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Promoting Exploratory Talk with Emergent Bilinguals

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Abstract

The authors explain their approach to teaching *literatura infantil* (children's literature) in Spanish to bilingual teachers pursuing their master's degree in bilingual education at a university in South Texas. In this Self-Study of Teacher Education Practice (S-STEP) research, the authors investigated how teachers can transform their practice and come to value their students' abilities to interpret literature. They engaged the teachers in projects using quality children's literature. The projects were carried out by graduate inservice teachers teaching Spanish/English bilingual students studying at different grade levels.

Some teachers taught along the Texas/Mexico border and others taught in a large metropolitan school district in central Texas. The authors used their analysis of the inservice teachers' projects as data to inform their own practice as teacher educators. In the first project, the bilingual teachers engaged their students in exploratory talk that allowed them to bring their backgrounds and experiences into discussions of what they read. The second project challenged the teachers to consider the importance of the images in high-quality illustrated children's books. The teachers asked their students to read the images and expand their understanding of the books by considering more than the words in the texts. In the final project, the teachers guided their students through Ada's stages of creative dialogue using children's literature. The authors describe the projects in detail and give examples from four different teachers showing what they learned about teaching children's literature and how they changed their perspectives about what their emergent bilingual students could do. Although only four teachers are highlighted, they are representative of students taking the course and engaging in the projects over three different semesters.

Promoting Exploratory Talk with *Literatura Infantil*

No existe ninguna perspectiva correcta, única, prefijada (Gramigna, 2005, p.32)

(There doesn't exist a singular predetermined correct point of view.)

Most educators who have been involved with the teaching of reading and the teaching of children's literature, in particular, would agree with the above quote. However, this openness to interpreting and allowing children in classrooms to explore literature is seldom a reality. Too often teachers dominate discussions following an all too traditional initiation, response, evaluation (IRE) format (Cazden, 2001). When teachers have the opportunity to experience exploratory talk (Barnes, 1990) with their students, they see their students' strengths and come to understand the power of good literature (Langer, 1995).

The authors of this article were teacher educators working in South Texas with Latino/a teachers in the field of bilingual education. We found that our approach to teaching *literatura infantil* (children's literature) transformed the thinking and practice of the inservice teacher graduate students in our class. These bilingual teachers were excited about taking a master's level course in *literatura infantil*. The idea of having "grand conversations" about books (Peterson & Eeds, 2007) was not something to which they had been exposed.

Our *literatura infantil* course was conducted in Spanish. Most of the readings for the course were in Spanish, and literature books were either written entirely in Spanish or were bilingual books. Most of the books were also culturally relevant. That is, the books connected to the students' lives and or backgrounds in some way (Freeman & Freeman,

2004; Rodriguez, 2009). Students responded both in writing and orally to projects and class discussions in Spanish.

We had several goals for the course. First of all, we wanted to expose the bilingual teachers to a large variety of quality, culturally relevant, children's literature in Spanish. We wanted to involve the teachers in projects using literature with their own students. In addition, it was important to us to connect the research on children's literature to classroom practice. Finally, we hoped to help the teachers transform their classroom practices using exploratory talk with their students.

To accomplish these goals students read and discussed various articles presented each week on different children's literature written in Spanish (Ada, 2003; Arizpe & Styles, 2002; Freeman & Freeman, 2009; Gramigna, 2005; Pellicer, 2011; Rodriguez, 2009), and engaged in three key projects. The first project was based on the article they read by Gramigna where the author explained the difference between the traditional classroom talk about books that follow the IRE (Initiation, Response, and Evaluation) pattern and exploratory talk that engages students and allows them to bring their own backgrounds and experiences to discussions about the books they read. The second project drawing on the article by Arizpe and Styles challenged the teachers to consider the importance of the images in high quality illustrated children's books. The project asked students to "read" the images and expand their understanding of the books by considering more than the words in the texts. The final project drew on the powerful work of author and educator Alma Flor Ada. Students read about and discussed Ada's stages of creative dialogue and took their students through the stages using children's literature. In the rest of this article, we describe each of the projects in detail and give

examples from the teachers showing what they learned about teaching children's literature.

Exploratory Talk

Gramigna (2005) explains that teachers who take a traditional approach evaluate students' responses to books they read as either "correct" or "incorrect" and look for what students remember from the readings and what they understood about the stories. The students' role is passive. She encourages teachers to use exploratory talk where they explore their own feelings, ideas, and beliefs and draw on their backgrounds to make connections with their own experiences. Students participate in discussions about culturally relevant texts and, as they respond, different meanings and interpretations are encouraged. Teachers are not looking for set answers. Key to exploratory talk is that the teacher is to stimulate conversation, not lead it. Typical exploratory talk questions include "What do you think about....?" "What part or character in the story did you like most?" "What else would you like to know?" "What does the story remind you of?"

To complete the exploratory talk project, our graduate students first chose a quality literature book in Spanish to read to a group of students. For this first project, they were asked to formulate exploratory talk questions and to create an exploratory talk atmosphere.

Laura, a fourth grade teacher, read *¡Qué montón de tamales!* (Soto, 1996) (Too Many Tamales) to her students. This culturally relevant story for Latino children tells of a girl, María, who, when helping to make the traditional Christmas tamales, tries on her mother's wedding ring. María gets distracted and forgets about the ring. Later she remembers the ring and thinks she must have lost the ring in the tamale dough. She

enlists her cousins to help her eat the tamales to find the ring.

Laura found that the exploratory questions she asked allowed for a deeper and more meaningful discussion of this book than she had experienced with her students in the reading of books in the past. In her Gramigna project paper Laura wrote about the effects of the free discussion of this book especially on one girl in her class.

En una discusión sin presiones ni límites de tiempo en la que las estudiantes determinaron el ritmo y el tiempo para expresar sus ideas, fue posible observar cómo L., hizo interpretaciones un poco más profundas, quizá porque tenga más conocimiento previo sobre el hecho de hacer travesuras y enfrentar las consecuencias.

(In a discussion without pressure or time restraints where the students determined the rhythm and the time to express their ideas, it was possible to see how L. made a little deeper interpretations perhaps because she had more previous experience getting into mischief and having to face the consequences).

(Note: All translations are free in an attempt to better represent the intent and Spanish included is exactly as written by the students.)

Natascha, a middle school teacher, chose *Friends from the other side / Amigos del otro lado* by border poet and writer, Gloria Anzaldúa (Anzaldúa, 1993) to read to her middle school students. This powerful story tells of Prietita, a girl who befriends Joaquín, an undocumented boy who is taunted by her classmates. She also provides food and moral support for the boy and his mother. The story brings in the fear that undocumented families suffer when the *migra* (border patrol) comes to the neighborhood. The *curandera* (healer) is a key character in the story as she gives the mother and son shelter

and helps them cure sores that they got when they crossed the river.

The four middle school students Natascha read with were labeled as struggling readers and had the characteristics of long term English learners (LTELs) as they had been in this country attending school seven or more years, appeared unengaged with school, and struggled with reading, writing, and understanding English. These LTELs showed, however, that, when their teacher encouraged exploratory talk, they were capable of much more than is usually expected of them. As Natascha explained in her project paper,

A pesar del bajo nivel académico y motivacional que los niños presentan en la clase regular de lectura y escritura, ...al exponer a los niños a estrategias del habla explorativa planteado por Gramigna, estos lograron demostrar que son capaces de comprender, interpretar y desarrollar el pensamiento crítico al realizar conexiones personales e intertextuales con el cuento narrado.

(In spite of the low academic and motivational level that these students showed in their regular reading and writing class... upon exposure to the exploratory talk strategies suggested by Gramigna, these students were able to show that they were capable of understanding, interpreting, and thinking critically as they made personal and intertextual connections with the narrative.)

Because the book talks openly about undocumented characters and Natascha encouraged students to discuss their own experiences,

Se abrió la puerta a la discusión y a las múltiples interpretaciones sobre la denominación “mojado.” Los niños estuvieron de acuerdo con haber escuchado la denominación antes y algunos compartieron historias de parientes y familiares

que también cruzaron el río y a los que los han llamado “mojados.”

Reflexionaron además sobre la importancia de venir a vivir y a trabajar a los Estados Unidos como causas nobles y que valen la pena, aún cuando la gente se burla de ellos.

(The door was opened for discussion [on the topic of undocumented people] and for discussion of the many interpretations of the label ‘wetback.’ The students all agreed they had heard the label before and some shared stories of relatives and close friends who also crossed the river and those people who had called them ‘wetbacks.’ They also reflected on the importance of coming to live and work in the United States as a noble goal and worth the effort even when people ridiculed them.)

When Laura and Natascha encouraged exploratory talk with their students, their students were more engaged with the literature and were able to interpret what they read and understand the readings at a deeper, more personal level than they had in the past.

Reading the Illustrations

Arizpe and Styles (2002) discussed their research in London reading powerfully illustrated books with children. The researchers used books by Anthony Browne to help both children and teachers see how illustrations, as well as the words, must be read. In their article, Arizpe and Styles shared the results of the children’s responses to the Browne books, books that have been translated into Spanish and are widely known and appreciated in Latin America. They explain that readers of illustrated books need to “read” the illustrations and see their connections to the texts and their importance in telling the stories. Arizpe and Styles believe that many adults have lost the ability to read

the illustrations and often ignore or devalue the importance of the illustration in telling the stories (Arizpe & Styles, 2003).

In their 2002 research Arizpe and Styles wanted to find out how children interpret images in illustrated books, how they connect images to the written text, and what the implications of how children read images in texts are for the teaching of reading. Using Antony Browne's *Zoológico* (Browne, 1993b) (Zoo) and *El túnel* (Browne, 1993a) (The Tunnel) in order to find out these answers, the researchers asked the children questions about the cover illustrations and what those illustrations told them about what would happen in the story. Then, the authors asked children to talk about their favorite illustrations and asked them how they read the pictures and how they understood that the words and pictures went together. They also had the children comment on facial expressions, gestures, colors and lines in the illustrations, and asked them about the perspectives of the illustrations. In a second set of interviews, they asked questions that were a bit deeper such as, "*¿Por qué crees que el autor/ilustrador quiere hacernos ver las cosas de esta manera?*" (Why do you think the author/illustrator wants us to see things like those in the illustrations?) "*¿Te hace leer el libro de una manera distinta?*" (Does it make you read the book differently?) "*¿Qué pasa por tu cabeza cuando ves una imagen?*" (What goes through your head when you see an illustration?) "*¿Sucede lo mismo que cuando ves un programa en la televisión o una película o juegas en la computadora?*" (Is it different from when you watch a TV program, or a movie or play on the computer?) (Arizpe & Styles, 2002, p.22).

In our graduate class we had the bilingual teachers read and discuss the Arizpe and Styles article. We then asked them to choose a well-illustrated children's book for the

second project we had them do. Teachers were to choose at least four students, preferably of different ages, read the book with the children, and ask questions like those suggested by Arizpe and Styles. The experience, like that with the Gramigna project, was very positive for the bilingual teachers.

Laura chose to use *El túnel* for her project. *El túnel* is the story of two siblings who do not get along. The brother is outgoing, athletic, and daring. The sister, a loner and an avid reader of fairy tales, is quite timid. Browne foreshadows in his illustrations what is to come. One key illustration shows the brother teasing the sister by crawling into her room at night wearing a wolf's mask. In the room, there is a witch's cape and hat hanging on a closet that is covered in tree bark, a picture of little Red Riding Hood meeting the wolf hanging on her wall, a tail coming out from under the bed, and what looks like the feet of someone hiding under her bed.

In the story, the sister is sad about the fact the brother is mean to her and ignores her. One day the children's mother, tired of the children's bickering, sends them out to play together for a change. When the brother crawls into a dark tunnel, his sister, afraid to follow him, stays behind, but her brother does not return. Finally, her concern for her brother helps her overcome her fears of the tunnel. She crawls through the tunnel and enters an illustrated magical and frightening world of wild beasts lurking and hidden in gnarled trees. None of these frightening apparitions are explicitly discussed in the text nor do the words express the strong emotions the sister feels, but these things are powerfully illustrated throughout the book. Thus, the reader must "read" the illustrations as well as the words to understand the story well.

Laura read *El túnel* (Browne, 1993a) to three different groups of students. The

first group consisted of 16 seven and eight year old second graders, the second group had 18 ten and eleven year old fourth graders. There were both boys and girls in these groups. Laura also read the book to a five year old kindergarten boy.

Laura hypothesized that the single interview with the five year old would not give her the same depth of analysis as that of the group discussions, *“Los estudiantes entrevistados en grupo serán capaces de construir una interpretación más completa del libro en comparación del estudiante entrevistado de manera individual.”* (The students interviewed in groups will be more able to develop more complete interpretations than the student interviewed alone.) However, the five year old read the illustrations with more care and drew some interesting conclusions that the older students did not seem to notice or discuss. Laura explained, *“hace inferencias sobre la imagen en lugar de describirla.”* ([he] makes inferences based on the illustration instead of describing it.) For example, in discussing the bedroom scene described above, he told his teacher that the girl in the story was scared based on how the girl was holding her doll and blanket when the brother came in wearing the wolf’s mask. The kindergartner showed how observant he was by adding details about the lighting in the illustration and inferring that someone was hiding because the shoes were showing under the bed.

In the story, once the brother enters the tunnel, his sister is faced with the dilemma of whether or not to follow. Both the second graders and the kindergartner read the sister’s facial expressions and made comments about how sad and frightened the sister was. The older students were able to take their interpretations to a deeper level. Laura observed,

Todos los estudiantes de todas las edades fueron capaces de hacer conexiones

basadas en sus sentimientos y experiencias previas sobre la tristeza. Todos fueron capaces de explicar porque Rosa estaba triste. Los niños de segundo y kinder se concentraron en observar los rasgos faciales de la niña... Mientras los niños de cuarto se concentraron en los posibles sentimientos por los que la protagonista podría estar atravesando.

(All students of all ages were able to make connections based on their feelings and prior experiences with sadness. All of them were able to explain why Rosa was sad. The second graders and the kindergarten student focused on observing the facial expressions of the girl... While fourth graders focused on the possible feelings through which the protagonist could be going.)

After the sister entered the tunnel, the text tells the reader that the sister is thinking about wolves, giants, and witches and wants to turn back, but she must find her brother. The next three pages have no words at all but the children “read” the illustrations. They used the illustrations to make intertextual ties as they compared the experience the girl had in the woods on the other side of the tunnel with Little Red Riding Hood.

In addition, several individual children noticed other beasts in the illustrations that proved that the sister’s expectations of finding *cosas malas* (bad things) on the other side of the tunnel were realized. Laura explained that the children observed a bear whose arms resembled the eyes of an owl. They hypothesized that the wolf was probably going to eat the owl. They also noticed something that resembled the fur of a lion, and they hypothesized that the wolf might have eaten the lion too. All of this “reading” of the illustrations showed the children’s ability to construct critical meaning from illustrations,

meanings the text never included.

Laura's students were all from a large metropolitan area in Texas, but students from a smaller city in the deep south of Texas along the Mexico border were able to "read" the illustrations and make the same kinds of observations.

Cynthia, a first grade bilingual teacher in a border elementary school, read *El túnel* to all her first grade students, and then individually to a kindergartener, two second graders and a third grader. Initially, the children made interesting comments about the book's cover which shows the sister entering the tunnel leaving her illustrated fairy tale book open to a picture of a witch threatening a princess. Cynthia noted,

El estudiante de Tercer Grado estaba usando su imaginación diciendo que la niña había hecho algo y que ella estaba escapando. Los estudiantes de Primero y kínder se fijaron más en los detalles que veían en la portada.

(The third grade student was using his imagination saying that the girl had done something and had to escape. The first grade and kindergarten students focused more on the details that they saw on the cover.)

For example, Cynthia explained that the younger children noticed the book the girl was reading was about witches and princesses.

Several of the children's observations were centered on the bedroom scene Laura's students described where the sister is in bed, and the brother is crawling in with the mask. Cynthia commented, "*A mis estudiantes les gustó mucho esta ilustración ya que está llena de detalles.*" (My students liked this illustration a lot because it is full of details.) Cynthia's third grader noted that the shadow of the brother with the mask looked like a wolf, and a second grader inferred that the girl was afraid of the dark and couldn't

sleep. Like Laura's students, Cynthia's students also noticed there was a monster under the bed because they could see the feet sticking out.

The children also noticed the sister's expressions once her brother entered the tunnel. Cynthia explained,

Los estudiantes hablaron sobre la expresión que tenía la niña. También unos estudiantes dijeron que la niña se siente sola, triste, y con miedo porque piensa que al entrar al túnel va a ver cosas malas ahí.

(Students talked about the girl's facial expression. Also, some students said the girl felt lonely, sad, and afraid because she thinks once she enters the tunnel, she will see bad things there.)

Once the sister went through the tunnel and entered the forest, the children made the same intertextual connections as Laura's students did. Cynthia's first graders noticed the wolf and made the connection to Little Red Riding Hood.

Cynthia's questions to her students about the importance of the illustrations, revealed to her the importance of providing students with quality illustrated books. The third grader she interviewed told her that if there had not been illustrations, it would have been hard to understand the story. Several of her first graders also said the illustrations helped them understand the story and that they wouldn't have liked the story without illustrations.

One last example from the Arizpe and Styles project comes from Natascha who interviewed a 15 year old, a 12 year old, a 6 year old and a 5 year old using a different Anthony Browne book, *El libro de los cerdos* (Browne, 1991) (Piggybook). This story tells of the Piggott family consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Piggott and their two sons. Mr.

Piggott and his sons do nothing around the house while Mrs. Piggott is a working mother and also does all the household chores. One day, tired of the drudgery and lack of appreciation from her family, she leaves the men alone with the note, “You are pigs.” After the mother leaves, this illustrated book shows the father and sons literally turning into pigs. Their home becomes a literal pigsty without the work the mother usually did.

Natascha explained in her project paper that the younger students she interviewed noticed many of Browne’s details in the illustrations:

Los niños más pequeños realizaron observaciones interesantes, pudieron ver detalles en las imágenes, como la cantidad de cerdos camuflados entre los objetos y las sombras, descubrieron que en una de las imágenes la sombra del señor de la Cerda es la de un cerdo, y entre risas comentaron que en verdad no era hombre, sino que era cerdo porque aunque no se viese como tal, actuaba como uno.

(The younger children made interesting observations, they could see details in the images, like the large number of pigs hidden among the objects and in the shadows, they discovered that in one of the images the shadow of Mr. Piggott is that of a pig, laughing they commented that, in truth, he was not a man, but a pig because although he didn’t look like one, he acted like one.)

Like Laura and Cynthia’s students, Natascha’s younger students made an intertextual tie with this story and *The Three Little Pigs* when they noticed some wolves hidden within the illustrations.

The older students, with Natascha’s guidance, came to deeper conclusions and could make personal connections. They analyzed color, expressions, gestures, the

author's intentions, and made personal connections. The older girl commented that the reason the illustrations that showed the mother were darker was surely because she felt lonely and sad. Natascha noted, "*Los niños mas grandes lograron hacer conexiones personales de manera casi inmediata.*" (The older children were able to establish personal connections almost immediately). They compared the characters in the story to their own parents. In discussion with her older students, Natascha noted the sophistication of their responses, "*...sintieron empatía por la protagonista del cuento y descubrieron el cambio radical de su rol en la familia al comienzo, donde la veían como a una "niña" y el final cuando la vieron "hermosa."*" (They felt empathy for the protagonist of the story and noticed the radical change in her role in the family from the beginning where she appeared to look like a little girl to the end where they saw her as looking beautiful.)

Natascha was impressed with the way both age groups were able to use the illustrations and to interpret the moral of the story. She wrote in her project, "*...ambos grupos llegaron a las mismas conclusiones, lograron comprender la temática del cuento e hicieron interpretaciones profundas y muy acertadas.*" (...both groups came to the same conclusions, were able to understand the story's theme and made profound interpretations that were right on the mark.)

Taking Literature through Ada's Four Phases of the Creative Dialogue

Ada (2003) developed a model for teaching children's literature referred to as creative dialogue. Ada proposes that teachers use quality literature and lead children through four phases as to help students delve deeper and deeper into the books they read. The first phase, the descriptive phase, is one in which the teacher asks questions to see if students understood the story. A teacher might ask questions about *El túnel* like "What

did the sister in the story like to do? Or “Who went into the tunnel first? The next phase is the interpretive phase. In this phase teachers encourage students to share personal reflections and emotions. So teachers might ask, “What part of the story did you like best?” Or “Have you ever felt like the sister did when she entered the tunnel?”

In the Critical/Multicultural/Anti-bias phase questions teachers ask are meant to help students explore their prejudices, opinions and ideas. About the *El túnel* teachers might ask “Should boys try to frighten or tease girls?” and *El libro de los cerdos* might bring up a discussion about whether housework is women’s work or should it be shared. The final stage that Ada proposes is the creative/transformational phase. In this phase teachers and students explore together what they might do to improve situations that exist in society or in their community. After reading *El túnel* and discussing the relationship between the brother and sister, students can discuss alternative ways of interacting with one another. Students reading *El libro de los cerdos* might talk about women’s rights and equality and plan to make changes in their own homes or community. In other words, students do not only discuss the literature in this final stage, but move towards some type of action.

For this project, we asked the bilingual teachers to choose an appropriate book and take students through the four phases with the book. The teachers were to do this with at least three children but could also do it with a whole class.

An excellent culturally relevant book for taking Latino students living along the border through the four phases is a book described above, *Friends from the other side / Amigos del otro lado* (Anzaldúa, 1993). Krisstel teaches in a rural community along the Texas and Mexico border. She decided to use the book with her 8 and 9 year-old third

graders because she believed it was relevant to them and their experiences. In her questions during the descriptive phase, it was clear to Krishtel that her students understood the story. They understood that the girl in the story, Prietita, empathized with and protected the undocumented Joaquín. Krishtel explained,

Los niños compararon y contrastaron al personaje de Joaquín con otros niños, ya que resaltaron cualidades sobre su apariencia física y su origen, lo que llevó a la docente a pensar que sus llagas y su pobreza impactaron a los alumnos de gran manera.

(The children compared and contrasted the character Joaquín with other children given that they highlighted characteristics of his physical appearance and his origin, which led the teacher to think that the character's wounds and poverty greatly impacted the students.)

The students could connect with this story in the interpretive stage. When Krishtel asked her students if they had been bullied by others like Joaquín was, Krishtel noted, *“Los niños pudieron hacer conexiones personales con sus vivencias al recordar instancias donde ellos mismos fueron víctimas de la crueldad de otros niños.”* (The children were able to make personal connections with their lived experiences by remembering instances when they were victims of the cruelty of other children.)

In the Critical/Multicultural/Antibias phase, Krishtel asked the students if all prisoners were bad because in the story Joaquín and his mother were afraid of being taken to jail. Krishtel explained,

“Muchos de los alumnos relataron historias acerca de parientes y amigos que han estado presos por diferentes motivos. Ellos pudieron darse cuenta de que la

percepción acerca de los presos cambia cuando alguien lo ha experimentado de cerca.”

(Many students told stories of relatives and friends that have been in jail for different reasons. They realized that the perception of the incarcerated changes when someone has experienced it close hand.)

In the final stage, students came up with alternatives such as the following: “*intentar cambiar las leyes o recolectar dinero para obtener su libertad...*” (try to change the law or collect money to get them free...)

Cynthia, the first grade teacher whose illustrated book project we discussed above, chose three fifth grade girls from her border school for her Ada four phases project. She read to the students Francisco Jimenez’, *La mariposa*, (Jiménez, 1998), Spanish for *butterfly*, an illustrated book available in English and Spanish taken from a chapter of Jimenez’ *The Circuit* (Jiménez, 1997) also available in Spanish as *Cajas de cartón* (Jiménez, 2000). *The Circuit* chronicles Jimenez’s own life as an immigrant child. In *La mariposa*, Jimenez tells about his experiences attending school for the first time in this country without knowing how to speak English. When he first gets to school, the teacher places Francisco in the back of the room next to a jar with a caterpillar. As the story unfolds and Francisco struggles with both English and the class bully, both Francisco and the caterpillar are transformed. In the end, Francisco’s teacher awards his art work, and Francisco makes peace with his tormentor.

During the descriptive phase the three students, all with personal experiences not knowing English, explained that Francisco was different because he did not speak English and that he wanted to speak English in order to communicate. The interpretive

phase brought out clearly how the students connected personally with the book. When Cynthia asked if they had ever felt like Francisco or experienced something like what Francisco experienced, the girls talked about their experience entering school not speaking English and how difficult it was for them to learn English and adapt to change. When asked how their experiences compared with Francisco's, all three girls told how their parents, like Francisco's, wanted to come to this country for a better life.

In discussion with the three girls during the critical/multicultural/anti-bias phase, they discussed whose voices were heard and whose were ignored in this story. The girls understood that Francisco's parents had no status or power. Cynthia explained, "*Ellas también dijeron que la voz de Francisco era ignorada porque la maestra no sabía ... [español] y no se podían comunicar con ella. Y el idioma de él no era valorado.*" (They also said that Francisco's voice was ignored because the teacher did not know... [Spanish] and they could not communicate with her. His language was not valued). This led to a discussion of the importance of maintaining one's home language even when one is learning English. They also discussed how some new immigrants are treated by their classmates.

In the creative/transformative phase, the students discussed what they could do if a new immigrant student was being mistreated. They talked about how they would try to welcome the new student and encourage others to do the same. Finally, Cynthia asked the students to tell her what they learned from the story. Cynthia reflected, "*Me gustó mucho lo que ella dijo, que aprender un idioma toma tiempo y que pasa por diferentes etapas, así como el ciclo de la mariposa que tiene que pasar por diferentes etapas para que se convierta en una mariposa.*" (I loved what she said, that to learn a language takes time

and one passes through different stages, just like the life cycle of the butterfly that has to go through different stages to change into a butterfly).

When teachers took students through the four phases discussing different pieces of children's literature, the children demonstrated their engagement through the exploratory talk and reached a deep understanding of the texts.

Conclusion

Throughout the course, the bilingual teachers in our classes read and shared many pieces of children's literature in Spanish and this exposure was important. However, it was the implementation of the three projects with their students that helped the teachers understand the power of the literature they were reading. The teachers practiced supporting exploratory talk, "reading" the illustrations with their students, and taking them through the four phases of the creative dialogue in reading literature. In the process, they began to understand the literature themselves and to see how they could facilitate a different kind of understanding of literature with their students. We conclude this article with the words of two of the teachers highlighted in this article, Krishtel and Natascha.

Krishtel concluded one of her projects with a summary of the importance of doing these projects.

Es indispensable que los docentes modifiquemos nuestra enseñanza de lectura y apoyemos la implementación de este tipo de actividades en el aula. Yo por mi parte, me siento afortunada de agregar estas herramientas a mi repertorio de estrategias didácticas y no dudaré en continuar empleándolas, ya que los resultados y el aprovechamiento evidenciado por parte de los alumnos las respalda.

(It is indispensable that as teachers we modify our teaching of reading and we support the implementation of these types of activities in our classrooms. For my part, I feel fortunate to have added these tools to my repertoire of teaching strategies and I don't doubt that I will continue to use them, because the results and my students' achievement support using them.)

Natascha explained clearly how her students have benefited from exploratory talk and the projects that she implemented with children's literature. We close with her words about what her students learned, the depth of their learning, and the impact that these reading experiences can have on students' lives.

...lograron comprender que la lectura creativa va más allá de poder leer sonidos impresos en un cuento. Tiene el gran poder de desarrollar una visión crítica, ya que los lectores se sienten involucrados plenamente con las situaciones y los personajes, logran hacer asociaciones personales basándose en sus propias experiencias y conocimientos del mundo, logrando así convertirse en inevitables protagonistas y autores de sus propias historias de vida, y logran reflexionar sobre temas de importancia moral, cultural y social capaces de transformar sus vidas.

(They were able to understand that creative reading goes beyond being able to read sounds printed in a story. It [creative reading] has the power of developing a critical view, because readers feel completely involved in the situations and the characters, they are able to make personal connections based on their own experiences and knowledge of the world, converting themselves into inevitable protagonists and authors of their own life stories, and they are able to reflect on

important moral, cultural, and social themes, themes capable of transforming their lives.)

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