate what it means to be a Dominican young woman growing up in New York City. Like the author herself, Xiomara is a poet, and in this novel written entirely in verse, she develops into a spoken word poet. Spoken word is Xiomara's escape from her perceived reality.

When Xiomara is going through some issues at home, her teacher notices that she is not being her usual self. Xiomara has been unusually quiet and distracted in school, and when her teacher wants to know what is going on, she says nothing because she believes 'in keeping matters of the home at home' (Acevedo, 2018: 252). Acevedo engages her entire linguistic repertoire in her writing, particularly when Xiomara emulates her mother and, as we can see in the excerpt above, when she negotiates lessons from her family.

These three YA novels similarly present a strong female protagonist grappling with young adulthood in various ways. Their cultural and language practices are shaped by the past and present and these also inform their future.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have highlighted the importance of developing Latinx children's *critical translanguaging literacies*, that is, their ability to use their entire repertoire, regardless of the language of the written text, to critically examine their histories and lives in US society. We have argued that to do so, it is important to have *textos* that portray the *temas* that are important to Latinx communities, and the *translanguaging* that is prevalent in Latinx communities. This would then encourage teachers to develop what we have called a *critical translanguaging literacies pedagogy*. To assist teachers in this endeavor, we have highlighted here some of the three Ts that we consider important: the *textos*, written by Latinx authors, which reflect the *temas* and the *translanguaging*.

Latinx children's literature increasingly includes texts with translanguaging for a variety of purposes. Some Latinx authors use italics to denote when there is Spanish writing in the text; others do not. Some offer translation and interpretations in the lines that follow, and others do not. But, as we have seen, Latinx children's authors are increasingly portraying bilingualism dynamically; that is, the texts portray translanguaging, much like many Latinx children and their families often do.

Most of the books we have highlighted in this chapter were published between 2018 and 2019. It is significant that many of these recent books with characters that engage in translanguaging have received numerous high-profile recognitions. Perhaps this says something about the ways in which we are affirming translanguaging practices, and how the publishing industry is recognizing and trusting the ways in which authors are expressing the varied linguistic practices of Latinx communities. However, most of the own voices Latinx books published are by white-presenting Latinx authors and have white-presenting Latinx characters. It is critical to also support Black and Indigenous Latinx authors to amplify the varied Latinx experiences. These representations have major implications for classroom instruction. What kinds of understandings of Latinx identities and issues are highlighted if mostly white-presenting Latinx characters in stories populate our curriculum and libraries? How does this lack of representation contribute to anti-Blackness across communities? These are questions that we all must confront when considering text selection, topics and translanguaging. From classroom teachers, to librarians, to editors and the publishing industry, we are all implicated.

In the classroom, children's books like the ones we have included here can be used as mentor texts, as the chispa that sparks a deeper conversation on meaningful topics that relate to family history and culture, immigration stories, separation, feeling a connection to various places, and coming of age, among other topics. They can also spark prompts for writing or serve as a mentor text for writing by engaging students' entire linguistic repertoire.

Integrating books that engage Latinx students' translanguaging literacies in curriculum design and instruction can be liberating and transformative for all. Incorporating a critical translanguaging literacies pedagogy means that bilingual and multilingual Latinx children can express themselves without constraints, and without being regulated by teachers and administrators who view their identities and language as something that needs to be 'fixed.' It can also be transformative in that Latinx people are able to forge their own spaces where they can express what is unique to them, to their distinctive experiences and their identity, without always having to see themselves, and read themselves, through the eyes of monolingual white writers. It can also be transformative for monolingual educators who have held deficit and raciolinguistic perspectives that make them unable to listen to Latinx children's potential (Rosa & Flores, 2017).

A critical translanguaging literacies pedagogy includes liberation from oppressive linguistic ideological frameworks that often inform curricular and pedagogical decisions, and that alienate Latinx children from their own realities. We posit that administrators, teachers, students and parents/caregivers can be liberated from the strict named language separation process in which society and schools have engaged, so that Latinx children can be included as meaningful literate beings with translanguaging practices. Children's literature that engages dynamic language practices plays a key role in this transformation.

For school leaders who seek an equity-based vision for their schools, and who are overwhelmed with decision-making around monolingual scripted curricula, advocating for critical translanguaging literacies can enable the development of a nurturing environment for all teachers and students, and relationship building with family and community members.

For teachers who are often asked to regulate students' languages in order to conform to the school's and district's language allocation policy, welcoming translanguaging literacies even within the traditional monolingual space can provide authenticity in what are labeled as monolingual or dual language bilingual classrooms which ignore the language and cultural practices of students. Some school policies direct teachers to persuade their students to think that they (the teachers) are monolingual in order to force the students to 'stick' to what is considered the language of instruction. But even when there is a target language in instruction, Latinx readers and writers cannot engage fully and critically in literacy acts unless they enter into texts with all of themselves, including their own translanguaging literacies. We suggest that using translanguaging texts like the ones we describe here can create a liberating space for them, encouraging students to engage in translanguaging in classrooms, as they already do in their lives outside of the classroom walls.

For students who are shut down for not using the expected language at the designated time or space, or who do not see their community and

home language practices as valid forms of communication or reflected in classroom expectations, engaging with translanguaging literature can help them see their own and their families' experiences reflected and sustained in the stories that they read. Supporting students' varied Latinx identities includes Black Latinx realities and translanguaging practices. This helps expand the understandings of Latinx identities by all, Latinx and non-Latinx students. It is no longer simply about planning instruction with monolingual texts in Spanish, with bilingual texts that display English and Spanish separately, or only with texts with white-presenting Latinx characters, but about texts that reflect the dynamic bilingualism with which all Latinx bilingual students engage.

Finally, for families and community members who have often been made to feel that they have nothing of value to offer their children's schools, embracing translanguaging literacies is an important reminder that they can support their children by sustaining the home language practices. The stories they tell their children are important, especially as these reveal intergenerational knowledge and coraje in the face of struggle. To see the home as a space where translanguaging literacies live, where Latinx bilingual children's translanguaging practices are accepted, and understanding that these may not be exactly like their parents', are key for nurturing comunidad (España & Herrera, 2020). Embracing children's translanguaging and understanding translanguaging literacies as bilingual practices are important expressions of resistance to racialized linguistic hierarchies. By implementing translanguaging literacies through texts and pedagogy, we can contribute to eradicating the reproduction of racist ideologies, practices and policies in schooling.

Note

(1) We want to acknowledge that Latinx children bring many other language practices besides those associated with English and Spanish. Many Latinx children also use language practices associated with the many Indigenous languages in Latin America. In this chapter, however, we are limiting ourselves to Spanish and English.

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