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A Critical Content Analysis: Representation of the Experiences of Emergent Bilingual Mexican American Children in Literature

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A CRITICAL CONTENT ANALYSIS: REPRESENTATION OF
THE EXPERIENCES OF EMERGENT BILINGUAL
MEXICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN
IN LITERATURE

A Dissertation

by

CYNTHIA VILLARREAL CANTU

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
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The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

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May 2022

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ABSTRACT

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This critical content analysis utilized the children's books *Efrén Divided*, *The Distance Between Us: Young Readers Edition*, and *They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems*. As I read the literature, I documented how children's literature can accurately influence the representation of emergent bilingual Mexican American children in literature. This qualitative study demonstrated the need for authentic children's literature that embraces a culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP). After analyzing the books, I realized that the power of literacy and language could help students form connections to their identity, agency, and power. Educators, administrators, and the community can include literacy in the curriculum to support critical race theory (CRT) and Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit). The inclusion of multiliteracies can promote appreciation for cultural differences and bilingualism.

DEDICATION

The support I have received throughout this journey has been unwavering. My husband, Mike, thank you for your constant support and motivation. You are my rock, and I love you. My two beautiful daughters, Emma and Ava, have been my inspiration and joy in my life. I hope you know that you can accomplish anything you set your mind to. Don't let anything get in the way of your dreams. I love you both so much. My beautiful poodle, Snowy, thank you for always providing moral support. This degree was possible through God and the support of my parents. My family inspired love and dedication to my culture. My former students were also the driving force and purpose of this study. Please continue to value your diversity and uniqueness.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to Cope and Kalantzis (2009), “Education is one of the key sources of social equity” (p. 168). However, current pedagogy has limited the teaching of diversity through literature (Martinez et al., 2019). The purpose of this qualitative critical content analysis (CCA) is to explore three children’s books to determine if they can influence the representation of emergent bilingual Mexican American student’s backgrounds and experiences. I selected books that represented the Mexican American culture and population of the Rio Grande Valley. I also wanted the literature to reflect most of the culture in the region in which I teach. I searched to find robust texts that may influence and support the students’ background knowledge.

Education can provide rich learning experiences that can influence literacy and multiculturalism within the classroom. A pedagogy that includes the representation of various cultures can lead to an increased acceptance of change. A diverse literacy curriculum that focuses on increased bilingual discourse can create a transformation in educational practices. More than ever, equity in the curriculum is necessary for social justice and awareness of various perspectives. Learning can increase the students’ interest in their history and deepen their understanding of how they can support their heritage.

González et al. (2005) mentioned that the students’ funds of knowledge are vital in a multilingual and multicultural learning environment. Funds of knowledge can include the

students' lived experiences, familial culture, and language as resources for expanding pedagogy. A change in the curriculum can integrate the students' background experiences into their learning. Language and culture can help establish a relationship between the educator, community, and students. The students' funds of knowledge can also express who they are, including their past and future (González et al., 2005).

Additionally, the students' funds of knowledge can provide educators with a better insight into the diverse culture students bring to the learning environment. Language practices can increase self-esteem, motivation, and student's talents. Through their valuable and unique experiences, effective pedagogical practices can enhance cultural identity, agency, and power. Educators can also encourage students and families to become a part of the classroom community to create a culturally appropriate and inclusive environment (González et al., 2005).

Embedding culturally authentic literature that is representative of their culture, values, and everyday life will give students of color the confidence they need to become successful learners who value their history. Culturally authentic literature can include literacy that expresses race, gender, heritage, and even religion. Through multicultural literature, students can become exposed to various texts that can teach them about their community and society. Culturally authentic texts can inform the reader about a variety of cultures. Children and adults can be made aware of injustices surrounding students and promote literature that addresses these issues.

Although multicultural texts may be challenging to find, educators can seek additional resources that allow children to experience this wealth of knowledge. Taxel (2003) stated, "Multiculturalism refers to education that addresses the interests, concerns, and experiences of individuals and groups considered outside of the sociopolitical and cultural mainstream of

American society” (p.143). Culturally authentic children’s literature can also include *testimonios* (testimonies) of lived experiences or hardships that have been endured.

Furthermore, literature by Cruz (2012) suggested that the curriculum should represent history and power. She mentioned that teachers must include the students’ experiences in the learning atmosphere and curriculum. Students and families often gain meaning from their community and background. Educators and administrators can collaborate with the community to develop activities that will embrace students’ and parents’ voices. Questioning and dialogue during activities foster growth and learning. Teachers can help students reflect on and analyze their experiences to develop them into critical thinkers. As students become aware of social change, they begin to inquire about essential issues that acknowledge and support their unique backgrounds (Cruz, 2012). Therefore, this CCA will focus on the diversity that culturally authentic stories can provide students.

Positionality

According to Murdock et al. (2014), an increase in the Hispanic population in Texas has significantly changed the demographics of the state. Minority growth has created diversity. Projections anticipate the “Texas population will become 50 percent or more Hispanic by 2040” (Murdock et al., 2014, p. 22). Hence, education should accommodate the needs of marginalized groups. Emergent bilinguals will benefit from finding connections to literature that relate to their personal lives and experiences. Students can gain valuable perspectives and demonstrate ways to bond with peers, families, and community through authentic literature (Fox & Short, 2003).

Garza and Gasquoine (2013) mentioned that “Over 90% of Hidalgo County residents are of Hispanic (especially Mexican) heritage” (p. 125). Many of these residents speak both English and Spanish or frequently switch between the two languages. Ryabov and Merino (2017) also

noted that “90% of the 1.3 million Rio Grande Valley residents are Hispanic” (p. 212). Most Rio Grande Valley residents live in poverty and have low levels of education. Almost 40% of adults over the age of 25 have not completed their high school education (Ryabov & Merino, 2017).

Additionally, Mexican Americans and immigrants have been the focus of debates, controversies, and discrimination (Gritter, 2012). For the purpose of this study, it is essential to address that “out of the four counties comprising the Rio Grande Valley, only Hidalgo County has consistently experienced more inbound domestic migration than outbound migration during the past two decades” (Ryabov & Merino, 2017, p. 214). Unfortunately, law enforcement apprehensions, injuries, and even deaths along the border have increased dramatically over the years (Palacio et al., 2021). These traumatic experiences are affecting the young students of the Rio Grande Valley.

As a child, I often heard stories of racism and intolerance from my parents, who worked across the United States as migrant field workers. Their experiences as Hispanics in other states and North Texas were difficult. They were ridiculed and devalued for speaking Spanish. The term *Hispanic* has carried a negative connotation for them and continues to do so. For this reason, I have chosen to use the term Mexican American. Mexican Americans also encompass various marginalized groups from Mexico and the United States. It is inclusive of multiple underrepresented cultures who speak the Spanish language. Therefore, Mexican Americans are the main characters in the three books I selected to analyze in my CCA.

As a middle class Mexican American child who grew up in the Rio Grande Valley, I experienced discrimination during my trips throughout the state of Texas. After I began traveling outside of Texas at the age of 25, I found that Mexican Americans were not valued and accepted

in many locations. My personal experiences may be relatable to others who have a similar background. This CCA may help students and educators who have faced adversity.

I have also primarily taught Mexican American students for the past 20 years. Most of my teaching experience has been in the Rio Grande Valley, and I am inclined to share resources that will benefit the students in this area. I have also seen how the absence of culturally authentic literature has hampered students that are of Mexican American heritage and culture.

Definitions of Terms

I have listed and defined some terms used throughout this CCA to help the reader connect to the information in the study.

Bilingual: A person who can fluently *speak* two languages (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

Biliterate: A person who can *read* and *write* proficiently in two languages. A person who is biliterate is also bilingual. (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

Critical Content Analysis: CCA is a form of analyzing literature that uses a lens that focuses on social justice and inequity within the text (Short, 2017).

Critical Literacy: Analyzing and interpreting the text in a way that is meaningful to the student. Through prior knowledge, the students can synthesize the information (Yoon & Sharif, 2015).

Critical Race Theory: The CRT framework studies how society and culture affect race, law, and power (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

Cultural Authenticity: Literature that students can make a personal connection with and see their culture represented (Short & Fox, 2003).

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: CSP can accept students' culture and promote academic success by transforming the curriculum to include pedagogy that seeks to sustain students' literacy, language, and cultural practices (Paris & Alim, 2014).

Discourse: Written or spoken language, which can include discussions, dialogue, and conversations between people or characters (Rogers, 2004).

Emergent Bilingual: A student who is learning English while also maintaining their native language (García & Kleifgen, 2010).

Latino Critical Race Theory: LatCrit theory looks explicitly at how education limits Latino/as and affects social justice (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

Multimodal: Multimodality uses multiple literacies, spoken language, written language, symbols, and art forms (Bull & Anstey, 2019).

Translanguaging: Through translanguaging, multilingual speakers use their languages as a communication system, which can be an extension of the concept. Multilingual speakers may use all their languages to communicate (Fu et al., 2019).

Transnational: A transnational person lives in more than one country and often travels back and forth. They travel and live part of the time in their home country and another in the other country (e.g., the United States). Transnational Mexican American families in the United States continue to have ties with their loved ones outside of the United States (Fu et al., 2019).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative CCA was to analyze children's literature for authenticity of representation and experiences of Mexican American culture and to describe how a diverse, multicultural pedagogy affects literacy and language practices of emergent bilinguals. Fox and Short (2003) stated:

The reader's sense of truth in how a specific cultural experience has been represented within a book, particularly when the reader is an insider to the culture portrayed in the book, is probably the most common understanding of cultural authenticity. (p. 5)

Although debates continue about what constitutes cultural authenticity, literature that makes a connection to one's own culture, experiences, and language are culturally authentic. There are many advantages to children's literature; however, I discussed how discourse can profoundly affect pedagogy and empowerment.

This study intends to contribute information on how education and culturally relevant literature can shape and develop emergent bilingual Mexican American students' literacy practices. By identifying themes and patterns in literature, adjustments in the future curriculum can focus on meeting the needs of all learners. Success in literacy is an essential part of a students' reading success in school; however, many students' cultures and backgrounds are not empowered through literacy (Thomas & Dyches, 2019). When educators become aware of the effects of language practices such as translanguaging and code-switching, they may be willing to embrace a more open approach to learning that encompasses the whole child and their funds of knowledge (Fu et al., 2019).

In addition, The New London Group (1996) suggested that multiliteracies can represent a variety of cultures. Incorporating several languages in literacy can create a pedagogy that connects communities. Literature that includes relatable lived experiences will provide positive and meaningful outcomes for marginalized groups that can promote justice. An environment that supports a transformation in dialogue is necessary for a globalized world (The New London Group, 1996).

Significance of the Study

The current pedagogy has restricted many Mexican Americans and forced them to assimilate to the White perspectives and western ideologies. Language, literacy, and community practices have been excluded from the students' learning (Martinez et al., 2019). Districts and schools have created barriers for language and minoritized students. Gándara and Contreras (2009) mentioned that "Contrary to stereotypes and oversimplifications, speaking Spanish is not fundamentally what holds Latino students back academically; experiencing inadequate opportunities for learning is a far more important factor" (p. 310). Unfortunately, these hegemonic practices are affecting the learning of Latina/o youth in Texas. Students are forced to transition to English in situations where Spanish instruction is almost nonexistent (Musanti & Rodriguez, 2017).

Additionally, bilingual education programs in practice often privilege the English language and reinforce language proficiency in English. Emergent bilingual students are encouraged to exit their bilingual programs quickly and are transitioned to a monolingual classroom. However, it is important for emergent bilingual Mexican American children to see themselves in authentic literature throughout their curriculum and schooling experience as opposed to just within the context of a bilingual or ESL classroom (Fu et al., 2019).

A CSP can allow students to connect with literacy and language practices. Educators should embrace multimodality and translanguaging in teaching, learning, and assessment through literature to which the students can relate (Paris & Alim, 2014). Multimodal practices can include various ways of learning that range from art works to music and dancing. Through visual, linguistic, and spatial representations, students' creativity can shine through. This can

better facilitate more equitable practices that recognize diverse knowledge to promote a more enhanced meaning-making process for all learners (Bull & Anstey, 2019).

Erickson (2011) stated “The learning of culture was seen as being total, that is, it affected and shaped the whole person, influencing the development of personality as well as of intellect and physical skills” (p. 27). A CSP is necessary to build learning that incorporates students’ language and culture. It is essential to provide students with opportunities to read and study materials that scaffold on their prior knowledge and experiences (Erickson, 2011).

Emergent bilingual students come from diverse backgrounds. Educators should not presume to understand the rationale for all multilingual students’ choices and development. It is also essential for teachers to provide a safe and welcoming space for students to practice discourse and language. Educators can incorporate literature that can help students become critical thinkers and develop metacognitive awareness.

Creese and Blackledge (2010) mentioned that integrating languages could be an asset. Being bilingual benefits learning and serves as a resource for emergent bilingual students. Translanguaging and code-switching in children’s literature can demonstrate that language and literacy are essential to enhance educational skills. Educators who participate in diverse pedagogies can motivate learners and support transferability. Recognizing that languages are vital for the future can create a flexible learning environment that acknowledges multiculturalism (Creese & Blackledge, 2010).

Darolia (2020) mentioned that children as young as 3 years old already understand race. Thus, it is never too early to implement a critical curriculum for students. Having children participate in a CSP will allow them to promote change and become critical thinkers. CSP can address the inequalities and microaggressions that have affected learning for minorities (Darolia,

2020). This transformative, culturally sustaining curriculum can also promote further research on an effective critical curriculum. CSP can inspire all students and support their understanding of other minorities and transnationals who have fought for their civil rights. A literacy curriculum should also address and respect the influence of culture on learning. A student's response to education should reflect their diverse background knowledge. Bringing different perspectives into the classroom setting can form active learning and higher levels of engagement (Dariola, 2020).

Incorporating a curriculum that underpins multiculturalism is necessary for growing and expanding social diversity. Several curriculum approaches such as the contributions, additive, transformation, and social action models are options for addressing change. The contributions approach consists of including ethnic heroes while the additive model allows for some adjustments to the curriculum content or concepts without changing the structure of the curriculum. The transformed curriculum includes changes to events and themes that may be important for various cultures. However, educators and administrators should appreciate a diverse curriculum that focuses on the social action approach to enhance learning. This includes social justice lessons and activities that instruct students about equity. These important conversations provoke thought as students reflect on their personal experiences (Banks, 1999).

When people from diverse cultures come together, they make modifications and adjustments to learn about their heritage, culture, and overall identity. Rubinstein-Ávila (2007) suggested it is complex for students to maintain their heritage, language, and cultural practices. They must incorporate new values and cultural traditions of the community. Although these values may contradict norms in their home community, they must find a way to adjust. However, valuing additional languages in a transnational space can significantly impact the curriculum and

the education of most students. Children who only speak one language can also become aware of multimodal ways of learning and expression.

Núñez (2014) mentioned that there are anti-bilingual laws in various states that impede the students' learning and education. These laws are widening the gaps in education and make a diverse curriculum almost impossible to implement. Students are feeling the stereotypes and discriminations directed at them. The recent waves in legislation and the political climate have also created barriers in the teaching of CRT in schools. Several schools in the United States have prohibited diverse books across all grade levels. The recent attacks have led to the banning of authentic literature that children and young adults could learn from. Unfortunately, legal interventions are limited, and they are allowing a "curriculum that excludes the history and lived experiences of Americans of color and imposes a dominant white narrative of history" (George, 2021, p.5). However, by incorporating students' diversity, learners can be responsive to change and acceptance. A multicultural curriculum and an emancipatory pedagogy can allow learners to explore the differences in cultures and languages (George, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

This study builds on CRT and Latino critical race theory (LatCrit). These frameworks helped me explore how power, agency, and identity can affect literature and social justice. A culturally sustaining curriculum can celebrate learners' critical perspectives and differences which can serve as learning tools (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

The history of CRT was originally derived from critical legal studies. However, critical legal studies did not fully encompass injustices and racism across all cultures. Although CRT is still evolving, it is now inclusive of identity, politics, race, and gender. This can acknowledge and inform where and how power is shaped by culture. Crenshaw (2011) highlighted how

awareness of CRT can encourage diversity and acknowledge identity. This framework allows for differences to be inclusive and representative of all people. The tenets of CRT include identifying and changing racism, hearing the voices of people of color, understanding White supremacy to create a change in inequality and intersectionality. All these ideas are committed to the improvement of social justice.

Although the LatCrit framework is similar to CRT, it is primarily focused on additional issues that are sometimes overlooked. LatCrit theory discusses important issues such as immigration, culture, and identity. Reflecting on LatCrit challenges dominant ideologies and honors oral history and language (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

Additionally, Rogers and Mosley (2006) mentioned that CRT identifies racism. Recognizing this can help eliminate oppression and create an environment of acceptance for diverse learners. Through CRT and LatCrit lenses, various cultures can be viewed and appreciated. Literature for children that builds on equitable representation is vital in today's growing and changing world (Rogers & Mosley, 2006).

This qualitative study focused on how critical literacy is used to interpret reading and help shape the outcome of emergent bilingual Mexican American students' engagement with the text. After analyzing the text and looking for underlying messages, different power structures can be identified. Critical literacy can reveal and identify agency, power, and identity as students critically reflect on perspectives and relationships. Advanced thinking skills are formed that can promote social practices. Through the tenets of critical literacy, learners can develop and understand the need for social justice. A curriculum that promotes authentic literacy practices can form equality and equity for marginalized groups (Larson & Marsh, 2015). Life experiences

and the resources provided are useful in forming a range of experiences that are indicative of higher-order thinking skills.

Although literacy has changed throughout the years, there is still a need for change in children's literature. Learning about historical events and sociocultural perspectives can help educators realize the importance and necessity of questioning authentic literature in the current curriculum. Critical literacy that supports multilingualism can provide instructional language discourse and help form relationships with students of various backgrounds. Through authentic literature, there can be a focus on the learners' history, beliefs, and prior knowledge (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2009).

Freire (2018) stated that in the banking model "Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories, and the teacher is the depositor" (p. 72). However, this banking concept limits students to rote memorization of material presented by the educator. According to Freire (2018), transforming thinking must involve questioning learning to advance how teachers implement daily instruction. Through critical thinking, learners are encouraged to analyze literature and seek a society that promotes equity and social justice. Instead of the students accepting the deposit, or direct instruction that the teacher delivers, the student becomes an advocate for their learning and questions the distribution of instruction. Learners become confident as they seek and explore the daily content and knowledge acquisitions that are expected (Freire, 2018).

This CCA will address how literature can empower emergent bilingual Mexican American students. It is important to have civil conversations about inequality and the students' culture. This study can help gain insight into how authentic literature can transform educational research to benefit emergent bilingual Mexican American students.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide my study:

1. In what ways are LatCrit and CRT reflected in children's literature centered on emergent bilingual Mexican American experiences?
2. How do discourse and translanguaging capture issues of agency, power, and identity in children's literature centered on emergent bilingual Mexican American experiences from a critical literacy perspective?
3. In what ways is children's literature featuring emergent bilingual Mexican American characters reflective of the linguistic, literate, and/or cultural practices of Mexican American youth?

This study helped demonstrate that authentic children's literature can reflect the experiences of Mexican American youth and can contribute to educational research. The overall goal was to be inclusive of diverse literature that accepts, includes, and acknowledges multicultural learners.

Research Design Overview

During this qualitative CCA, I used a LatCrit and CRT theoretical framework to analyze the discourse within children's books that focused on the representation of Mexican American culture. The children's books in the study sample included *Efrén Divided* (2020) by Ernesto Cisneros, *The Distance Between Us: Young Readers Edition* (2016) by Reyna Grande, and *They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems* (2018), by David Bowles.

I selected these books based on third–eighth grade levels. I wanted the literature to include Mexican Americans as the main characters since this was the primary area that I wanted to analyze. I also made an informed decision after attending the virtual San Antonio Book

Festival, Viva Latino: Own Voices Writers in Conversation webinar in April of 2021, and the Re-Imagining Migration virtual seminar. Hearing the authors discuss their books impacted my final decision.

I studied how critical literacy and discourse in literature impacted the learning of Mexican American culture. Stein et al. (2018) stated that “teachers must reflect on how their beliefs may enforce racial or ethnic stereotypes and how their instruction and class norms privilege particular students, knowledge, and outcomes” (p. 117). Often, the selection of children’s literature for classroom use is a norm that can reflect the cultural experiences of the majority in the school environment.

After carefully rereading the texts several times through a critical lens, as suggested by Short (2017), I searched for patterns and themes within the literature that could empower youth of color. According to Johnson et al. (2017) a CCA begins by reading the text to look for key phrases or sentences. Once these terms are identified a chart or detailed notes that includes sentences related to the main characters in the literature can provide strategies for identifying themes.

Delbridge and Helman (2016) noted that access to equitable literature in the child’s native language is often challenging. However, a closer look at authentic multicultural literature can help decrease and eliminate negative perceptions of Latinos/as and their heritage. Detailed information about the design of the study is included in Chapter 3.

Summary

Bilingual language practices and programs have “failed to recognize language minority students’ evolving bilingualism and the role of their home language in supporting their learning” (García & Kleifgen, 2010, p. 37). However, research conducted by García and Kleifgen (2010)

showed that students who engaged in bilingual practices applied advanced cognitive skills. Language and literacy play an essential part in the learning success of children and young readers. Although literacy is filled with gaps in history and culture, it is necessary for the young learners' educational success. A CCA that analyzes diversity through a critical lens can thoroughly examine children's literature.

CRT and LatCrit have impacted law, policy, and racism (Oliva et al., 2013). According to Oliva et al. (2013), educational policy can transform curriculum and learning. Analyzing children's literature can provide a powerful perspective for students of color and marginalized groups. Knowledge derived from literature can also challenge ideologies and support students that bring new and innovative ideas to the classroom setting. Educational policies can begin to recognize and change the discrimination that limits students of color and their heritage.

All languages are an essential resource in our growing and diverse world. Students' language practices and discourse can impact the community and inspire future generations of marginalized groups to become successful. Biliteracy and translanguaging have affected the literacy and language practices of many bilingual students, but they have been silenced (Fu et al., 2019). It has also shaped their life experiences and personal beliefs. An authentic curriculum can further transform educational research and develop a learning community that challenges and questions literature.

In this Introduction, I explained the importance of analyzing children's literature through a CCA. I also discussed the theoretical framework of my study and how I used CRT and LatCrit as a lens that focused on how literature can impact Mexican American students. In Chapter Two, I review the literature that supports critical literacy and multiculturalism in the curriculum. In Chapter Three, I discuss the methodology that includes the research design and how I conducted

my CCA. In Chapter Four, I analyze my findings. I also interpret the overall results and conclusion of the study in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The aim of this literature review is to introduce some published works that have impacted children's literature for Mexican American children. While these studies provided a brief insight into the representation of the oppressed in literature, there is still a need for knowledge in this area to help develop a pedagogy that includes culturally sustaining materials for all learners. Meeting the educational needs of marginalized groups can impact teaching and learning for all students.

In this chapter, I discuss how the history of bilingual education has shaped learning for Mexican American students. According to García and Kleifgen (2010), "Latino immigrant children account for more than half (58%) of all immigrant youth in the United States" (p. 20). History has played an essential role in how language is perceived and implemented within the classroom setting. I used a CCA approach that focused on how a critical literacy framework can break the barriers. I also used a CRT and Latina/o critical race theory (LatCrit) lens to demonstrate the importance that literature and children's books can have on emergent bilingual learners. Resources such as discourse, code-switching, and translanguaging can impact identity and empowerment in young learners from various cultures. The following guiding questions helped guide my literature review and contributed to my CCA:

1. In what ways are LatCrit and CRT reflected in children's literature centered on emergent bilingual Mexican American experiences?
2. How do discourse and translanguaging capture issues of agency, power, and identity in children's literature centered on emergent bilingual Mexican American experiences from a critical literacy perspective?
3. In what ways is children's literature featuring emergent bilingual Mexican American characters reflective of the linguistic, literate, and/or cultural practices of Mexican American youth?

A CCA is a methodology and pedagogical approach that focuses on how children's literature can add value to academics. A CCA can provide students with language and literacy skills that are relevant and purposeful to their cognitive and linguistic skills. Literature can also allow classroom teachers to empower learners through reading and/or making accessible literature that promotes students' culture and heritage. Through this CCA, I discussed current research that supports critical literacy through a CRT and LatCrit framework. A critical analysis can reveal the inequalities and oppression that many students of color have faced in academics.

The representation of cultures in literature found within the United States curriculum can have a purposeful impact on a bilingual and multicultural curriculum (García & Wei, 2014). Reading and interacting with books can provide knowledge on vital literacy practices. Building on a theoretical framework of critical literacy, CRT, and LatCrit can add value to Mexican American students' lived experiences. Seeking literature where students are valued and accepted can promote growth and acceptance of diversity for marginalized groups (García & Wei, 2014).

In addition, authentic literature can help enrich languages through stories. Understanding literacy as a social practice will enhance perspectives and revisit negative assumptions.

Communication, service, and discourse can help address the re-evaluation and redesign of the curriculum. Educators can reimagine education through the inclusion of authentic literature that supports various ethnicities and cultures. However, engagement and practices that emphasize the importance of critical literacy and pedagogy can influence a change in 21st-century teaching and learning. González et al. (2005) argued that the learners' funds of knowledge can activate prior learning by validating the learners' home and culture. As students relate to their lived experiences, they can connect to new learning in all content areas (González et al., 2005).

History of Education for Minorities

During the 1800s, the waves of migration to the United States made it standard for languages such as Spanish, French, German, and Italian to be taught in the academic setting. It was essential to communicate and form bonds with those new to the area. The community unified as a nation that desired and valued diverse languages. However, after World War I, the United States implemented an "English-Only" perspective. Bilingual students were punished, ridiculed, and reprimanded for speaking their native languages. In the 1920s, bilingual education became nonexistent, and funding came to a halt. Many states disapproved of foreign language programs and found them unnecessary for student learning and success (Cobb & Kallus, 2011). Years later, after the launch of Sputnik in 1957, the United States found international relations essential. The National Defense Education Act (1958) expanded programs that would fund foreign languages in schools once again. However, this was not without controversy and political attacks.

Although the United States Supreme Court cases of *Brown vs. the Board of Education* (1954) and the United States Supreme Court case *Lau vs. Nichols* (1974) implemented a bilingual education, students continued to face many struggles and injustices. Many immigrants

who choose to make the United States their home continue to face prejudice and ridicule. Their language is criticized, and they are humiliated as newcomers (Cobb & Kallus, 2011).

Although education has come a long way, some educators continue to have limited knowledge on how to teach emergent bilingual students. Many states have limited resources, or the teacher-education programs do not provide a substantial amount of training in literacy for educators. Furthermore, there are many biases and misconceptions made by parents, educators, and administrators. Minority students deserve the opportunity to express their culture and use their language at school (Orellana, 2016).

Latinos and Oppression

Dehumanization has existed for many years and has revealed itself in many forms, including in literature. According to Freire (2018), oppression and violence is “affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity” (p. 44). Through manipulation and the banking concept, educators deliver the information, and students memorize it. Ultimately, critical thinking and empowerment have been lost. The oppressed have been negated and devalued throughout history. However, cultural action and a movement for equity can transform misconceptions.

Gándara & Contreras (2009) suggested that many Latinos/as are struggling with academics and achievement; however, “Latinos are the largest and most rapidly growing ethnic minority in the country” (p. 1). Some of the problems are restrictions on language proficiency, the improper implementation of bilingual programs, and required strict proficiency exams. Emergent bilinguals are expected to quickly forget their native language and are forced to speak, read, and write academic English. This approach has left minority students feeling lost and

insecure about their educational possibilities since many face challenges as they adapt to a new culture (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

Unfortunately, the failure rate of Latinos is rapidly increasing as students are forced to assimilate to the English language and culture of the United States (Cobb & Kallus, 2011). Educators can change this trend by valuing diversity and acceptance of differences. The National Association for Bilingual Education has advocated for immigrant children and their need for a culturally diverse education. Also, the sheltered instruction observation protocol model discussed by Short and Echevarria (2005) created 30 educational strategies to assist emergent bilingual students with language and academic success. These strategies connect the learning content to the student's background knowledge and experiences. Through cooperative learning and meaningful conversations, educators can address the language and culture that students bring with them (Short & Echevarria, 2005). The sheltered instruction observation protocol model has helped form CSP that values the learners' lived experiences.

Theoretical Framework

Reviewing literature through a CRT and LatCrit lens can enhance a CCA and bring awareness to diversity and acceptance of various cultures. Through culturally authentic literature, all learners' backgrounds are valued and accepted. Instruction that includes authentic literature can support student development in literacy and further educational opportunities for all learners. Understanding multiculturalism, multilingualism, and critical literacy in the curriculum can promote growth in our society and community.

Critical Literacy and Multiculturalism

Looking at children's literature through a critical lens gives a voice to the oppressed and marginalized groups. Through social justice awareness, critical literacy can empower learners

and foster a sense of self-worth and value. Equity and multiculturalism in children's literature is essential to promote agency and identity (Rogers & Labadie, 2015). When students feel accepted in their learning environment, they can engage in meaningful discourse to build a bridge between communities and cultures. The opportunity for diverse literature can impact students to promote social change (Rogers & Labadie, 2015).

Children's literature in the Mexican American community and culture can also cultivate an appreciation for cultures and languages. Yoon and Sharif (2015) suggest that "when students become aware of critical literacy, they may realize that they are empowered when they use their voices to challenge dominant or mainstream views" (p. 14). A detailed analysis and exploration of literature can identify strong characters that can lead a movement of empowerment and growth. When learners form connections with the characters in the book, they reflect on themselves and their learning. They also begin to value and realize their worth (Yoon & Sharif, 2015).

Menchaca (2001) provided insight into a culturally relevant curriculum for Hispanic students. Students can make connections to their lived experiences and build on their background knowledge. When students connect to the learning material, the lessons become seamless and enrich the curriculum. Menchaca (2001) suggested that several studies in various content areas can give teachers the tools to incorporate culturally authentic material in their classroom lessons. The culture and language that Mexican American children bring with them are invaluable. They can relate the literature to their cultural and home experiences to create success and acknowledge their expertise. The lessons can be incorporated with any heritage and bring value to the students' sociocultural experiences. Providing a culturally sustaining curriculum for students can

provide them with ways to connect to the text and acknowledge the importance of their culture to make learning successful (Menchaca, 2001).

Critical Race Theory and Learning

CRT seeks to understand and reevaluate the injustices that students face in education. This theory focuses on and challenges racial injustice. I used a CRT framework to examine literature by looking at dialogue and content found in books written by Mexican American authors. The representation of culture helped shape this CCA. Drawing on Freire (2018), *conscientization* can develop the learners' critical thinking and encourages the oppressed to become aware of injustices. Conscientization allows individuals to reflect and ultimately change their consciousness and reality. Through dialogue, emergent bilinguals' can explore a second language such as English while maintaining and strengthening their native language.

In their study, Hughes-Hassell et al. (2009) analyzed books using CRT. The study suggested that multicultural literature can engage children as they relate to the characters in the story and share in their life experiences. Culturally authentic reading materials can teach students literacy and comprehension skills in their native language to foster growth in English. It can help students gain reading achievement and expose them to professional literature that is rigorous. CRT can also provide a change and transformation in education and the curriculum. Scholars in this area have recommended that storytelling include multicultural literature to support readers of all backgrounds and cultures (Moje, 2008). Independent and transitional readers can ultimately connect with text that they can relate with and become motivated to learn. The research by Hughes-Hassell et al. (2009) connected to my study that focused on promoting a culturally sustaining curriculum and pedagogy.

A crucial tenet of CRT is counterstorytelling. Hughes-Hassell et al. (2009) stated “CRT scholars believe that by giving voice to the marginalized, counterstories validate their life circumstances and serve as powerful ways to challenge and subvert the versions of reality held by the privileged” (p. 6). The representation of people of color is minimal in many children’s books; however, through counterstorytelling and listening to the viewpoints of the oppressed, myths and misconceptions can be challenged (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2009). Counterstories also allow marginalized groups to embrace their lived experiences. Through stories about race or injustices they have experienced, different perspectives can become powerful. The characters from various ethnic groups, such as African Americans and Mexican Americans, can help children see themselves in literature and stories (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2009).

I used a CRT and LatCrit framework to analyze stories that focused on race and can ultimately affect children’s views of themselves. CRT and LatCrit lenses are appropriate for this study because it can help educators guide literacy instruction. Authentic literature also promotes a positive learning environment for all ethnicities. Students’ stories and experiences can become a crucial part of the curriculum. They can help form identities and allow for marginalized groups to be heard. Through counterstories, students’ voices become essential as they challenge discriminatory practices (Hughes-Hassell et al., 2009).

Rogers and Mosley (2006) mentioned that racial literacy should be developed and analyzed in educational settings and classrooms. Drawing on CRT, the reading supports guiding Anglo-American students through racism in literacy. This article focused on the data found in a second-grade classroom. The researcher collected interviews and patterns of discussion to determine the questions that educators could frame for learning. This helped guide the lessons throughout the curriculum. Rogers and Mosley (2006) used themes and visual information to

understand how education can enhance literature. A discussion of racial literacy is essential for the advancement of cultures. The conversations can include topics on language and diversity. Educators can also explore multiculturalism, equality, and culture through a diverse curriculum that allows for modifications. This research is significant to my study because it draws on how CRT can promote critical literacy and how books that discuss race can validate multilingualism (Rogers & Mosley, 2006).

LatCrit Theory and Education

LatCrit focuses on the intersection of identity, migration, and languages and has been “applied more frequently to study inequities in education” (Nunez, 2014, p. 86). Using LatCrit to study social justice in literature will help examine how educators can implement inclusive and effective strategies in the educational curriculum. This framework can emphasize ethnicity and identity to create necessary changes in the community and educational theory. A LatCrit lens will bring skepticism and fear to the forefront so that educators can resolve inequities (Nunez, 2014).

Solórzano and Bernal (2001) discussed two categories of transformational resistance that affect Chicano/a students. Internal resistance seems to be a subtle way of addressing transformation. The student may resist oppression by going to college and attending a higher education institution to rise above injustices and enact social mobility. Formal education can support change through learning and spreading social justice knowledge to others. External transformational resistance is also valuable for equity. This could include more visible behaviors for change, such as boycotts, speeches, and political writings. External transformation addresses the need for an inclusive community that is resilient. Both types of resistance can create a space

and opportunity for Chicano/a and Mexican American children to identify with themselves and promote empathy and self-affirmation (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001).

Relevant Literature

Quality studies that acknowledge the advantages of incorporating culturally authentic text within the classroom can be a significant contribution to education. Discourse found within the text can be used to empower students of color and give them a voice. During this section, I will highlight some valuable resources that can be used in expanding and promoting critical discussions.

Critical Content Analysis to Explore Children's Literature

Through this CCA, I explored the possibility of how children's literature can empower marginalized groups. According to Short (2017), uncovering inequity in the literature using a critical lens can transform research and teaching practices. Discovering critical social issues can shape and impact values within society and culture. A critical stance may include "questioning the concept of 'truth' and how it is presented, by whom, and for what purposes" (Short, 2017, p. 5). Since the primary focus of a CCA is to investigate equity, enhancing the curriculum, and advocating for change can present opportunities for a multicultural curriculum that builds on students' experiences and history.

Furthermore, analyzing a text from the beginning, middle, and end can reveal themes and patterns within the literature. Focusing on CRT and LatCrit frameworks can enhance research by looking specifically at categories that have devalued marginalized groups for centuries. A CCA that uses a CRT and LatCrit lens can also benefit CSP that focuses on student acceptance and success. Although a top-down and bottom-up process can present some emotional challenges, a CCA can ultimately explore strengths within the text by looking at power, agency, and identity.

A critical examination of the text and the language can guide a relevant and informative methodology. A CCA can also promote the empowerment of minorities of various cultures (Bradford, 2016).

A CCA conducted by Martínez-Roldán (2017) inspired me to conduct this study and informed my decision on analyzing culturally authentic literature. In her study, she examined some of the children's stories from the *Skippyjon Jones* series written by Judith Schachner. Using a Marxist framework, she looked at the Spanish language, literary elements, and illustrations that the author included throughout the series. An analysis of the text found stereotypes and misrepresentations of Mexican culture. After comparing words, points-of-view, and cognates found in the text, the author revealed some linguistic elements that mocked the Spanish language and promoted an idea that did not align with Mexican beliefs. Although the book is meant to be humorous, it created confusion and insecurities for bilingual learners. An analysis of the *Skippyjon Jones* series revealed its failure to support an appropriate representation of Spanish heritage. Instead, it seems to ridicule the Spanish language and linguistics. As young children read, they need to see their culture reflected and acknowledged fairly. A CCA that closely examines children's literature can thoughtfully encourage educators to provide books that include Mexican American children as the main characters. This can connect students with their culture (Martínez-Roldán, 2017).

A Culturally Relevant and Sustaining Pedagogy

Ladson-Billings (1995a) suggested that through culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), “students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order” (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, p. 160). Her study presents examples of integrating culturally relevant lessons. In one classroom observation, she noticed a novice teacher

using her students' social power as a scaffold that led to academic success. Educators worked collaboratively and provided opportunities for learners to exhibit their culture creatively, which created encouragement and bonds were formed within the community. The educator also used strategies that impacted students' development and leadership skills as opposed to using the students' social power negatively. Another teacher incorporated poetry through rap music. The educators in this study were active in their schools and surrounding communities, which impacted the students' learning and self-esteem. Her ethnographic study included interviews, classroom observations, video recordings, and focus groups. The researcher identified the importance of CRP and identified commonalities among educators. This study challenged educators to reconsider what is considered "good" teaching and make it available to learners of all ethnicities (Ladson-Billings, 1995a).

Ladson-Billings (1995b) also supported the need for books that portrayed children of various nationalities and encouraged learners to form collaborative groups with peers. Through peer discourse, students developed success as they built relationships and created connections to learning. Culturally relevant literature can encourage a multicultural education that includes diversity. A CCA that studies culturally relevant literature extends the work of Ladson-Billing (1995b) and promotes awareness of the importance of diversity.

Additional literature by Howard (2003) also advocated for CRP. The author addresses the change in demographics and cultural diversity in the United States. The students' cultural, linguistic, racial, and social class backgrounds require educators to modify their pedagogical practices. District administrators can prepare teachers with knowledge and skills to teach a diverse student population. This article suggested that educator reflections can provide the opportunity for embracing and analyzing race, ethnicity, and culture. Essentially, educators can

shape the student's lived experience. They can also construct pedagogical practices relevant and meaningful to the student's social and cultural life. Highlighting the importance of critical teacher reflection can nurture culturally relevant teaching practices (Howard, 2003).

Critical reflection can affirm the need for moral, political, and ethical teaching practices (Howard, 2003). Critical reflection focuses on how race, culture, and social class shape students' thinking and learning. Teachers must reflect on how they can positively or negatively influence student learning and engagement. Implementing CRP can be an effective way to meet the academic and social needs of culturally diverse groups of learners (Howard, 2003).

In 2014, Paris and Alim wrote about a more advanced notion derived from CRP. They discussed a CSP which can also foster student language and growth. According to Paris and Alim (2014), CSP can help form the foundation of respect that supports cultural practices and equity. Paris and Alim (2014) said:

As we reposition our pedagogies to focus on the practices and knowledges of communities of color, we must do so with the understanding that fostering linguistic and cultural flexibility has become an educational imperative, as multilingualism and multiculturalism are increasingly linked to access and power. (p. 95)

CSP can affirm the students' funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005) and create liberatory practices. Through multicultural children's literature, education for marginalized groups can promote students' linguistic practices and flexibility. Furthermore, it promotes respect for diversity and cultivates students' self-worth. CSP offers students, parents, and educators the opportunity to interact and respect a diverse pedagogy (González et al., 2005).

Additionally, a study conducted by Bucholtz et al. (2017) said that "CSP can sustain the linguistic and cultural practices of young people of color, and how these practices in turn sustain

youth identities” (p. 47). The students in this study, Isabel and Elisa, used translanguaging practices to express their thoughts. They used their past experiences to relate to the present and make lasting connections. This promoted a more positive approach toward language and discourse. As language and culture are sustained, students develop agency, identity, and power. The students in the study also engaged in bilingual practices that contributed to their understanding and overall educational development (Bucholtz et al., 2017).

Many educators have responded to the needs of language-minority students using the students’ unique cultural and linguistic backgrounds and developed CSP. However, English-only policies and high-stakes testing have led to racial ideologies. This has made it difficult for educators to implement CSP in the classroom. Students have been forced to hide their native language and acquire English. Michener et al. (2013) explored the gap between restrictive educational language policies and the theoretical principles of CSP to understand how teachers can reflect academic language policies in their current pedagogy. The researchers observed two classrooms and created educator interviews to determine curricular and pedagogical choices, student-teacher participation structures, and teachers’ views on language. This ethnographic study found a limited range of CSP observed in classrooms that serve minority students using an English-only policy. Teacher responses indicated they understood the importance of preparing lesson plans that allowed them to connect with real-life experiences related to their culture and language. However, language policy continues to mandate practices of standardized curricula and lacks sociocultural framing of pedagogy (Michener et al., 2013).

Ultimately, CSP can reveal insights into how language and discourse are needed in the educational planning of curriculum. A pedagogy that rejects hegemonic practices can clear up skepticism and misconceptions of other cultures. As Mexican American students engage in

literature, they can learn how history has affected the teaching and the educational system. Students of color deserve the opportunity to explore literature relevant to their funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005). Literature can also produce collaborative learning within educators and the community.

Discourse Analysis in Children’s Literature

Discourse is essential when looking at critical literacy, and “critical literacy is not possible without discourse analysis” (Rogers & Wetzel, 2014, p.1). As educators look at their language practices and background, they can begin to see the relationship between power, language, and identity and the importance of racial justice. Through literacy research, educators can become aware of how reflecting on CRT supports discourse analysis. This framework builds on the concepts that educators bring into the classroom. An anti-racism study conducted by Rogers and Wetzel (2014) analyzed how practicing racial literacy through book clubs can profoundly affect children. The authors looked at the text *Iggie’s House* (Blume, 1970) to support how the author constructed meaning. The critical analysis of the characters in the story provided insight into how discourse that focused on racism and anti-racism can help educators form connections to lived experiences. The teachers in the study noticed that critical literacy practices provided multimodal ways of learning that supported essential and diverse literacies.

A closer look at discourse analysis can reveal the representation of “learning, identity, culture, and race as well as the places that remained a-critical” (Rogers & Wetzel, 2014, p. 103). Exploring children’s literature and analyzing the character’s conversations and interactions can support critical literacy. Research in this area allows for a crucial change in the curriculum that educators and administrators can recreate. When the students are represented in the text, they can

relate to the language and background of the characters. The representation will foster growth and relationships (Rogers & Wetzel, 2014)

I build on literature by Gee (2016), who suggested that discourse is cross-cultural and “discourse analysis should be central to issues of justice, peace, and the many crises we face in the world today” (p. 346). In this study, Gee (2016) discussed nine steps that can be used to influence discourse analysis. The stages include semantics, relationships, situational meanings, and experiences. Through lived experiences, critical discussions on conflict, goodwill, and religion, dialogue can uncover valuable aspects of language and literature. Each stage holds a valuable place in the various frameworks. By looking at semantics and lived experiences, languages can take on a variety of situated meanings. Depending on the cultural background, the learner may have certain expectations. These social experiences can also affect learning and experiences at school. Critical discussions that value higher-order thinking can deepen knowledge of race and culture. Although discourse can have multiple meanings, it is essential to consider the social and political context of the situation. This CCA aligns with a perspective that focuses on the language and discourse found in culturally authentic children’s literature. Culture, social justice, and equity for Mexican American students drove the focus of this study (Gee, 2016).

CRT and LatCrit Lens

Osorio (2018) used CRT and LatCrit framework to analyze her Spanish bilingual students’ stories. She focused on letting her second-grade students discuss their identity and how it was interconnected to the literature they were currently reading. Discussions guided through literature allowed her to focus on the students’ “border stories” consisting of migration and social justice exploration. These conversations allowed the children to find themselves and be proud of

who they are. Valuing their language and diverse background can enable emergent bilingual Mexican American students to reflect on who they are and realize that Spanish is an asset (Osorio, 2018).

Arreguín-Anderson and Kennedy (2013) used Project WILD, an environmental and conservation education program, to specifically look at how it can help the experiences of minority students through a LatCrit and CRT framework. In this study, 24 preservice bilingual teachers were asked to participate in Spanish workshops that focused on analyzing and participating with the curriculum. The teachers searched for the inclusion of diverse language targeted toward marginalized students. As they looked through the program, they interpreted it using the five tenets of CRT specific to Mexican American students. This included intersectionality of race and racism, challenging dominant ideologies, the centrality of experiential knowledge, social justice, and an interdisciplinary perspective (Arreguín-Anderson & Kennedy, 2013). Through cultural songs and engaging opportunities, the teachers determined that connections can be made for student success when materials are inclusive of Spanish. The student's native language is vital in making necessary connections. Therefore, educators should support a diverse pedagogy by focusing on the children's funds of knowledge and supporting their home environment. If educators can find it inclusive to their cultural background, students may also form positive contributions (Arreguín-Anderson & Kennedy, 2013).

Translanguaging in Literature

Rowe (2018) discussed how the translanguaging skills of emergent bilinguals are valuable for learners to self-identify and for continued academic success. The author recommended some guiding principles for designing activities in education that will benefit students who know more than one language. These strategies support the use of various

language styles and provide opportunities to connect with their peers. Rowe (2018) recommended that teachers also involve the children's parents and the community in the educational setting. She suggested that the teachers should model translanguaging to promote the benefits of a multilingual classroom environment. The students can compose dual-language text and writing to share with their peers. García and Kleifgen (2010) stated the following:

Translanguaging includes code-switching- the shift between two languages in context-but differs from it in significant ways, for it includes other bilingual practices that go beyond a simple switch of code, such as when bilingual students read in one language and then take notes, write, or discuss in another. (p. 45)

Educators can have the students display their bilingual work throughout the school hallways or within the community. Sharing personal experiences and composing bilingual literature can benefit and support the community (García & Kleifgen, 2010).

Creating a space of acceptance for translanguaging can encourage students to engage in texts that include multiple languages. A multilingual classroom can build a community that embraces and promotes diversity. Biliteracy development can value and share the importance of various languages. This article supported the theoretical framework of CRT and LatCrit. The approaches and suggestions that the author presented can be beneficial in examining how educators can promote culturally authentic practices in literacy. Higher-order thinking skills and flexibility are only a few of the benefits of translanguaging for emergent bilingual and transnational students. Translanguaging allows students to form connections and develop critical thinking skills within the classroom and their home environment (García & Kleifgen, 2010).

In this study, Duarte (2019) looked at how 10th grade students from four different secondary campuses applied language to scaffold their learning. Building on Vygotsky's work

of Sociocultural Theory, this study focused on examining dialogue within the classroom. After studying the videotaped lessons, the author carefully coded the data using units of analysis, languages, and collaborative talk. This research revealed that students switched between languages and engaged in exploratory conversations that provided insight into learning. Through genuine linguistic interactions, the adolescents became problem solvers and critical thinkers. Translanguaging and “exploratory talk” allowed for unique peer interactions (Duarte, 2019).

Learners communicated with their peers, which can “reinforce the creative process of knowledge building” (Duarte, 2019, p. 162). This study demonstrated that multilingual education and diversity in the classroom could improve equity and the quality of learning. Language as an access to education can include various ways of learning that support linguistic skills. A CCA that includes culturally authentic text facilitates multilingual and multimodal ways of learning for Mexican American students. A shift in educational pedagogy can also reinforce the cognitive demands of today’s growing need for social diversity (Duarte, 2019).

Additionally, translanguaging creates opportunities for learners to discuss their work and connect to the literature presented in the classroom and community. Guiding the learning will transfer discourse into writing that can have lasting impacts on the students’ understanding of content. A CCA can further analyze culturally authentic literature that can be used in presentations and reader’s theater. This can create connections with the learning communities and multilingual learners (Fu et al., 2019).

Fu et al. (2019) studied Ms. Huang’s third grade ESL classroom. The students in the class were from a combination of various countries such as India, China, Japan, Poland, and Thailand. The teacher’s practices included the incorporation of language and culture in literacy and writing activities. During one of the lessons, 22 students created a class book that featured their primary

languages. The book included images of food from their country and vocabulary that was pertinent to them as learners. Ms. Huang encouraged her students to use their native language as a resource and empowered everyone with praise and acknowledgment for their achievements. Translanguaging gave the students the support they needed to get their point across while expanding their self-esteem and identity (Fu et al., 2019). The bilingual and multilingual practices that the students engaged in allowed for critical thinking and 21st-century literacy skills. Through communication and support, the educator discovered that building on the student's community and home resources could provide an environment of cultural acceptance. Translanguaging facilitated individual student interactions and whole group sociocultural awareness. As co-learners, the students maximized their knowledge and expertise as they formed relationships and bonds with their peers (Fu et al., 2019).

Osorio (2020) stated that "One way to welcome a student's linguistic resources is to promote translanguaging, which uses a multilingual lens, in the classroom" (p. 127). As students are developing a new language, educators can acknowledge their funds of knowledge and linguistic skills. This form of communication can build CSP. Osorio (2020) examined her first-grade class in Illinois. She analyzed their use of literature that included how translanguaging affected their learning. Through observations, notes, and videotaping, she found that her students were making meaning of the text. They began to have meaningful conversations about vocabulary and formed identities with the stories. The representation of the students' culture and population through literature can profoundly impact developing CSP in the classroom. Translanguaging can also create an enriching and purposeful way of learning that is inclusive (Osorio, 2020). Through this CCA, translanguaging was recognized as a resource that supported students' academics, language development, and history.

Velasco and García (2014) mentioned that “scholars have challenged the strict separation of languages in classrooms, opening up space for what we are calling here the practice of translanguaging” (p. 7). In their article, they focused on the writing process of five bilingual students. The students in the study used problem-solving techniques through their writing development. This was evident across several languages, so it was vital to encourage translanguaging to benefit academic success (Velasco & García, 2014). The information presented included evidence on how diverse linguistics and translanguaging could benefit education. Through students’ academic writing, educators can modify and adjust their teaching practices to meet the needs of emergent bilinguals. This study indicated that translanguaging and meaningful discourse paired with writing can be an effective learning tool for academic advancement. When educators provide these opportunities, students’ metacognitive skills are enhanced (Velasco & García, 2014).

A research study conducted in South Texas by Arreguín-Anderson et al. (2018) identified the language practices of 17 Head Start students in South Texas. The teacher, Mrs. Ramos, gave the children several opportunities to explore and converse during circle time and a dramatic center. As the teacher probed a few questions, such as “What did you do over the weekend?” the students responded using both the English and Spanish language to add relevance to their personal experiences. The translanguaging practices of the preschoolers gave the discourse meaning and relevance. The children used words such as *los cochinitos* (a pig shaped pastry), *panadería* (bakery), and *La Reynera* (name of the bakery) to foster connections with the community and culture. These cultural experiences allowed engagement and discourse within the classroom. Utilizing CRT and LatCrit as a framework allowed the researchers to focus on the students’ languages as a cultural resource. The findings suggested that language and discourse

during playtime produced code-switching and translanguaging practices that were relevant to the children's needs. These opportunities provided creative thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills for all learners. Validating the students' experiences and prior knowledge formed connections with the community and parents. The emergent bilingual students in the study and Mrs. Ramos helped reexamine how teachers can incorporate translanguaging practices into the educational curriculum. This provided developmentally appropriate practices that motivated young Mexican American children (Arreguín-Anderson et al., 2018).

The results of this study indicate that including the student's language and cultural practices are necessary for emergent bilingual Mexican American students. Honoring their experiences through diverse literature can help form identity and create a space of acceptance and worth. Culturally authentic text can also support and expand classroom interactions for minority students (Arreguín-Anderson et al., 2018).

Translanguaging practices in the curriculum can also offer a form of communication with the student's families. Through awareness about diversity and cultures, the students' background can be a resource that draws on their experiences. Although policymakers have implemented "English-only" mandates, bilingual and translanguaging practices can create an environment of respect. The families can form communications to develop the student's identity, agency, and power. It would benefit all schools to design instruction that builds on the unique practices of translanguaging to support the students' education. Drawing on their experiences can provide a space for collaboration and growth (Hornberger & Link, 2012).

Subtractive Schooling and Hegemonic Practices

Inquiry and knowledge about subtractive schooling can help create a curriculum that is culturally sustaining for Mexican American students. Valenzuela (2009) said that "to become

authentically caring institutions, they need to at once stop subtracting resources from youth and deal with the effects of subtraction” (p. 344). As educators and administrators become aware of how minority students are stripped of their cultural identity, they can begin to enhance students’ opportunities for empowerment. Subtractive schooling is harmful to minority students, and educators should value various cultural differences. In a study conducted by Valenzuela (2009) at Seguin High School, she looked at how the teacher sacrificed the students’ culture and language for academic success. During the study, she witnessed a lack of empathy from educators and how dismissive they were of the learner’s background. This is how the term “subtractive schooling” was originally derived. However, through empowerment and supportive academics, the consequences of subtractive schooling can be ameliorated. It becomes necessary to look at the curriculum and restructure it to include a perspective that supports the students’ home culture and community (Valenzuela, 2009). This CCA supports the need for integrating culturally authentic literature into the learning process.

According to Valdés (2015), “Bilingual education programs were originally designed as compensatory programs for non-English-speaking students who entered American schools” (p. 258). Legislators created these programs to enhance the students’ primary language and instruction. Although many foreign language programs exist in the educational system, many are used to maintain the language and are circularized. For example, Baker et al. (2012) found that paired bilingual programs, where students worked in pairs to develop the English language, was beneficial. Their study found that this approach improved reading outcomes of bilingual learners and was as effective as an English-only approach. However, Valdés (2015) suggested that educators promote social justice awareness. Viewpoints on language can reexamine how a second language can be valuable and vital for building student support.

Subtractive schooling follows the dominant culture's language and demands that educators follow the scripted curriculum and pedagogy. Many immigrant students must leave their home language behind because the school system does not value their heritage (Valdés, 2015). Although subtractive schooling removes students' identities and insists on assimilation into the dominant society at the expense of their heritage, language, and culture, CSP can ameliorate the curriculum to include diversity and acceptance of all cultures. A culturally sustaining curriculum is necessary to help build a future that empowers learners and their backgrounds. It is essential to provide students with opportunities to promote their voice for their community and district. Institutions that are caring and welcoming can promote a pedagogy that gives students the voice to advocate for their culture and heritage. A curriculum that lacks an inclusive pedagogy can be enhanced with culturally authentic literature that can ultimately create a change (Valdés, 2015).

Additionally, subtractive schooling and hegemonic approaches have affected multicultural learners for many years. However, emancipatory knowledge can help educators and parents understand how oppression has affected schooling. Promoting CSP can change the way diversity is viewed in teaching and education. Including lessons and literature that emphasize empowerment can transform education (Valdés, 2015). This CCA provides insight into how equity and social justice in the curriculum can advance learning about various cultures and languages through culturally authentic literature. This study also contributed resources that focus on empowerment for Mexican American and transnational students. A curriculum can further transform educational research to help develop a community where unique differences are accepted and valued.

McLaren (2009) referred to empowerment as “the process through which students learn to critically appropriate knowledge existing outside their immediate experiences in order to broaden their understanding of themselves” (p. 77). Although assimilation into the mainstream culture forces students to lose their identity and heritage, educators can instill empowerment through culturally authentic literature that focuses on learning, questioning, and dialogue. The purpose of this study was to gain information that can ultimately help emergent bilingual Mexican American students seek further knowledge about their language, heritage, and culture. An emancipatory curriculum can also foster the students’ cognitive strengths through a multicultural pedagogy that supports student growth and challenges change (McLaren, 2009). Through CSP, learners can engage others in the benefits of being multilingual and multicultural citizens.

Although subtractive schooling has stripped students of their strengths and languages, educators should seek to empower the learner in their native language. Finding ways to include literature in their lives and community can encourage empathy and equity. A study conducted by Garza and Crawford (2005) looked at hegemonic multiculturalism and the assimilation of migrant learners at an elementary school that served over 600 students. Garza and Crawford (2005) stated the following:

Hegemonic multiculturalism is the result of dissonance between a school’s desire to promote an inclusive and welcoming learning environment for their culturally and linguistically diverse students and the pervasive, yet persuasive, assimilation agenda that underlies instructional practices and programs designed to educate them. (p. 601)

Although the prestigious campus in this study was once filled with upper-and middle-class students, the area now had many native Spanish speakers and immigrant learners. After

meaningful discourse and conversations with students and the English as a second language (ESL) teachers, it was discovered that academic support for bilingual students was lacking. The campus immersion model had forced the students to assimilate to speaking only English. It was determined that the educators devalued diversity and the student's native language. The study acknowledged that the campus goals and intended protocol were not consistent with the demands placed on the children. This study demonstrated the need for a curriculum that does not subtract a language or the student's culture (Garza & Crawford, 2005).

Furthermore, the ESL educator's expertise and knowledge about the Spanish language were not valued by the administrative team on campus. However, languages can add value to the educational setting and enrich other languages from cultures worldwide. When bilingualism and multiculturalism are the goals in education, teachers will create an academically and socially successful campus. As educators seek justice and are seen as a valuable resource, students and parents become empowered to advocate for change that supports their knowledge and background (Garza & Crawford, 2005).

Examining Identity and Agency in Children's Literature

In her 1990 essay, *Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors*, Sims Bishop (1990) used metaphors to explain how children used and perceived literature. The mirrors represented how students gain empathy as they saw themselves in the literature to develop identity. The windows represented the diversity and growth that students acquired as they began to understand social and cultural viewpoints. The sliding glass doors signified an opportunity to learn through advanced skills. These interpretations gave educators an insight into how culturally authentic literature could challenge negative ideologies. Although Sims Bishop (1990) focused on the portrayal of African American students, this notion applies to all cultures and ethnicities. Sims

Bishop (2016) stated that “Diverse literature can reflect the unique life experiences of underrepresented or marginalized children at the same time it encourages readers/listeners to recognize and celebrate our shared humanity” (p. 120). A multicultural perspective can reflect the unique differences that are portrayed in literature.

Lynch (2018) studied a third-grade female emergent bilingual (EB) student from Cuba. Yaneth was enrolled in a transitional bilingual classroom in Texas. This research explored connections between literacy practices constructed by the student’s identity, self-efficacy, and academic identity. Through this qualitative case study, the researcher observed daily lessons in reading and vocabulary taught in the classroom. The researcher described how literacy practices influenced identity development through community cultural wealth during literacy and discourse practices. Lynch (2018) mentioned that community cultural wealth “challenged traditional interpretation of power and capital by acknowledging the collective wealth within communicates of color” (p.119). The community cultural resources framework guided the understanding of how resources are leveraged from families to the classroom community. Community cultural wealth is a powerful literacy learning tool that can lead to discussions that develop positive classroom and social settings. This study challenged traditional interpretations of power and capital by acknowledging “the shared resources, skills, strengths, and ways of knowing that students of color bring from their families and communities into the classroom” (Lynch, 2018, p. 119). The young girl, Yaneth, used linguistic, social, and familial resources to enhance literacy learning. This also taught her classmates to develop a positive academic identity. The study built on new literacy studies literature that viewed literacy as a social practice. The interactions and conversations between people are all different and are understood differently within a particular community. The study discovered ways to maintain healthy

connections with the community and its resources. Valuing emergent bilinguals' linguistic and cultural resources encouraged them to expand their linguistic repertoires. Building biliteracy skills in the classroom and leveraging CCW supported the development of academic literacy skills. It also affected the way students developed their self-understanding as learners (Lynch, 2018). Emergent bilinguals can leverage their cultural and linguistic assets as pedagogical resources for literacy development. The student's home language can also develop their identity and academic success. Through this CCA, educators will be better able to facilitate their selection of culturally authentic literature that can enhance CSP.

In her CCA, Mathis (2015) specifically looked for evidence of agency in multicultural and international children's literature. She explored books listed in the *International Board on Books for Young People*, *The Notable Books for a Global Society List*, *Worlds of Words*, the *American Library Association Batchelder*, and the *Pura Belpré* list. Mathis (2015) stated that "children's literature also offers demonstrations of agency that can potentially be part of the negotiation of the many voices that inform young people as they continuously interpret their own lives" (p. 219). After analyzing 27 books, the author identified the themes of personal agency, social agency, and cultural agency. She discussed how empowerment could affect inquiry and action. The lack of agency found in books can limit students' perception of themselves and others. Mathis (2015) found that "International literature is becoming a valued resource in classrooms as teachers realize its potential to create international experiences within literary contexts" (p. 207). Overall, educators can form a global community of acceptance through unique stories (Mathis, 2015).

As children are building their identity, they begin to reflect on how they live. Further examination of these themes revealed that characters, families, and cultures in the stories played

a crucial role in the acceptance and impact of culture, identity, and agency. The results of this study suggested that texts can offer a voice for readers and listeners that are beginning to form connections with the world around them. Children's literature can provide a powerful tool that can help them act as advocates for their learning. Relationships and languages found are impactful for youth from various cultures. A global community can also promote respect for communication and discourse. Through quality literature, students can promote social and cultural change for their future. The political aspect in reading and literacy can make an impact across decades of learners and transform ideologies for all students. Through empowerment, learners may also recognize their value (Mathis, 2015).

A study conducted by Garcia and Okhidoi (2015) mentioned how Hispanic serving institutions could promote culturally relevant "best" practices. Their study illustrated how to successfully meet the needs of the Chicano/a population in higher education. This was implemented through cultural practices that consisted of an ethnic studies program that supported students throughout their educational journey. The study focused on the Chicana/o Studies Department, and the educational opportunity program was created to serve the underrepresented students at the college level. Their results suggested that the educational opportunity program was successful in supporting student success through coursework that addressed multicultural issues. The study revealed that all Hispanic serving institutions should implement the ideologies of the programs. The study presented the success of having a department that supported students taking their core "basic" classes. Since the core classes are the primary classes offered at two-year colleges, it led to the exploration of a Chicano/a Studies Department that implemented a Chicano/a core curriculum in Texas. This directly linked curriculum and pedagogy throughout multiple disciplines and inspired a transition at a higher level. This research is beneficial to my

study since a shift in children's literature and the acceptance of differences can begin with training future educators at institutions of higher learning (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015).

Summary

Throughout this chapter, I explained some critical aspects of why a CCA that focuses on children's literature is vital in supporting CSP for Mexican American students. Through the lens of CRT and LatCrit, I analyzed selected literature that focused on the Mexican American student population and included a pedagogical approach that supported educators and administrators in creating a change in the curriculum. The foundation of critical literacy led me toward a precise examination of the literature selected and the importance of an inclusive and diverse curriculum. The research discussed in this chapter indicated that critical literacy and CSP are essential in learner success and empowerment. The review of the literature supports the need for the inclusion of diverse children's literature that can support educators in teaching students from marginalized groups. Using a CRT and LatCrit lens helped me provide a more detailed description of the analysis process.

Providing an educational environment that represents the identity and agency of the student's language and culture is vital for creating acceptance and embracing differences. An emancipatory curriculum where critical perspectives are celebrated can provide advanced problem-solving and critical thinking skills for all learners. Empowering students throughout the learning process will create different perspectives that will allow oppressed students to reflect on their learning. Although some educational curricula can be social, political, and controversial, this CCA represented the Mexican American learners' identity, agency, and power. Formulating education around the student's prior knowledge can shape "identities and mentalities" (Williamson, 2013, p. 102). Furthermore, discourse analysis and lived experiences throughout

the literature allowed me to determine the strengths and weaknesses of children's books specifically for Mexican Americans.

In Chapter Three, I provide an overview of the methodology and the purpose for selecting a qualitative CCA. I also elaborate on the research questions that led my study and listed the steps I took as I collected the data. Text selections and analysis are also discussed thoroughly in the methodology. The themes and discourse that I encountered throughout several readings of the books guided the focus of my study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The goal of this chapter is to discuss the research methodology that I used to build around my guiding research questions. The purpose of this qualitative CCA was to analyze children's books through the critical lens of CRT and LatCrit. I explored how culturally relevant children's literature can represent Mexican American students' backgrounds and experiences.

Children's literature is vital in representing cultures and heritage to provide youth with opportunities to think critically. However, educators should also talk about cultural differences to advocate for change in the curriculum (Rogers, 2004). Through this research study, I systematically analyzed literature as I looked for relevant details that represented the students' experiences as Mexican Americans. The interpretive messages in distinct literature can have a profound impact on students of color and marginalized groups.

I provided a brief overview of the book selection process and analysis for this study. The books included *Efrén Divided* (2020) by Ernesto Cisneros, *The Distance Between: Us Young Readers Edition* (2016) by Reyna Grande, and *They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems* (2018), by David Bowles. I correlated my research and guiding questions to my data collection and data analysis. I also included a discussion of the trustworthiness and credibility of the data. Through this CCA, I examined how discourse analysis and language could connect the reader to multicultural texts.

Research and Guiding Questions

Through this research methodology, I answered the following guiding questions that contributed to the results of my findings:

1. In what ways are LatCrit and CRT reflected in children's literature centered on emergent bilingual Mexican American experiences?
2. How do discourse and translanguaging capture issues of agency, power, and identity in children's literature centered on emergent bilingual Mexican American experiences from a critical literacy perspective?
3. In what ways is children's literature featuring emergent bilingual Mexican American characters reflective of the linguistic, literate, and/or cultural practices of Mexican American youth?

I looked at a purposeful selection of children's literature that related to my research questions to determine if it contributed to empowerment for young students and challenged social justice.

Critical Content Analysis as a Methodology

Johnson and Christensen (2014) stated that the purpose of a research study is to “express the researcher's intent or the study's objective” (p. 97). This study contributed information on how educational practices can shape, guide, and develop emergent bilingual students' literacy experiences. By identifying culturally authentic texts, educators can adjust literacy practices and modify the future curriculum to help meet the needs of diverse learners. Success in literacy is an essential part of a student's reading development in elementary school and life. However, many students are not allowed to thrive in their native language since many schools in the United States are English dominant. When educators become aware of the impact that a multilingual

curriculum can possess, they may be willing to allow for a more open-ended learning process that encompasses the whole child, their heritage, and their funds of knowledge.

A CCA can help examine literature by looking at power, agency, and identity (Johnson et al., 2017). An in-depth analysis can identify themes that provide insight into the characters' experiences and how they could relate to the reader or listener. A CCA is "a stance of locating power in social practices in order to challenge conditions of inequity" (Short, 2017, p. 1).

Through a qualitative approach, I looked at emerging patterns in the texts and the characters' language that is representative of bilingualism within Mexican American culture. Culturally authentic children's literature can promote a critical stance for equity and social justice.

Furthermore, analyzing children's literature through a CRT and LatCrit lens remains useful in questioning and reorganizing local school policies for Mexican American students. I drew from Solórzano (2013), who stated that CRT "examines the complex issues of race, gender, ethnicity, racism, and sexism from an interdisciplinary perspective" (p. 51). CRT and LatCrit are essential in promoting empowerment for young students through literacy and education. After several readings of the selected children's literature, I looked closely at the concepts of sociocultural context. This ultimately affected the outcome of themes and patterns located throughout the texts.

Theoretical Framework

Erickson (2011) stated, "the use of culture differences as a resource for starting and continuing conflicts has unfortunately been a common practice in formal schooling" (p. 29). Therefore, literacy practices for multicultural learners should develop a community where the diversity of multilingual learners is accepted and included. The learning of culture can influence the development of personality, intellect, and physical skills (Erickson, 2011).

Delbridge and Helman (2016) stated, “Even in classrooms where instruction occurs exclusively in English and the teacher is monolingual, however, teachers can create an environment in which biliteracy development is supported” (p. 307). Literature can also equip students with an understanding of how diverse texts can create social justice. Transformation of future books can be accomplished by selecting literature that educates learners on the critical imbalance between power and equity. The CRT and LatCrit frameworks can also challenge areas that are lacking affirmation of cultural diversity, power, and identity.

As educators learn and understand other cultures, they will be able to help their students form connections to diverse literature and a multicultural curriculum. Banks and McGee Banks (2016) stated:

Each major variable in the school—such as its culture, its power relationships, the curriculum and materials, and the attitudes and beliefs of the staff—must be changed in ways that will allow the school to promote educational equality for students from diverse groups. (p. 1)

Learning about other cultures and races can promote growth and understanding within the classroom setting. When student identity is represented, culturally diverse literature can create political shifts (Convertino et al., 2016).

Discourse Analysis

According to Rogers and Wetzel (2014), discourse analysis and “critical literacy education focuses on investigations into language and power” (p. 55). Diversity in language can eliminate inequalities in literature and learning. Providing students with opportunities to explore various languages and discourses can cultivate acceptance and recognition. Analyzing the

characters and their communication can be a valuable tool for educators to address race and culture within lessons.

A CCA looks closely at the linguistics and social relationships formed within the texts. Analyzing discourse can also examine the voice, mood, and actions of the characters. Sims Bishop (1990) believed that children learn lessons through books that reflect their identity. Through social identity, the student can relate to the characters' lived experiences and situations that are presented in stories. A LatCrit and CRT framework can assist educators in advocating for literature that meets all learners' needs and experiences. Gee (2016) stated:

If, in a critical discussion, we have reason to suspect or doubt our interpretation of a claim in our framework, this need not be an invitation to give up that claim. Rather it is an invitation to think more deeply about and, perhaps, modify other parts of our framework and their interpretations. (p. 357)

Discourse analysis can also reveal insights into how languages such as translanguaging and code-switching can provide an opportunity to expand CSP.

Search Strategy

I began this study by looking closely at journal articles that used a CCA to analyze literature. I created an outline that identified important concepts found throughout the literature and that were valuable to my study. Some of the keywords included: children's literature, CCA, critical literacy, CRT, CSP, discourse analysis, Latino/a Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), and translanguaging.

I searched through peer-reviewed journals, doctoral theses, reviews, ebooks, and dissertations on the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's (UTRGV) online database. My search led me to ProQuest, ERIC, and EBSCOhost. I also accessed Google Scholar to locate

additional articles by well-known authors in the field of critical literacy. On Amazon, I read reviews of some reviews of books that I felt would be useful for my study. I initially selected 10 books and narrowed it down to the three texts that I analyzed. I also found some thesis and doctoral dissertations in this area that were necessary for expanding my research. I tried to focus on literature written within the past ten years; however, some information was older but pertinent to establishing the history and foundation of my study.

Data Collection

Plummer (2001) discussed how stories can change perspectives and tell the story of valuable and essential life experiences. This CCA built on the strengths of the qualitative data and the opportunities for interpretation. Through stories and lived experiences, perspectives can be significant for Mexican American students. After attending the virtual San Antonio Book Festival, Viva Latino: Own Voices Writers in Conversation webinar in April of 2021, and the Re-Imagining Migration virtual seminar, I narrowed my book selection from 10 to five books. I removed books from my selection that were at a first–second grade reading level and those that did not have Mexican Americans as the main characters in the text. I made my decisions based on the topic of the book, the characters that were described in the text, the impact they had on the overall story, and the age level that the literature was targeting.

After extensive research on Amazon.com, the Barnes & Noble website, and the Re-Imagining Migration website, I finally selected three books that aligned with my study and methodology. I selected these books because they brought in the topics of migration, language, and race that many Mexican American students can connect with at an individual and cultural level. The chosen books fell within the age groups ranging from third–eighth grade levels. I selected literature at this level since many Mexican American students in this age group are

forming questions about race, culture, and individuality. The literature also related to my research questions and allowed for a multicultural perspective that is representative of Mexican American culture in the Rio Grande Valley.

Rationale for Books Selected

Through this CCA, I analyzed three children's books written by Mexican American authors. As I read through the selected texts, I referred to my guiding questions and was attentive to evidence of power, agency, and identity, as Short (2017) suggested. It was essential that the books I selected explored how literature relates to and affects emergent bilingual Mexican American students.

I decided to create an in-depth analysis for three books out of the 10 I had initially researched. The books I selected identified Mexican American children as the main characters and included the Spanish language. These books provided language that is inclusive and used in a social context by the students throughout the Rio Grande Valley. According to Murdock et al. (2014), bilingual and ESL students are increasing throughout Texas. Therefore, it was essential to include children's literature that values bilingualism.

My ultimate decision to select three books in total was to examine them thoroughly and determine if they could form connections with emergent bilingual learners throughout the Rio Grande Valley since this area is a highly bicultural and biliterate community. The purpose of my study was to identify language and discourse that promoted agency, power, and identity in children's literature. Three books gave me some comprehensive insight into how I answered my guiding questions.

When I selected the three books, I looked at the grade levels that the text might impact the most. Since students in third–eighth grades are beginning to self-select, books based on their

interest, I decided against picture books and literature below a second grade reading level. The language at this level was not as detailed and could not be significantly analyzed to answer my intended research questions. My emphasis on analyzing three books was to generate research that produced a detailed analysis rooted in the tenets of critical literacy and LatCrit.

After attending the Re-Imagining Migration virtual seminar, the company emailed me the educator's guide, *Moving Stories: An Educator's Guide to Connecting and Engaging Our Moving Stories*. This resource provided additional activities that educators could use in the classroom for the book *Efrén Divided* (Cisneros, 2020). My curiosity was sparked after I reviewed and analyzed the *Extensions for Education*. I researched further and read several comments on Goodreads.com. As an educator, I connected to the text and purchased it on Amazon.com to reread and analyze the entire book.

Additionally, I attended the Viva Latino: Own Voices Writers in Conversation webinar. I listened to Reyna Grande discuss her book, *The Distance Between Us* (Grande, 2016), in a panel of other authors. I felt compelled by her personal story and researched further information on how this book could be valuable to emergent bilingual Mexican American students.

They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems (Bowles, 2018) is one of the books I had heard some of my classmates' mention. I added it to my ongoing list of books to read in the future. However, I was especially interested in this text since it earned the Pura Belpré Award, which celebrates Latino/a cultural experiences through children's literature. After researching the author's background, I realized that he is an English professor at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). As a student at UTRGV and an educator who has taught at schools along the Mexican American border, I felt that this book would be appropriate. I also wanted to

examine the quality of language and representation of the Mexican American culture that the author portrayed.

My final book selection was based on the author's cultural identity, reviews from reputable websites, videos, webinars, and the grade level that the book was intended for. For the purpose of my study, I focused on children's literature between third–eighth grade levels. I also considered the interest level of Mexican American emergent bilingual students.

1. *Efrén Divided* (Cisneros, 2020)

This book is about a young, American-born boy who is born to immigrant parents from Mexico. When his Amá (mother) is deported, he is faced with the responsibility of taking care of his siblings while trying to stay strong for his parents. Throughout the story, Efrén feels divided between Mexico and his birthland. However, through perseverance and resilience, Efrén overcomes his fears and becomes motivated to make the best of the time in his life without his mother. Translanguaging and the Spanish language are used throughout the text as Efrén and his family communicate. Although there are not many translations of the Spanish words, the author provided a glossary at the end of the book to define each Spanish term.

I selected this book because several students in the United States and particularly the Rio Grande Valley, have parents that have faced the fear of being deported for their current immigration status. The author connected the reader to the struggles that the main character faced through his use of language. Efrén, like many emergent bilingual Mexican American students, found the silver lining during challenging situations.

2. *The Distance Between Us: Young Readers Edition* (Grande, 2016)

In this book, Grande (2016) discussed her personal experiences as an immigrant child from Mexico. Her journey to the United States was a risk, and she faced many adversities with her family. However, she was determined to have a better life for herself and her siblings. Throughout the story, the author connected the reader to the text by describing and expressing her struggles, thoughts, and fears. *The Distance Between Us: Young Readers Edition* (Grande, 2016) also included eight pages filled with Grande's life photos that began at age two and continued through her university graduation and adulthood.

While reading this book, I realized that many Mexican American students might face similar situations as the characters in the stories. This text was selected because some emergent bilingual Mexican American students have their own personal stories about migration, immigration, and travel to the United States. This text may provide students an opportunity to hear stories that are similar to their cultural experiences. Children in grades third–eighth may also find a connection to the pictures and language throughout the literature.

3. *They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems* (Bowles, 2018)

The word *Güero* means light skin in Spanish. Through this collection of poems, the author captured the reader's attention through his personal experiences as a Mexican American child. In his poetry, the writer described the forced assimilation that many Mexican American children go through. He utilized translanguaging to get his point across to the Spanish reader. Güero, the author, also described what he saw and how he related to those circumstances through language and poetry.

Bowles (2018) described his lived experiences in the United States and his trips to visit family in Mexico. The references he made through language can connect students to their culture, history, and lived experiences. The poems in this collection may resonate with Mexican American students who have experienced similar situations. These stories may be relevant to many transnational and emergent bilingual Mexican American students that live in the Rio Grande Valley and travel to Mexico on a regular basis to visit family and friends.

A thorough examination of the books can provide educators a reference on literature that is inclusive of emergent bilingual Mexican American learners.

Data Analysis

My data analysis process began by creating an initial list of books that included Mexican American youth and children as the main characters. I determined if they related to my research questions and fell within the grade level I was specifically searching for. I focused the first reading on relatability and pleasure. As I immersed myself in the stories, I explored the text for a connection to the characters and their experiences as bilingual Mexican Americans. I also gave careful attention to the details in the language that was used throughout the texts. During the second reading, I determined if these books could support a diverse CSP. The second reading focused on looking at the text through a different lens that included searching for tenets of CRT and LatCrit that pertained to emergent bilingual Mexican American students. During the third and fourth reading, I searched for issues of agency, power, and identity. Through a critical literacy lens, I was able to search for evidence of diverse, bilingual discourse.

Johnson et al. (2017) mentioned that critical literacy required revisiting the text several times to identify emerging themes and patterns. Through notetaking and journaling, I carefully

analyzed the books and looked for examples of social processes representing marginalized groups, specifically Mexican American culture. An in-depth review of the literature explored and identified meaningful content that intersected between agency, power, and identity.

Throughout the study, I used a critical lens that was guided by my research questions. This CCA focused on discourse and language that was located throughout the literature. I used an iterative process as I read through the books and took notes. I read each page, noting sections that showed evidence throughout the data, and then reread them line by line. I also extracted excerpts from each book to identify patterns and categorized them across texts to create themes. I regrouped the themes and noted the relevance for addressing my research questions. As I immersed myself in the stories, I looked at the verbal dialogue and interpreted the data based on prominent patterns. I looked at emerging themes of importance for awareness of social change, and I discussed the interpretations of my findings thoroughly (Johnson et al., 2017).

Glesne (2016) mentioned that coding in qualitative research could help build connections and links to make some comparisons that form themes. After rereading the text several times, I coded the data and noted passages in the book that resonated. I also included a data collection diagram in the Appendix of this paper.

Glense (2016) suggested that researchers should study patterns, similarities, and differences in various events. An interpretative lens allowed me to examine language and discourse that is related to the tenets of CRT and LatCrit frameworks. Both theories added insight to the results of my qualitative CCA. As I read, I was vigilant to include data from the readings that could form relationships with Mexican American culture and how it was represented throughout the texts. The literature contained Mexican American children as main

characters and their use of bilingual language and relationships helped to inform my decisions. I also determined if the authors' cultural background was evident in the stories and poems.

This research study focused on the uniqueness of the social context and the techniques for gathering and analyzing data. As a researcher, I embraced the more direct connection to social and cultural practices. After studying and interpreting the texts and my journal entries, I looked for key themes and patterns throughout the data. Janks et al. (2013) stated that "Not all languages or all dialects are valued equally. This can lead to us profiling people we meet and dismissing or overvaluing them based on the way they speak" (p. 54). Therefore, this study helped determine if discourse in children's literature can influence agency, power, and identity. It was imperative to this study that the literature included the representation of the Spanish language and Mexican American culture because it can form connections with the students who live in the Rio Grande Valley.

According to Ellis (1991), introspection allowed researchers to find patterns in the findings. Through reflection, I looked for similarities and differences between the texts and the personal experiences of the main characters. I determined if the data formed connections to the educational and lived experience that emergent bilingual Mexican American students might encounter. It was also imperative to note if the literature could impact the student's bilingual literacy practices.

During the analysis process, I noted the opportunities to enhance the language skills of emergent bilingual Mexican American students by relating their prior knowledge to the reading. The characters' portrayal in the texts helped identify if the authors valued learning more than one

language and the importance of bilingualism. Diversity in literature is vital in creating a global curriculum. Through the incorporation of cultural differences, the needs of all learners can be met.

Trustworthiness and Credibility of the Study

According to Glesne (2016), trustworthiness is “about alertness to the quality and rigor of a study, about what sorts of criteria can be used to assess how well the research was carried out” (p. 53). In this study, I used thick descriptions to establish trustworthiness and credibility. As I collected the data, I analyzed the patterns that I noticed throughout the reading and went back to the data several times to confirm the findings and my interpretations. As I compared my notes and journal entries, I noted the key themes that could resonate with emergent bilingual Mexican American readers that live in the Rio Grande Valley.

Through prolonged engagement, rereading the children’s literature several times, and persistent annotations, I provided quality descriptions that fully allowed the reader or listener to understand the impact that culturally authentic literature can provide. To assist with the trustworthiness of this qualitative study, I selected current books that authors published within the last seven years. More recent literature also provided insight into the struggles that students are facing to form connections.

Saldaña (2018) recommended that qualitative researchers become reflexive about their works and metacognitive processes to explore culture through qualitative inquiry. As a qualitative researcher, I reflected on the findings that I located throughout the books. Through prolonged engagement and several readings of the texts, I detailed the lived experiences of the characters in the stories. Introspective reflection allowed me to produce the answers to all my research questions.

Furthermore, “Thematic statements are categorized and, if possible, placed in a hierarchical outline to bring some sense of order to the various themes. Or, the analyst can venture into what are theoretical constructs, which transform themes into broader meanings” (Saldaña, 2018, p. 3). The categories and themes allowed me to determine the areas that were more pronounced. I discussed these through the tenets of CRT and LatCrit lens, which allowed me to analyze the text further and create an in-depth analysis.

Denzin and Lincoln (2018) stated that “qualitative research/inquiry is endlessly creative and interpretive” (p. 22). However, it is also essential to limit biases and interpret the data extensively through reflection and thick descriptions. Creswell (2013) recommended an external check of the qualitative research to establish the trustworthiness of the study. Through peer debriefing, interpretations and meanings found in the text can be confirmed. Therefore, I had a peer read through my study to provide opportunities for questioning and reflection. This process allowed me to check my interpretations.

Additionally, the data collection diagram and journal entries helped me create a credible study. I provided some translations for vocabulary words that were pertinent in making an informed decision and conclusion. Specific and detailed information helped me create a study that is replicable and can guide future research.

Summary

The goal of this chapter was to discuss the research methodology that I used to build around my guiding research questions. I discussed the purpose of this qualitative CCA and defined the term discourse analysis used throughout this research study. I also provided a brief description of the three books that I analyzed and the reasons I selected the specific texts for this study. The data collection and data analysis portion of my research mentioned how this CCA

could help build trustworthiness and credibility. A CRT and LatCrit framework also helped examine the literature selected to determine the emerging themes and patterns that arose.

I built on literature by Solórzano & Bernal (2001) who suggested that educators, policymakers, and community workers should understand how students engage in learning and multilingual strategies. Therefore, the following chapter focuses on the overall findings of the study. This helped determine whether CSP that includes bilingualism can build a future that empowers Mexican American learners through their language and culture.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

I build on literature by Solórzano and Bernal (2001), who suggested that educators, policymakers, and community workers should understand how students engage in learning and multilingual strategies. In this chapter, I present the themes and patterns that resonated as I reread each text multiple times. Through this CCA, I analyzed children's literature to determine how emergent bilingual Mexican Americans are portrayed in the three selected books, *Efrén Divided* (2020) by Ernesto Cisneros, *The Distance Between: Us Young Readers Edition* (2016) by Reyna Grande, and *They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems* (2018) by David Bowles.

The purpose of my study was to determine if diverse books could influence CSP that can empower young emergent bilingual Mexican American learners' literacy and language practices. I focused on data and themes that revealed how diverse children's literature could represent the identities of Mexican American characters as viewed through a CRT and LatCrit lens. I also looked at how children's literature can provide opportunities for critical literacy and pedagogy in the classroom setting.

I considered how the main characters' discourse and language could build on the emergent bilingual readers' connections to literacy and can ultimately enhance education. Janks et al. (2013) stated the following:

As a result the language or variety we choose to use is one of the ways in which we design our identities and other people's judgments about who we are. It is a powerful force in constructing who is *us* and who is *them*. (p. 54)

Recognizing the impact that culturally authentic literature can have on education and the future of emergent bilingual Mexican American students can ultimately create a space of acceptance, worth, and empowerment.

I organized my data collection by looking closely at the discourse of the main characters throughout the literature. The supporting themes that I uncovered during the analysis process supported in answering my research questions for this study. While analyzing the patterns and discourse in the literature, I was able to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways are LatCrit and CRT reflected in children's literature centered on emergent bilingual Mexican American experiences?
2. How do discourse and translanguaging capture issues of agency, power, and identity in children's literature centered on emergent bilingual Mexican American experiences from a critical literacy perspective?
3. In what ways is children's literature featuring emergent bilingual Mexican American characters reflective of the linguistic, literate, and/or cultural practices of Mexican American youth?

The findings from this study can help support educators and students in selecting diverse and multicultural literature that will enhance agency, power, and identity. This study can also guide and provide opportunities for future literature by Mexican American authors to empower young emergent bilingual learners.

Findings

Rogers and Wetzel (2014) suggested that critical literacy should investigate language and feedback given to students that provide empowerment and support for future learning. Therefore, I analyzed three children's books that focused on the culture, experiences, and discourse of emergent bilingual Mexican American students. The books included are as follows:

1. *Efrén Divided* (Cisneros, 2020)
2. *The Distance Between Us: Young Readers Edition* (Grande, 2016)
3. *They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems* (Bowles, 2018)

I initially read the books for pleasure, understanding, and content. I wanted to determine if the text was authentic literature that I could form a personal connection with. I also wanted to find some connection (or relationship between my students' experiences) to some of the characters in the story. Although I did not take notes during this initial reading, I thought about my students' experiences and struggles. During the second reading, I used my reflective journal to jot down notes that stood out throughout the stories. Short (2017) suggested that it is necessary to document themes found throughout the stories that the readers of the study can possibly relate to. I used post-it notes to tag sections of the literature that I felt were significant for the reader and wanted to return for further evaluation. I also noted Spanish words, phrases, and dialogue that were crucial in creating meaningful connections to Mexican American culture. After the third and fourth reading, I developed the patterns and themes that stood out amongst all three books. I grouped them and ruled out themes that did not apply or were not as significant for emergent bilingual Mexican American students. I narrowed it down to the following themes and patterns that can produce empowerment through discourse and language: (a) Lived Experiences/ Experiencias vividas; (b) Representation of Agency, Power, and Identity/ Representación de

agencia, poder, e identidad; (c) Representation of Culture/ Representación de la cultura; and (d) The Portrayal of Mexican Americans/ Representación de Mexicanos Americanos.

Theme 1: Lived Experiences—*Experiencias vividas*

According to Stites et al. (2021), educators are responsible for the diverse opportunities presented to bilingual learners. Schools should be a place where creativity, differences, and student experiences are accepted. The child's experiences can help them make connections to the world (Stites et al., 2021).

The power of lived experiences is essential in the story, *The Distance Between Us: Young Readers Edition* (Grande, 2016). As a child, Reyna came to the United States illegally with her sibling and father. Although she was in pain and nervous, the excitement of being with her father and finally having a family is much more critical than her toothache. The family is caught during their first and second attempts to cross the border and deported to Tijuana, Mexico. However, they do not give up and are finally successful during the third attempt. These early experiences and challenges helped Reyna grow into a strong character at the end of the story.

The smuggler picked us up before sunrise at the hotel and drove us across the city. I was sleepy, and I found myself struggling to stay awake. I wasn't used to waking up that early, and I was groggy and grumpy. To make matters worse, that morning I'd woken up with a toothache, and Papi didn't have anything to give me. (Grande, 2016, pp. 130-131)

Reyna, the main character and author of the book, also understood her mother's emotions.

Although her mother lived in the United States for several years, she still held a bond with her and could empathize with her suffering.

I didn't look at Mami, because I know she was angry, at me, at the man, at the mother with her five children, at Papi for putting her into this situation, at herself for leaving El Otro Lado [The Other Side] in a moment of desperation. (Grande, 2016, p.7)

The children's experiences, while their mother was absent, are a connection that many immigrant and transnational children face as they are separated from their parents and loved ones. As the author described her internal childhood thoughts, her lived experiences allow the reader to understand that, at times, words cannot do justice to the situation that others are going through. Although the relationship between the mother and children is strained, there is still an understanding that they are united as a family.

Reyna's lived experiences may be relatable to some Mexican American children that have immigrated to the United States with little money but have high hopes of having more opportunities in life. Many students face similar struggles and use these challenges to develop resiliency. They are grateful for their parent's efforts to provide them with the few resources they can.

The perspective of Reyna as an emergent bilingual Mexican American child is honest and reflects her acceptance and understanding of her new life in the United States. This story acknowledged the emotional struggles that Reyna and her siblings faced as they adapted to a new culture. Through her lived experiences, empathy and understanding become vital ways that children can relate to the main character. Students that might be facing similar circumstances, can develop skills that will guide them to persist and overcome obstacles. Also, students and teachers who have not had these experiences may develop empathy for their peers who have.

The family in the story *Efrén Divided* by Ernesto Cisneros (2020) faced many struggles after Amá (mother) is deported to Mexico. Efrén is left to care for his brother and sister while helping his father with household chores. As a middle school student who often depended on his mother, Efrén is forced to grow up quickly. Initially, the reader learns that the book's main character has inner challenges and must ultimately become brave for his siblings and father. The

following quote from the book revealed that Efrén is still a child with many questions and is worried about his mother's well-being:

“Ahora, ¿cómo consigo más dinero para cruzarla?” Where would he find the money to get her home? The question ripped a hole in Efrén's heart, even as more questions filled his mind. Where could Áma be? Was she hurt? Was she scared? Would she ever be coming back? (Cisneros, 2020, p. 67)

The challenges that Efrén encountered throughout the story are guided by his lived experiences when his mother was home. He tried to make “miracle meals” for his siblings by combining the few items they had in the refrigerator like his mother always did. Although he was not successful at first, he quickly adapted as he remembered the lessons learned from his Amá (mother). He also realized that he was helping his father, who worked tirelessly to earn extra money for his mother's return to the United States.

This text highlighted the importance of lived experiences as Efrén struggled to make it through the day without his mother. Although he is a legal U.S. citizen and Mexican American, he hesitated to tell his best friend that his mother was undocumented.

My Áma got deported. Four simple words. That's it. And yet, those words carried so much hurt they seemed to swell and get lodged in his throat. (Cisneros, 2020, p. 133)

During this section of the story, Efrén is scared to share his story with David. He is reluctant to express that his mother was deported to Mexico. He is worried that it will cause more trouble or potentially cause the entire family to be deported. He felt the need to speak to someone but resisted to keep his family from further harm.

Efrén's lived experiences as a legal Mexican American are different from David's. His friend is white, and his caregivers are United States citizens. Although his friend was from a broken family, Efrén felt that he could not relate to or understand what he was going through. These different experiences helped them become best friends in elementary school but had now

caused some stress in their relationship. However, the reader learns that this situation with his friend eventually helped him grow into a more understanding and caring person. In the end, he acknowledged that the connections with family and friends helped him advocate for other children that are like him and are facing similar experiences.

The book, *They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems* (2018), is written from the point-of-view of a young David Bowles. As a light skin Mexican American child from the Rio Grande Valley, he is referred to as *Güero*. In his poem, *Tamalada*, he is invited to join the family as they made tamales on Christmas Eve. After he took the place of his sister, who wanted to watch the Dallas football game, *Güero* was excited to be listening to all the *chisme* (gossip) that was exchanged while preparing the food for the family celebration. The following quote from the story depicts the exchange of conversations that *Güero* listened to:

Other teams of tías and primas spoon in the fillings, fold them up, tie them tight, and stand them neat in pots for baño maría steaming. The warmth of the kitchen mixes with laughter as great-grandma Luisa stirs the champurrado, and leads the rich plática: stories, gossip, old dichos that make us laugh with happiness nourishing us like good tamales! (Bowles, 2018, p. 57)

Through the hard work of cooking, the writer, and the main character of all the poems in the book, learned new information about his family and lessons about his Mexican and Mexican American relatives. He discovered that his father cheated in a game of golf and that his grandfather did not catch a swordfish while deep-sea fishing. Instead, it was purchased at a market nearby. It is also revealed that his grandmother, Mimi, still had silver spoons that were heirlooms from before la Revolución (the revolution). These lived experiences were memorable and stayed close to Bowles (2018) as he created his writing.

As young children from the Rio Grande Valley read this story, they may relate to some of *Güero's* lived experiences. Many Mexican American children have made tamales with their

family or experienced eating too many of them. The bonds that the main character created with his family while cooking can emphasize the importance of the child's perspective and experiences with their own loved ones. Young Mexican American readers can also learn to appreciate the cultural practice of generational family storytelling as they relate to the sharing of *chisme*. The students' funds of knowledge can help them make connections with the author.

When Bowles (2018) and his family took a trip from the Rio Grande Valley to San Antonio, they were questioned about their citizenship. During the poem, *Checkpoint*, Güero's mother presented her *papeles* (passport) at the immigration checkpoint. The children become uneasy and upset even though they are legal United States citizens. They are apprehensive about the treatment they could receive for being Mexican American. When the agents instructed their German Shepherds to sniff the family vehicle, the children became nervous.

We just don't understand why we have to prove every time that we belong in our own country where our mother gave birth to us. Dad, like he can feel that bad vibes coming from the back seat, tells us to chill. (Bowles, 2018, p. 12)

Unfortunately, many children and adults living in the Rio Grande Valley who are legal United States citizens have been questioned or searched at the Checkpoint in Falfurrias, Texas, which is 75 miles inland. This uneasy feeling has left many Mexican Americans feeling like it is a crime to travel beyond the Rio Grande Valley. The lived experiences that Bowles (2018) described in this poem are significant for many children that have traveled throughout Texas to visit family or would like to take a fun trip outside of the Rio Grande Valley. However, students may find a connection to this poem and feel that their lived experiences are valued.

Theme 2: Representation of Agency, Power, and Identity—*Representación de agencia, poder, e identidad*

Literature that includes the student's identity and culture can create a climate that empowers them and promotes agency. As students see themselves in literature, they can reflect and examine who they are and where they came from. This sense of empowerment can develop a future of acceptance (Johnson et al., 2017).

School and language were initially a struggle for Reyna since she only spoke Spanish when she entered school in the United States. However, she had dreams of attending a university. Reyna often wanted to do well in school to make her father proud and earn his approval. She studied to prove to him that she could become successful. Although her father encouraged education and demanded that his children attend school, he did not encourage them to strive for a higher education. Ultimately, Reyna enrolled in Pasadena City College without her father's approval or financial support.

I wanted to tell him I'd be different, that I'd seen with my own eyes the poverty he'd helped us escape. I'd seen with my own eye the reason he'd been such a tyrant about school. I wanted to tell him I'd do what Mago and Carlos hadn't been able to do. I would go to UC Irvine and get my degree. I would be somebody he could be proud of. But he said to me, "You can forget all about going to that university. You're going to be a failure too, just like them, so don't even bother." Then he walked away. (Grande, 2016, p. 279)

Emergent bilingual Mexican American students may struggle with language, acceptance, and family resistance in the United States school system. They may feel that they will never master the language to gain acceptance into a university or college. The character of Reyna Grande demonstrated that through resilience, power and identity can be developed. Emergent bilingual Mexican American students must read literature that reflects the success of those with similar backgrounds as theirs. This can build and enhance their agency, power, and identity.

As a young Mexican American girl in college, Reyna is faced with many challenges. Assimilating to a new language and culture while facing abuse from her father came with many obstacles. However, once she was in college, she was empowered through the support of her professor and mentor, Diana. She encouraged Reyna to do better and work harder to earn her degree. Diana supported Reyna by opening the doors of her own home when she had nowhere else to go. She also ignited a love of writing in her. She saw the potential that Reyna held and valued her background, culture, and identity. The reader can witness the support that is provided to her in the following quote from the book:

“You have to be a writer, Reynita,” Diana said to me. “You have to transfer to a good school, Reynita.” Over and over she repeated this like a chant. “If Alvarez, Cisneros, and Viramontes can publish their stories, so can you, Reynita.” (Grande, 2016, p. 310)

As a friend and mentor, Diana displayed support through agency and identity. Reyna is encouraged to achieve her dream of becoming a writer. This is something that Reyna had never experienced. She was delighted that someone cared enough about her to see her fulfill her dream. In the end, Reyna strived to become brave and is empowered by her Mexican American identity and voice. This also exemplifies the influence of educators and how mentors can contribute to Mexican American student success.

At the end of the story, Reyna mentioned the challenges of traveling to the United States from Mexico without documentation. The troubles she faced with her father molded her into the strong person she became at the end of the story. The fears and insecurities she experienced as a child helped form her identity and empowered her to become better for herself and her family. The injustices do not stop her from ultimately becoming successful. This book can deepen young Mexican American students’ understanding of injustice. Transnational and emergent bilingual

Mexican American and children can also reflect on how they can overcome adversity and produce a positive change for their own future through agency.

In the story *Efrén Divided* (Cisneros, 2020), Efrén stepped up for the family and took the stressful trip to Tijuana, Mexico alone. Since his father is undocumented, he could not risk also losing him to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and putting more strain on the family. After a long ride to the border, Efrén crossed over and gave his mother the money. Unfortunately, he is faced with a few frightful situations.

“Yep. Ready.” Efrén forced a smile. In spite of what Apá had told him over and over again—he really did not have a choice. Going into Tijuana alone was something he had to do. For Amá. For the entire family. This was the only plan they had. He needed to be brave. (Cisneros, 2020, p. 168)

Although the United States government disempowered his mother and father based on their documentation status, Efrén understood that his family came first. He is empowered to do the best that he can for his family. The immigration system forced the main character to become an adult and rise above the challenging circumstances. This book also built on the child’s identity as he developed into a responsible teenager who valued his family and used his power to help support them. This can be relatable to Mexican American youth that are reading the book and taking on adult responsibilities such as language brokering for their parents or relatives.

The story also includes representation of power and identity through the characters of Apá (father) and Efrén. After saving money for several months, the family is ready to have Amá (mother) home. Efrén successfully crossed the border and delivered the money to his mother in Tijuana, Mexico. With the help of a taxi driver named Lalo, they connected Amá to a *coyote* (smuggler) that helped her cross to the United States again. Unfortunately, this did not guarantee a safe return home. As the family awaited Amá’s arrival with food and celebration, they are

stricken with emotions when they find out that she was detained at the San Clemente checkpoint and will be returned to Mexico.

That's when Apá went down on one knee, first gently resting one hand on Max's shoulder, then another on Mía's. "Mijos, your Amá loves you two"—he interrupted himself and turned briefly to Efrén—"you three. And she will do everything she can to come home to you. And I will do everything I can to get her here. We will never give up. Nunca. That much I can promise you. But, no... she will not be coming home tonight. She will not be coming home tomorrow. Honestly"—His voice broke mid-sentence—"she won't be coming home anytime soon." (Cisneros, 2020, pp. 227-228)

The characters in this story learned about sacrifice, patience, and their identity. The father sacrificed the time with his family as he worked extra jobs to earn money for the mother's return. He also learned to persevere and not give up on himself when he was tired and emotionally exhausted. Apá promised the family that he would continue to work towards getting Amá home. He also comforted the children when they were at their weakest point.

Efrén learned about sacrifice and empowerment as he cooked for his siblings and helped around the house. Taking more responsibility allowed the main character to grow in his own identity. Towards the end of the story, the reader again sees an example of how Efrén developed in his own identity as he tore up his school president's resignation letter and decided to continue running.

"You really think I could make a difference?" David nodded. "Yeah, I do. You taught me that the color of my skin doesn't matter. Only now, this school—heck, the whole world, needs to be reminded." (Cisneros, 2020, p. 246)

Despite the conflict in his life, Efrén is motivated by his family and closest peers. He decided to serve his school in a new capacity. After the school is vandalized with dehumanizing words directed at undocumented citizens, the main character decided that as class president, he would be a voice for students facing racism. He realized the need to empower his classmates and

revealed how inequity can hurt students. It is important for young students to recognize that language, culture, and heritage are valuable.

The students' sense of self can influence agency for Mexican American learners to embrace their identity. The transition for emergent bilingual learners may be complicated; however, Efrén's challenges can resonate with emergent bilingual Mexican American children that have experienced racism. This text encourages young readers to research their culture and heritage as well as cultivate empathy among their peers and teachers. Analyzing their own unique journey will give Mexican American students the agency and empowerment to navigate demanding situations that might arise throughout their lives.

In a poem by Bowles (2018), *Christmas Concrete*, the Mexican American author vividly writes about a conversation with his father during his winter break from school. As he lugged cement in a wheelbarrow to help his grandfather at the construction site, his father reminded him of the importance of hard work.

“Ya sé, m’ijo. But there’s value in manual labor, Red. Dignity, too. Me and your apá, we got a duty- can’t let you wind up useless with the God-given hands.” (Bowles, 2018, p. 54)

During the conversation, *Güero*, the main character and author, quickly decided that he would rather go to college. His experience with manual labor left his hands bleeding and cold. Although he understood how this generational work has supported his family and the sacrifices they had made, he refused to continue his family's legacy in the construction company that required much physical labor. His father reminded him that there was value in manual labor, and they should be grateful. Apá reminded *Güero* that God had given them hands and good health to work with dignity.

This poem reminds readers from all cultures and backgrounds that all hard work is essential. Several emergent bilingual Mexican American children have seen the struggles that their families face just to put food on the table or send them to school with a few supplies. This poem sheds some light on the sacrifices that many parents make for their children. Educators can also gain some insight in understanding their students and families.

Multicultural learners and transnational learners can also relate to the experience of wanting to further their education for themselves and their children. They may begin to realize the sacrifices that their parents made through migration to the United States. Emergent bilingual Mexican American children may also find that literature can provide a place of comfort and acknowledgement.

The poem, *Learning to Read*, discussed the author's first experiences with literature. As a child, Güero and his cousins would listen to their Abuela Mimi (grandmother) tell stories of scary monsters. However, he slowly began to question the reality of these events. This oral storytelling sparked an interest in Güero and ignited his love of reading. His mother eventually taught him to read at a young age and he excelled beyond grade level.

The school counselor told my folks I can already read at college level! And I've found lots of answers, but also many new questions. Of course I pass all the state tests with super high scores. Learning in class is easy for me. Dad says all those books rewired my brain, got me ready for study. (Bowles, 2018, p. 20)

Storytelling is a prominent form of communication in many Mexican American households. Their stories are a way to keep the family and culture alive, as many grandparents and relatives recount their days of youth and hard work. As emergent bilingual Mexican American and transnational children listen to their ancestors tell stories, they develop a love and passion for literature. Like Bowles (2018), they can value the representation of their culture. This form of

agency represented in the poem is powerful for emergent bilingual Mexican American students who are trying to find their identity. This story about Güero and his success can give students hope for the future and instill that their love of reading is something they should cherish.

Theme 3: Representation of Culture—*Representación de la cultura*

Erickson (2011) said “Framed in border terms, culture difference is treated by the school as deficiency: something characteristic of parents and students who are not normal” (p. 29).

Although culture is treated as a boundary and can cause conflict, it is significant in creating diverse social interactions and is a resource (Erickson, 2011). Cultures are unique and distinct.

During this section of the story, Reyna and her siblings are excited to see their father for the first time in years. In the children’s eyes, their father from the United States had finally returned to be with them and rescue them from poverty. They are excited that he will take them to the United States, a land they had dreamed of seeing for so long.

He gave my aunt money, and she went to buy a pot of menudo at the nearest food stand. Out of his suitcases Papi took three dolls, one for me, one for Mago, and one for Betty. They were life-size baby dolls with blue eyes that closed when we lay them down, and opened when we stood them up. I buried my face in my doll’s blond hair and smelled the scent of plastic, the amazing scent of a new toy, which we hardly ever got to smell.
(Grande, 2016, pp. 112-113)

Mexican American culture is represented in the story when the father sends his sister to buy a pot of menudo. This cultural and special food is served during times of celebration. Since the children had not been eating well at their grandmother’s home, this was a treat for them. The reader is also presented with a unique circumstance when the siblings are given gifts. The father presented them with a doll that had blond hair and blue eyes. Although no one had ever told the children that blond hair and blue eyes were representative of the United States, the reader sees how the children are in love with the new toys that might suggest that this race is superior.

Once in the United States, the children have their first Christmas experience. In Reyna's hometown of Iguala, Mexico, Santa Claus did not exist. During Christmas, the children were not presented with expensive and unnecessary gifts. While they stayed home alone and watched a commercial that asked the children to call Santa, they pleaded their request to an automated answering service that claimed to be Santa. Since the children had only been in the United States for a few months and did not speak English well, they made some of their requests in Spanish and their best English. In the following quote, Grande (2016) wrote about their first communication with Santa:

Mago dialed the number and called Santa. She frowned. "What's wrong?" Carlos said. "It's in English." Mago said. "Doesn't Santa speak Spanish?" I asked. (Grande, 2016, p. 178)

Frustrated, I put the phone to my ear. "Alo? Santa Clos? Yo quiero patines. Mándeme unos patines para la Navidad. Tank you." Mago took the phone away and hung up. "Do you think he understood what I said?" I asked them. He's Santa Claus. I don't see why not," Mago said. "Don't worry, Nena." (Grande, 2016, p. 179)

The children's language acquisition and bilingual skills were developing during their short time in the United States. As they began to use common words from the English language, such as "you" and "Santa", they found that they were exploring new sounds. The author intentionally misspelled the words in the text to allow the reader to imagine how the children were still acquiring English. However, the reader can understand the spoken words and the dialogue that Reyna and her siblings are trying to get across. The word "Hello" is replaced with "Alo" and the word "Thank" is replaced by "Tank." The young Mexican American reader may also understand how desperate the siblings were to receive gifts for the first time.

Duran (2017) suggested that language should not be seen as a disadvantage. A child's insight into the structure of words and language helps build unique pedagogies that include

cultural representations. The dialogue in this section of the story reminds the reader of the connections that transnational and Mexican American children make from Spanish to English. As they build on their prior knowledge, they are activating and acquiring cognitive skills that can ultimately improve literacy and knowledge.

At the beginning of the story, *Efrén Divided* (Cisneros, 2020), the reader begins to understand the main character as a child who valued his mother and appreciated the sacrifices she made for the family. Unfortunately, like many immigrants and Mexican Americans, Efrén is forced to assimilate to the English-only language. In the following excerpt from the story, the main character begins to depreciate the Spanish language and does not consider the value of it. His mother gently reminded him of the importance of language and how other parts of the world find its value.

“Aquí están.” Amá set the breakfast spread on the kitchen table, her exhausted eyes creasing as she smiled. “Mijo, most of the world speaks more than one language. And Spanish is a part of who we are.” She moved toward Efrén and ruffled his hair. “You’ll understand when you’re older.” (Cisneros, 2020, p. 6)

Throughout the story, Cisneros (2020) included translanguaging and code-switching to connect with the young emergent bilingual reader. Efrén encountered the words *dulces*, *jugos*, and *paletas* on signs as he walked the streets of Tijuana, Mexico. As the story progressed, the main character acknowledged that Spanish is important and began to appreciate the value of both languages. Ultimately, the privilege of knowing and understanding Spanish connected him to his mother, his family, and his unforgettable experiences in Mexico. The inclusion of these Spanish words in the text can help the reader connect the character’s understanding of the language.

Portnoi and Kwong (2019) found that personal situations and family connections can affect the students’ experiences. However, the representation of their culture is essential and

should be recognized and deemed valuable. The practice of learning more than one language can demonstrate knowledge, growth, and form identity. Exposure to literature that is related to the students' culture and ethnicity can lead to a positive view of diversity.

As the story continued, the reader learned that Apá cherished his tools and took care of them. However, he was willing to sell them to earn money for Amá's return from Mexico. He valued his family more than physical items and was determined to have them back together once again. The father did not want their financial instability to be an obstacle.

Then two men climbed onto the back of the truck and unfastened the metal tool bin. Apá's tools? Efrén couldn't believe it. They were Apá's prize possessions. No matter how much he used them, he always kept them looking new. Amá would sometimes joke, calling the collection his fourth child. (Cisneros, 2020, pp. 82-83)

Many Mexican American children have seen their families make sacrifices for the better of the family. They have seen their parents work late and earn little money. However, they find ways to appreciate their resources and extend them. The representation of culture in this section of the book may resonate with some students who have experienced similar circumstances where money is limited but they make ends meet with what they have. They have also experienced the sacrifices that Mexican American families make to put their loved ones first.

In the poem *Border Kid*, Bowles (2018) wrote about his childhood experience as he traveled to Mexico with his dad. They met with friends and chatted in both English and Spanish. They purchased drinks and food that reminded them of their culture. As he waited at the bridge to head home, he noted how the wall between the two countries took away from the beauty that the river held. His dad reminded him that no one could take away his uniqueness of being Mexican American and the culture that was gifted to them by their ancestors.

“You’re a border kid, a foot on either bank. You ancestors crossed this river a thousand times. No wall, no matter how tall, can stop your heritage from flowing forever, like the Río Grande itself.” (Bowles, 2018, p. 9)

Emergent bilingual Mexican American students may relate to Güero’s experiences of traveling to Mexico to visit friends and family as a transnational. Some students and their families have traveled to enjoy the beauty that Mexico offers. Mexican food, culture, and heritage are a few things that are, at times, insignificant in the United States. The wall put up between the two countries seems to signify that the United States is superior. Unfortunately, many students may buy into this notion that devalues their heritage. After reading this poem, the young learner may realize that their culture is essential, and their experiences as Mexican Americans represent their culture and who they are.

The poem, *Mis Otros Abuelos*, described Güero’s experiences as he visited family in Monterrey, Mexico, during Spring Break. The author thoughtfully described his connections to his other family. He stated how refreshing it was to visit this comforting place that connected him to his Mamá Toñita (grandmother) and his authentic Mexican culture. In this poem, Bowles (2018) described the long bus trip to Monterrey, Mexico. As Mexican agents inspected the bus at the entering gates, his family was not asked for papers or documentation of citizenship. He mentioned that this was likely because of the color of their skin, and they looked like Mexicans.

Get out at the bridge, walk through inspection. Then an hour later, at the garita, agents and soldiers come on board—they never ask for our papers, though. I guess we look Mexican enough for them. (Bowles, 2018, p. 87)

After a long ride, the mountains indicated that they were near their destination and the place they had missed. Hugs from his grandmother, visits to the waterfalls, and outdoor activities with his cousins allowed the author to connect with his family from Mexico. The main character stated “me siento recargado de cultura” (I feel recharged by the culture.) (Bowles, 2018, p. 88). The

experience of visiting family in Monterrey, Nuevo León created a refreshing connection to his culture and heritage.

As emergent bilingual Mexican American children read these poems, they may feel the same love for the home country they left behind and long to visit. The adventures that Güero experienced in Mexico can help young Mexican American readers understand that they are not alone in their longing for their home and families. They may also realize that their culture is valuable and worth remembering. Students may also feel compelled to write about their personal experiences.

Theme 4: The Portrayal of Mexican Americans—*Representación de Mexicanos Americanos*

The portrayal of Mexican American students has often been viewed negatively. However, literacy can increase awareness of racism, diversity, and cultural acceptance. Transnational and emergent bilingual Mexican American students can feel safe and welcomed when they are viewed as significant and important. Educators must work together to create an accepting space that helps maintain a community that advocates for the learners' culture (Valdés, 2015).

In *The Distance Between Us: Young Readers Edition* (Reyna, 2016), Papi finally went to Iguala, Mexico to pick up Reyna and her siblings. They were surprised at first, but they begged him to take them with him to the land of possibilities, the United States. The siblings were scared that the father would leave without them as the mother had done several times. However, they were reassured that he would make the sacrifice of crossing with them as undocumented citizens.

Unfortunately, many immigrant children have had the experience of being left with grandparents or loved ones as the parents traveled to the United States to work. Some Mexican American students can relate to the feelings of insecurity and distrust. The following quotes may resonate with the young reader as they connect to the literature:

“You’ll still be here tomorrow, won’t you?” Mago asked. We were afraid that while we were gone, Papi would pack up and leave, never to come back to Iguala again. “Of course I will, negra,” Papi said. (Grande, 2016, p. 120)

In the story, Papi called Mago, the eldest sister, “Negra.” The father used this word with love for his daughter. The nickname for Reyna is “Chata” and “Carnal” for Carlos, her brother. Carnal means full blood brother or friend. Although the father did not show physical affection for the children and was abusive throughout the story, the nicknames he had for them showed that he cared about them.

As the family attempted to cross to the United States, they were faced with the challenge of trying to arrive safely. Reyna described the outdoor scene as beautiful and peaceful; however, she is also scared of being caught by the Border Patrol. The family is forced to walk quietly without complaints. They hid and trusted that the *coyote* (smuggler) would help them make their way through the darkness.

The coyote led us through a hole in a chain-link fence into the vacant land on the other side. We followed in silence. I looked at the ants scurrying around, gathering food. A hawk soared above in the wind. Birds chirped in trees. Lizards crawled under rocks. If I hadn’t been so afraid, I would have been enjoying our adventure. But then I remembered that even though this place was beautiful, it was forbidden land. We were not welcome here. (Grande, 2016, pp. 131-132)

Although there has been a negative portrayal of Mexican American children who cross the border undocumented, educators and administrators need to empathize with Mexican American students. Many children traveling to the United States are faced with grave danger, and the parents made many sacrifices to cross their children. They feel this land will give their children more opportunities and success in their future. Many emergent bilingual Mexican American children are forced to adapt to a new land and should be given the tools to succeed in their new environment.

The theme of how emergent bilingual Mexican Americans are portrayed in the book, *Efrén Divided*, is fascinating yet humbling. Like many Mexican American mothers, Amá is a sweet lady that is willing to give all she has for her children. She took pride in her cooking and provided for all her children. Although the family did not have a lot of money, the children loved her *sopes* that were filled with love and just the right amount of bean and cheese. This book allows emergent bilingual and transnational Mexican American children to understand the mother's sacrifices and her nurturing ways. Efrén's mother valued her children and the food that they are fed. Her love and true affection for her children can be seen in the following quote from the book:

Max and Mía reached in first, each picking up a bean-and-cheese-topped sope. Efrén eyed the last one while Amá filled the glasses with chilled orange juice?" "Amá, where is yours?" "Ay, amor....a cup of cafecito is all I need." Efrén's stomach grumbled, but it was his heart giving the order. "Amá, why don't you take mine? I can have breakfast at school anyway. There's no point letting all that school food go to waste." "And have them think I can't provide for my own children? No, gracias." Efrén inhaled. "Ay Amá," he said, knowing that she was simply being, well... Amá. (Cisneros, 2020, pp. 6-7)

The main character, Efrén, is concerned about his mother's safety throughout the story. Although he loved her *sopes* and his stomach grumbled at the thought of them, he immediately offered his food to her. He suggested that he could eat at school since the food was going to waste. This book displayed the caring individuals that Mexican American children can be and are willing to put others before themselves. Therefore, students of color and marginalized groups can easily see themselves in this piece of literature.

Furthermore, the Mexican American community is portrayed as supportive and willing to help each other in times of need. The relationships that are formed are significant to other young readers as they become aware of the sacrifices made for them. The recognition of culture and

heritage captures the essence of family, love, and sacrifice. This story of migration shares compassion towards diversity of languages and other cultures.

Later in the story, Efrén grew to trust his teacher. He noticed a picture of Mr. Garrett's ex-wife who is Latina. He then began to feel comfortable disclosing his family situation. After much hesitation, he finally mentioned that this mother had been deported. Mr. Garrett talked to Efrén about trusting his father and reminded him that he should not be stressed out. Efrén found comfort in his sincere words.

Efrén brushed his face with the fold of his sleeve and looked up at the photo. Mr. Garrett's ex-wife had long, wavy hair, a honey-beige complexion, and caramel eyes...just like Amá. A Latina? He'd married a Latina! Did this mean he could now trust Mr. Garrett? After all, the last thing he wanted to do was put Apá in danger too. If he were arrested, the entire family would most likely be uprooted like some uninvited weed and discarded across the border. (Cisneros, 2020, p. 87)

When Efrén noticed that Mr. Garrett's ex-wife is Latina, he felt that his teacher could understand or empathize with his situation. Some emergent bilingual Mexican American students may also feel a sense of ease when they have others of the same race or culture within their support group. This may lead students to gain trust with educators who have a similar background or experiences. Students recognize that many Mexican American families work together to better their culture and race. They support one another during difficult and trying times.

Bowles (2018) explained his experience with racism and hatred in the poem *Playoff Game*. After his sister's basketball team made the final playoff game, the team and entire community were beyond excited until the opposing teams' fans diminish them. Unfortunately, the harsh and unruly words such as "wetback" and "build that wall" affected the team negatively. After the coach called a time out, the girls regrouped and regained their confidence. They ended up winning the game and headed to the state championships.

“Go back, wetbacks! Build that wall!” Adults and teens begin to call. A sea of white faces, twisting in rage like all the brown bodies are there to invade. Teresa my sister stops dead in her tracks. We’re shocked as well at this ugly attack. We’re American too! This just isn’t right. My friends and I are raring to fight. (Bowles, 2018, p. 83)

Although the team won and the opposing team’s coach apologized for their cruelty, the horrible words hurt the families. However, the people of the town persevered and were resilient. They kept their heads held high and were proud of the teams’ accomplishments. Unfortunately, hateful comments such as these continue to express the racism that exists for many emergent bilingual Mexican American youth in the world today. This text can teach young Mexican American children that are facing adversity how they can benefit from the unique experiences of characters that are found in the literature. The experiences that Güero and his family face make them stronger individuals. They choose not to fight but instead let others see how worthy they were of greatness in a civilized manner.

Uncle Joe’s History Lessons is another powerful poem by Bowles (2018) that can teach Mexican American children not to give up on their dreams. Uncle Jose, renamed Joe and Joseph in elementary school by his teachers, tells Güero that he aspired to attend law school; however, the school counselor discouraged him from his dream. He claimed that she was racist for suggesting that he attend a technical college. Uncle Joe also mentioned that he is accused of cheating in college because he turned in a nearly perfect paper on a world history assignment. He was disheartened by this and dropped out of school. In the following quote, Bowles (2018) expressed his uncle’s experience:

“Pos, sí, nobody believed in me. Fijate. When I was in 7th grade like you? Counselor asked me what I wanted to be. A lawyer, I said. That white lady almost laughed in my face. ‘What? No, Joseph. You should go to a technical college, become a mechanic. No shame in Hard work!’ Vieja racista. (Bowles, 2018, p. 56)

Worthy et al. (2013) encouraged students to continue with bilingualism and connect their language to the text that fully engaged them. Students' academic skills and success will flourish as they are encouraged to utilize more than one language. Unfortunately, many emergent bilingual Mexican American students are portrayed in history as ignorant and unteachable. After assimilating to the English-only language, children of color are criticized for not understanding some of the content or instruction that is taught. However, this poem can be a powerful example to Mexican American children. It can help guide them in achieving their goals and in continuing their learning. Although they may experience adversity, they should continue to move forward and overcome the negativity. Through interaction and collaboration, literature can be a powerful resource that can positively portray Mexican American culture. The expansion of language acquisition can also have lasting implications for monolingual students that are eager to learn more about the various types of literature and cultures.

Variedad Musical is a delightful poem about the power of music. While Dad enjoyed country music, Uncle Danny enjoyed rap. Mamá listened to Spanish rancheras and classical songs. Whether it is Tejano or rock 'n' roll music, the family respected their differences. During *fiestas* (parties), all genres were played to celebrate and enjoy each other's company.

Though we each have different tastes, music has a special place in my family members' lives so that we thrive, not just survive. (Bowles, 2018, p. 41)

Although this poem is about various styles of music, it is essential to note that the family is respectful of their differences. Like in everyday life, students can learn to respect and value how they are all unique. Together, celebrations of culture and heritage can form bonds. As children read this poem, they may learn to respect one another and how this distinctness can connect them to the world. Therefore, it is important for children to see their culture represented in books.

Discussion of Findings

Krippendorff (1980) suggested that content analysis is a way of “analyzing data as symbolic communication” (p. 11). After reading the books, *Efrén Divided* (Cisneros, 2020), *The Distance Between Us: Young Readers Edition* (Grande, 2016), and *They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid’s Poems* (Bowles, 2018) multiple times over several months, I looked at memorable and significant themes that created purposeful reading for emergent bilingual Mexican American learners. The themes that guided my analysis included (a) Lived Experiences/Experiencias vividas; (b) Representation of Agency, Power, and Identity/ Representación de agencia, poder, e identidad; (c) Representation of Culture/ Representación de la cultura; and (d) The Portrayal of Mexican Americans/ Representación de Mexicanos Americanos. I discussed my results through the lens of CRT and LatCrit that can empower young readers to rise above discrimination and systemic racism.

According to Salinas et al. (2016), Latino/a educators are an essential part of creating and implementing a pedagogy that discusses “issues such as race, immigration, language, culture, phenotype, surname, and others” (p. 266). An educator’s personal experiences can also guide the inquiry of students’ language practices within the classroom. These influential books can inform readers of various age levels that are facing diversity in their daily lives. The representation of culture and language can profoundly impact the success of young emergent bilingual Mexican American and transnational students who are new to this county or have experienced the dominant ideologies of a system that denies cultural differences. Children’s literature that focuses on Mexican American students can guide teaching and reshape the curriculum to alleviate hegemonic teaching practices. As educators and administrators become aware of the impact that books can have, they can restructure the current curriculum to include CSP.

Language and discourse can also help form positive relationships between and within the schools and community.

Escamilla and Nathenson-Mejía (2003) stated, “It is our obligation as teacher educators to help them see that in recognizing the differences, we can celebrate and share the wonderful variations human cultures produce, thus placing value on all cultures” (p. 244). Therefore, these three books examined the main characters and the impact that their culture and ethnicity had on their struggles as Mexican American youth. The authentic perspectives and challenges of Efrén, Reyna, and Güero as children can speak to young readers and allow them to connect with other emergent bilingual Mexican American children that are facing similar experiences. The inequalities and injustices that these characters endured represent the struggles of many Mexican American youth and children of color.

Furthermore, language and literacy can uncover the history and struggles of marginalized groups. Through communication and critical dialogue, diverse groups can become connected to create empowerment. Language can connect culture and heritage as it relates to history and future change. Advocating for diverse literacy opportunities for students and educators can open a world of knowledge and advancement for transnational and emergent bilingual Mexican American youth.

Summary

During this chapter, I provided the results of my CCA that was gathered from three children’s books that depicted Mexican American children as the main characters. My findings suggest that literature can impact the representation of emergent bilingual Mexican American learners. The inclusion of diverse literature can provide experiences and opportunities for various marginalized groups. The themes found were (a) Lived Experiences/ Experiencias vividas; (b)

Representation of Agency, Power, and Identity/ Representación de agencia, poder, e identidad; (c) Representation of Culture/ Representación de la cultura; and (d) The Portrayal of Mexican Americans/ Representación de Mexicanos Americanos. These themes can have a significant impact on the education of all youth.

In Chapter Five, I present a discussion that includes how the findings of my study can support further implications for future research that is inclusive of emergent bilingual Mexican American children's literature. The three books that I analyzed in this study can positively impact future teaching, pedagogy, and identify areas of implications for change in literature. The inclusion of social justice in the curriculum can also support opportunities for advancement and lessen hegemonic practices. Future research can include analyzing books that include children from different cultures, races, and ethnic backgrounds. The language and discourse that is presented in these stories can be helpful in forming relationships and connections to different parts of the world.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this qualitative CCA study was to analyze three authentic children's books that represented Mexican American culture. I discussed how diverse literature and pedagogy could add to the language practices of emergent bilingual Mexican American students. The findings of this study revealed that culturally authentic literature and CSP are necessary for children's overall growth and empowerment. Literature that focuses on the student's prior knowledge can significantly impact the learning and identity of emergent bilingual Mexican American youth. The representation of emergent bilingual Mexican Americans as the main characters in authentic literature can also provide educators insight into including such texts in their lessons and curriculum. Including books that display code-switching and translanguaging can also benefit transnational children.

I began the Introduction of this research study by stating the problem and the purpose of this qualitative CCA study. I then discussed my search strategies and the history of education for minority learners. During the Literature Review, I explored books and journals that were representative of Mexican American culture and pertained to critical literacy, multiliteracies, discourse, and language of emergent bilinguals. I also explained why a CCA is a purposeful way to investigate and analyze children's books. I cited relevant literature and supported CRT and LatCrit as a framework for my study. During the Methodology, I discussed the research

questions that I used to guide my data collection and data analysis. After rereading the books several times over several months, I formed themes and patterns that resonated throughout all three stories. In Chapter Four, I discussed the overall findings of this CCA. I analyzed the books *Efrén Divided* (Cisneros, 2020), *The Distance Between Us: Young Readers Edition* (Grande, 2016), and *They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems* (Bowles, 2018). The relevant themes that emerged were (a) Lived Experiences/ Experiencias vividas; (b) Representation of Agency, Power, and Identity/ Representación de agencia, poder, e identidad; (c) Representation of Culture/ Representación de la cultura; and (d) The Portrayal of Mexican Americans/ Representación de Mexicanos Americanos. I also discussed how these results could support future education, create a diverse CSP, and change in the community.

During this final chapter, I will explore and discuss implications for social justice, implications for educators, implications for future research. I will consider how my study could be extended by comparing or analyzing the current curriculum educators are implementing. Some of the limitations that I experienced as a bilingual Mexican American educator and student will also be mentioned in this chapter.

Significance of the Study

The recent passing of House Bill 3979 has caused some controversy for many educators in Texas. This House Bill mentions that teachers are not required or encouraged to teach concepts related to race. Will et al. (2021) mentioned that Texas has limited teachers on discussions of racism, and “Texas’ restrictions are among the broadest in the nation, and they will affect nearly 5.5 million students, nearly three-quarters of whom are students of color” (p.1). Unfortunately, this has perpetuated hegemonic practices and dismissed the tenets of CRT.

Many students and educators in the Rio Grande Valley have been affected by House Bill 3979 and have had their voices silenced. Sadly, many children of color are deprived of studying their heritage and race. Learning about other cultures is necessary to develop a society of acceptance. As an educator and advocate for students in the Rio Grande Valley, I have also been limited in sharing my story. I hope that children in my area will eventually have the opportunity to become informed citizens through literature and conversations that are filled with authentic experiences.

According to Jocius (2016), literature can enhance students' comprehension, knowledge, and overall connections to the texts. It becomes powerful to include relevant data and resources that can support a foundation for change. Literature that explores the representation of Mexican American culture, language, and heritage is vital for students of all ages.

As education and learning become more diverse, it is essential to find literature that educators feel comfortable teaching to help expand understanding and knowledge. Through important books that use the framework of CRT and LatCrit, purposeful reading can be introduced and accepted. Engagement with the dialogue and language is necessary for students and teachers to deconstruct hegemonic practices. Including emergent bilingual Mexican Americans as the main characters in the text is vital for the growth of transnational and marginalized students. Learners can finally see themselves and their loved ones represented and respected throughout literature.

Implications for Social Justice

The findings of my study demonstrate a need for social justice in education and CSP. The acceptance of diversity is necessary to gain an appreciation for a variety of cultures and differences. According to Bednarek and Caple (2014), critical literacy values discourse and can

promote cross-cultural awareness. The books I analyzed for this study include male and female main characters of Mexican American descent and brought in several perspectives from lived experiences. Their point-of-views are examples of how oppression has become a cultural barrier. However, through education, awareness, and understanding, Mexican American students can overcome these challenges.

Although the characters, Efrén, Güero, and Reyna, may have experienced some of the obstacles that emergent bilingual Mexican American students have faced, they also help the reader understand that language and culture are essential in helping develop their identity. Moje et al. (2009) stated that “Learning, from a social and cultural perspective, involves people in participation, interaction, relationships, and contexts, all of which have implications for how people make sense of themselves and others, identify, and are identified” (p. 416). Therefore, literacy is significant in the development and celebration of Mexican American student’s positive self-image.

Like Sims Bishop (1990), I had not seen myself portrayed in literature until the age of 18. During my first university literature class, I read a book that included Mexican American characters and the author was also Mexican American. However, Sims Bishop (2016) stated, “diverse literature can reflect the unique life experiences of underrepresented or marginalized children at the same time it encourages readers/listeners to recognize and celebrate our shared humanity” (p. 120). The windows help students of other races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds understand the experiences of transnational and emergent bilingual Mexican American students. CSP and diverse literature promotes growth and acceptance in the classroom.

The potential of young emergent bilingual Mexican American children is limitless when they realize their capabilities. When educators collaborate over specific topics and perspectives

that support the students' cultural and linguistic diversity, they are engaging the learners' creativity. Educators and researchers can advocate for CSP and an inclusive curriculum where awareness of relevant social justice issues is acknowledged through literature. Critical literacy and dialogue that reflect the student's insight and intellect are just a few ways that hegemonic practices can be dismissed. Campano et al. (2013) mentioned that students often act as support for other students that have had similar struggles. Through authentic literature, empathy and consciousness can connect students to future and past learning.

Through the social action approach suggested by Banks (1999), students can become activists for change. As they become aware of social issues, they can promote a change in policy. Educators and students can participate by writing letters to the local media stations or state Congress. As activists, they can share their beliefs and opinions about policy changes. Including articles in the newspaper that promote positive changes can resonate within the community. Critical literacy and multimodal practices can also guide students on important topics of conversations and as they reflect and act on injustices (Banks, 1999).

Additionally, the main characters in the three books, *Efrén Divided* (Cisneros, 2020), *The Distance Between Us: Young Readers Edition* (Grande, 2016), and *They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems* (Bowles, 2018), convey the message of courage, spirit, family, and empowerment. Although some of the relationships with their parents and loved ones are strained, they continue to love and respect the family through their struggles. The ideas expressed in these stories can provide the cultural space for emergent bilingual Mexican American students to feel comfortable with their current challenges. All students may also find a space for needed conversations that build understanding for friendships and differences in society.

Implications for Educators

A study conducted by Kohli (2014) revealed that many educators of color had experienced racism as children and as accomplished adults. The inequity in education and the curriculum has created a feeling of isolation and negativity from the learning community for several minority groups. There were also some low expectations for them as children of color and low socioeconomic status. However, through self-work and awareness, the educators ensured a culturally inviting setting for their students (Kohli, 2014).

A curriculum that contains culturally authentic and diverse literacy can have a significant impact on students of color. Through diverse dialogue, the educators could connect with their students and recognize the importance of learning to pronounce their names correctly. Educators of color can find the results of this CCA helpful as they implement learning activities for emergent bilingual Mexican American and transnational children. A CRT and LatCrit lens can emphasize the need for social justice within the classroom community.

School librarians can also provide support, motivation, and suggestions to students, teachers, and administrators on culturally authentic literature that promotes equity and equality in pedagogy. Literature that values the learners' experiences and language is a resource that all staff on campus can integrate into their daily lessons. As students read, write, and think, they begin to develop connections to the world and their understanding of various cultures. Menchaca (2001) stated that "Integrating culturally relevant perspectives into the elementary curriculum serves multiple purposes. Culturally relevant content builds and strengthens the self-esteem of Hispanic students" (p.18). Promoting a culture of acceptance will ultimately create a community of support and equity for emergent bilingual Mexican American children.

Teacher education is an essential aspect of creating an inclusive environment for minority and transnational students. Jackson et al. (2021) mentioned that responsive teacher education could create academic success and sociopolitical consciousness. School districts and decision-making committees on campuses can foster a classroom that promotes development, identity, and empowerment for all students. The literature analyzed in this study can raise awareness of cultural differences and the portrayal of marginalized bilingual Mexican American students. The unique perspectives of these characters may also reflect the identities of individual students across the United States. Educators continue to have the responsibility of acknowledging the students' funds of knowledge and their lived experiences. Access to authentic literature that includes code-switching and translanguaging may influence a culture that is accepting and welcoming of minority students.

Implications for Future Research

Implications for future research on this topic can look closely at how students' feelings, emotions, and funds of knowledge are acknowledged. Studies and investigations could extend this research to include students in a variety of grade levels and gather data on their feelings and emotions while reading the text. Their funds of knowledge and connections are also important when using a variety of literature. The students' background can profoundly impact how they perceive and translate the situations that the characters in the stories are going through.

Evaluating children's literature in a whole classroom, small group, or individual setting can also provide more information on how students will react to the stories. The learners could choose to discuss their personal experiences with a classmate, teacher, or mentor. The children could also have some input in the type of literature they prefer as they are exposed to new and exciting stories that pertain to their culture.

Additional or expanded research could include a CCA on the current literature that is provided to students at school. The mandated literature recommended by the district curriculum can be closely analyzed and compared to options on multicultural text. Literature by Thomas and Dyches (2019) stated the following:

Analyzing curricular documents through a critical lens, such as critical race theory, sheds light on ideologies implicit in texts. An awareness of the implicit ideologies of text is essential to the development of critical literacy, and critical content analysis offers a vehicle for illuminating implicit ideologies. (p. 604)

The authentic literature that I explored in this study and current ideologies can be juxtaposed to create a study that will benefit a particular cultural group and promote CSP.

The Viva Latino: Own Voices Writers in Conversation webinar and the Re-Imagining Migration virtual seminar also recommended several other authentic books. Additional books that have earned the *Pura Belpré Award* can be further investigated to promote social awareness and social justice through literacy. Future research can consider including more text focused on emergent bilingual Mexican American students using a similar methodology and data collection. This could impact current and future hegemonic practices in the field of education. Through diverse literature, future research can address several perspectives from several point-of-views.

A different selection criterion gathered from a variety of webinars or conferences could include more quality literature from various cultures and backgrounds. A CCA could analyze more texts that provide learning opportunities for emergent bilingual Mexican American children or different ethnicities and races. Researchers can use the diverse mixture of cultures to promote the importance of multicultural texts in other grade levels, such as the elementary, middle, or high school setting.

Furthermore, a qualitative case study focusing on children's literature through LatCrit, and CRT lens can challenge negative ideologies and perceptions. This methodology can explore several patterns and themes located throughout quality multicultural literacy programs. Multiliteracies can also “support learners to specify differences in language and promote meaning making, in a range of contexts and cultures at the regional, state and national levels” (Bull & Anstey, 2018, p. 6). Through conversations and discussions, children’s thoughts can be explored and used in the discovery of problems that arise in diverse literature.

Additional recommendations by students would be useful in creating study resources for emergent bilingual Mexican American students. Vaught and Castagno (2008) suggested that teachers must become aware of the existing racist frameworks and inequalities to address and create a change. Current in-service teachers could also engage in CSP that focuses on action research in their own classrooms. This transformation can begin through reflection and research in literacy.

Limitations of the Study

As I completed this CCA and analyzed the three books, I noticed a few limitations and biases. As an educator, I was drawn to texts that fell within the range of third–eighth grade because this is the area that I have seen literature impact students. This is also the age level of students I have worked with in the past. However, this can be restricting and limiting to children that are reading above or below their grade level. Children in the classroom setting may also feel the need to read outside of their grade level based on the story’s description, cover illustration, or recommendations from a friend and/or teacher. Although there may be some constraints, the teacher, parent, or student may find an online version or electronic book that can be read by an

online application. The student could also seek assistance from a teacher, librarian, or parent that could read the book with them.

I selected the literature based on the initial information I gained from conferences, webinars, and websites. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all conferences were held online. Some of the companies recorded the presentations for additional viewing and posted them on sites such as YouTube. Although I was able to attend in the comfort of my own home, it does not make up for the experiences found through in-person events and personal discussions. The constraints of online sessions were quicker, limiting, and more impersonal. Speaking to the authors in person would have been valuable in my decision-making process and further results of the study. An extension of this qualitative CCA could include in-person conversations, interviews, and discussions with the authors. This personal connection could extend the study further.

As a bilingual Mexican American educator and literacy specialist who has taught for over 20 years in the Rio Grande Valley, I may have some biases towards the implementation of the mandatory curriculum. Many literacy programs do not reflect the culture and community of the students in the Rio Grande Valley. As an advocate for emergent bilingual Mexican American children and recent immigrants, I feel a need to create a culture of acceptance for all learners.

In this study, I focused on text that included stories that spoke to me and my experiences as a Mexican American educator. If I had had more time, I could have looked at more texts to expand the study further. I would also include literature that extends to the Latino/a culture and is more inclusive of other cultures and languages.

There may also be a need to look at text that is relatable to older readers at the high school level. Recent immigrants at this age level may feel that there is not enough text that

highlights their background and experiences. The issues and concerns that older readers face as emergent bilingual Mexican American students are topics that may need further exploration. Since I have never taught at the high-school level, I am not as familiar with their current needs in literacy. Therefore, I may not be the right fit for expanding the research for this grade level.

Summary

This qualitative CCA provided some insight into how literature can reflect and be representative of student language, funds of knowledge, and identity to create empowerment and effective CSP. The three stories that I selected for this study represented some of the experiences emergent bilingual Mexican American children may face. However, many have been securitized for their Mexican American heritage, culture, and language. Parker and Lynn (2002) stated, “We contend that linking CRT to education can indeed foster the connections of theory to practice and activism on issues related to race” (p.18). Understanding how authentic stories can change perceptions and lives is vital as students read, write, and think about their self-identity and place in the world. Emergent bilingual Mexican American children can begin to develop connections to their understanding of the world around them and affirm who they genuinely are through authentic literature.

Additionally, collaboration with stakeholders can create a space of acceptance and love for all students and teachers of color. Educators, librarians, administrators, and parents can engage students through their unique personal experiences and informed representations in children’s literature. Forming relationships with students from various cultures can create an inclusive environment. Creating a culture of acceptance in the classroom can also promote growth within the community. Durán and Palmer (2013) stated:

Students make choices about their language use based not only on communicative efficiency but also in response to the relative prestige and value of different variants in their environment. Their choices about language reflect not only whom they are but also whom they wish to be. (p. 369)

As transnational and emergent bilingual Mexican American students engage with literature that includes translanguaging and code-switching, they are better able to express their thoughts and identity. The value of their second or third language is essential in their future learning that is inclusive of diversity.

Solórzano and Bernal (2001) agreed that students' voices could transform education and build policies to empower our youth of color. Marginalized groups can feel welcomed when they are validated through quality literature that represents their unique culture and experiences. Through this qualitative study, the voices of emergent bilingual Mexican American children can be explored, heard, and appreciated. I hope that quality and authentic literature will become available to students of all cultures and nationalities.

The results of this qualitative CCA, and future research focused on CSP can extend the need for literature that is important for children of color. When marginalized groups and emergent bilingual Mexican American children see themselves in the main characters' eyes, their interest in learning and literature is heightened. As an educator, student, and parent, I believe that teachers can make a difference in our student's growth and learning. Through the exploration of culturally authentic text in a formal or informal setting, students will gain an understanding of how to evaluate books and identify dialogue that is representative of their culture and funds of knowledge.

Epilogue

I embarked on my dissertation journey before the change in the political climate and new laws regarding CRT in Texas had been put into place. Texas House Bill 3979 has now banned the teaching of culture in the classroom which is impacting society. This controversial bill has deprived students and educators from having honest conversations about race and pivotal historical events.

My message in this dissertation is to resolve misconceptions about CRT and LatCrit. I seek to empower the youth of color and be a voice for authentic literature that has been neglected. As an advocate for my community and culture, I aspire to promote racial equity and equality.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

Data Collection Diagrams

Table 1

The Distance Between Us: Young Readers Edition by Reyna Grade (2016)

Characters	Examples of Translanguaging/ bilingual dialogue	Page Number	Notes	Codes
Reyna (Main Character)	I didn't look at Mami, because I know she was angry, at me, at the man, at the mother with her five children, at Papi for putting her into this situation, at herself for leaving El Otro Lado in a moment of desperation.	p. 71	Translanguaging	Lived Experiences
Reyna	Frustrated, I put the phone to my ear. "Alo? Santa los? Yo quiero patines. Mándeme unos patines para la Navidad. Tank you." Mago took the phone away and hung up. "Do you think he understood what I said?" I asked them. He's Santa Claus. I don't see why not," Mago said. "Don't worry, Nena."	p. 179	Emergent bilingual	Representation of Culture
Mago (sister)	Mago dialed the number and called Santa. She frowned. "What's wrong?"	p. 178	At this point of the story the children are still	Representation of Culture

Table 1, continued

Characters	Examples of Translanguaging/ bilingual dialogue	Page Number	Notes	Codes
Mago (sister; cont'd.)	Carlos said. "It's in English." Mago said. "Doesn't Santa speak Spanish?" I asked.	p. 178 (cont'd.)	learning English and have not attended school yet.	Representation of Culture (cont'd.)
Papi	"You'll still be here tomorrow, won't you?" Mago asked. We were afraid that while we were gone, Papi would pack up and leave, never to come back to Iguala again. "Of course I will, negra," Papi said.	p. 20	The word negra means dark or black but the father uses it as a term of endearment and affection.	Portrayal of Mexican Americans
Diana	"You have to be a writer, Reynita," Diana said to me. "You have to transfer to a good school, Reynita." Over and over she repeated this like chant. "If Alvarez, Cisneros, and Viramontes can publish their stories, so can you, Reynita."	p. 310	The ending "ita" is also added as affection in the Mexican language. Diana is a professor at the University that takes Reyna under her wing and allows her to live with her temporarily after a severe beating by her father.	Representation of Agency, Power, and Identity
Reyna	He gave my aunt money, and she went to buy a pot of menudo at the nearest food stand. Out of his suitcases Papi took three dolls, one for me, one for Mago, and one for Betty. They were life-size baby	pp. 112–113		Representation of Culture

Table 1, continued

Characters	Examples of Translanguaging/ bilingual dialogue	Page Number	Notes	Codes
Reyna (cont'd.)	dolls with blue eyes that closed when we lay them down, and opened when we stood them up. I buried my face in my doll's blond hair and smelled the scent of plastic, the amazing scent of a new toy, which we hardly ever got to smell.	pp. 112–113 (cont'd.)		Representation of Culture (cont'd.)
Reyna	The smuggler picked us up before sunrise at the hotel and drove us across the city. I was sleepy, and I found myself struggling to stay awake. I wasn't used to waking up that early, and I was groggy and grumpy. To make matters worse, that morning I'd woken up with a toothache, and Papi didn't have anything to give me.	pp. 130–131		Lived Experiences
Reyna	The coyote led us through a hole in a chain-link fence into the vacant land on the other side. We followed in silence. I looked at the ants scurrying around, gathering food. A hawk soared above in the wind. Birds chirped in trees. Lizards crawled under rocks. If I hadn't been so afraid, I would have been enjoying our adventure.	pp. 131–132	Although she is scared, she feels the need to be brave and does not complain.	Portrayal of Mexican Americans

Table 1, continued

Characters	Examples of Translanguaging/ bilingual dialogue	Page Number	Notes	Codes
Reyna (cont'd.)	But then I remembered that even though this place was beautiful, it was forbidden land. We were not welcome here.	pp. 131–132 (cont'd.)		Portrayal of Mexican Americans (cont'd.)
Reyna	I wanted to tell him I'd be different, that I'd seen with my own eyes the poverty he'd helped us escape. I'd seen with my own eye the reason he'd been such a tyrant about school. I wanted to tell him I'd do what Mago and Carlos hadn't been able to do. I would go to UC Irvine and get my degree. I would be somebody he could be proud of. But he said to me, "You can forget all about going to that university. You're going to be a failure too, just like them, so don't even bother." Then he walked away.	p. 279	Although her father does not believe in her, Reyna becomes successful and achieves her dreams.	Representation of Agency, Power, and Identity

Table 2*Efrén Divided* by Ernesto Cisneros (2020)

Characters	Examples of Translanguaging/ bilingual dialogue	Page Number	Notes	Codes
Ápa	“Ahora, ¿cómo consigo más dinero para cruzarla?” Where would he find the money to get her home? The question ripped a hole in Efrén’s heart, even as more questions filled his mind. Where could Áma be? Was she hurt? Was she scared? Would she ever be coming back?	p. 67	Efrén’s mother has just been deported and the family is worried. The father will work an additional job to get a coyote to cross her over.	Lived Experiences
Áma	“Aquí están.” Amá set the breakfast spread on the kitchen table, her exhausted eyes creasing as she smiled. “Mijo, most of the world speaks more than one language. And Spanish is a part of who we are.” She moved toward Efrén and ruffled his hair. “You’ll understand when you’re older.”	p. 6		Representation of Culture
Efrén	My Áma got deported. Four simple words. That’s it. And yet, those words carried so much hurt they seemed to swell and get lodged in his throat.	p. 133	Efrén is faced with struggles as his mother is deported. He is forced to grow up and take care of his siblings. Personal experiences	Lived Experiences

Table 2, continued

Characters	Examples of Translanguaging/ bilingual dialogue	Page Number	Notes	Codes
Apá	That's when Apá went down on one knee, first gently resting one hand on Max's shoulder, then another on Mía's. "Mijos, your Amá loves you two"—he interrupted himself and turned briefly to Efrén—"you three. And she will do everything she can to come home to you. And I will do everything I can to get her here. We will never give up. Nunca. That much I can promise you. But, no... she will not be coming home tonight. She will not be coming home tomorrow. Honestly"—His voice broke mid-sentence—"she won't be coming home anytime soon."	pp. 227–228	Translanguaging	Representation of Agency, Power, and Identity
Efrén	Max and Mía reached in first, each picking up a bean-and-cheese-topped sope. Efrén eyed the last one while Amá filled the glasses with chilled orange juice?" "Amá, where is yours?" Ay, amor....a cup of 121afecito is all I need." Efrén's stomach grumbled, but it was his heart giving the order. "Amá, why don't you take mine? I can have breakfast at school anyway. There's no point letting all that school food go to waste." "And have	pp. 6–7	This conversation with his mother shows that he is willing to sacrifice for her and she for him.	Portrayal of Mexican Americans

Table 2, continued

Characters	Examples of Translanguaging/ bilingual dialogue	Page Number	Notes	Codes
Efrén (cont'd.)	them think I can't provide for my own children? No, gracias." Efrén inhaled. "Ay Amá, he said, knowing that she was simply being, well... Amá.	pp. 6-7 (cont'd.)		Portrayal of Mexican Americans (cont'd.)
David	"You really think I could make a difference?" David nodded. "Yeah, I do. You taught me that the color of my skin doesn't matter. Only now, this school-heck, the whole world, needs to be reminded." (Cisneros, 2020)	p. 246	David has been Efrén's best friend since elementary.	Representation of Agency, Power, and Identity
Apá	Then two men climbed onto the back of the truck and unfastened the metal tool bin. <i>Apá's tools?</i> Efrén couldn't believe it. They were Apás prize possessions. No matter how much he used them, he always kept them looking new. Amá would sometimes joke, calling the collection his fourth child.	pp. 82-83	The father sells his tools to collect money to bring the mother back to the United States. Family makes sacrifices	Representation of Culture
Efrén	Efrén brushed his face with the fold of his sleeve and looked up at the photo. Mr. Garrett's ex-wife had long, wavy hair, a honey-beige complexion, and caramel eyes...just like Amá. <i>A Latina? He'd married a Latina! Did this mean he could now trust Mr. Garrett?</i> After all, the last	p. 87	Efrén chooses to trust Mr. Garrett and confesses that his mother has been deported.	Portrayal of Mexican Americans

Table 2, continued

Characters	Examples of Translanguaging/ bilingual dialogue	Page Number	Notes	Codes
Efrén (cont'd.)	thing he wanted to do was put Apá in danger too. If he were arrested, the entire family would most likely be uprooted like some uninvited weed and discarded across the border.	p. 87 (cont'd.)		Portrayal of Mexican Americans (cont'd.)
Efrén	“Yep. Ready.” Efrén forced a smile. In spite of what Apá had told him over and over again—he really <i>did not</i> have a choice. Going into Tijuana alone was something he had to do. For Amá. For the entire family. This was the only plan they had. He needed to be brave.	p. 168		Representation of Agency, Power, and Identity

Table 3*They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems* by David Bowles (2018)

Poem	Examples of Translanguaging/ bilingual dialogue	Page Number	Notes	Codes
Tamalada	Other teams of tías and primas spoon in the fillings, fold them up, tie them tight, and stand them neat in pots for baño maría steaming. The warmth of the kitchen mixes with laughter as great-grandma Luisa stirs the champurrado, and leads the rich plática: stories, gossip, old dichos that make us laugh with happiness nourishing us like good tamales!	p. 57	Translanguaging	Lived Experiences
Uncle Joe's History Lessons	“Pos, sí, nobody believed in me. Fíjate. When I was in 7 th grade like you? Counselor asked me what I wanted to be. A lawyer, I said. That white lady almost laughed in my face. ‘What? No, Joseph. You should go to a technical college, become a mechanic. No shame in Hard work!’ Vieja racista.	p. 56		Portrayal of Mexican Americans
Christmas Concrete	“Ya sé, m’ijo. But there’s value in manual labor, Red. Dignity, too. Me and your apá, we got a duty- can’t let you wind up useless with the God-given hands.”	p. 54		Representation of Agency, Power, and Identity

Table 3, continued

Poem	Examples of Translanguaging/ bilingual dialogue	Page Number	Notes	Codes
Playoff Game	“Go back, wetbacks! Build that wall!” Adults and teens begin to call. A sea of white faces, twisting in rage like all the brown bodies are there to invade. Teresa my sister stops dead in her tracks. We’re shocked as well at this ugly attack. We’re American too! This just isn’t right. My friends and I are raring to fight.	p. 83		Portrayal of Mexican Americans
Mis Otros Abuelos	Get out at the bridge, walk through inspection. Then an hour later, at the garita, agents and soldiers come on board—they never ask for our papers though. I guess we look Mexican enough for them.	p.87		Representation of Culture
Learning to Read	The school counselor told my folks I can already read at college level! And I’ve found lots of answers, but also many new questions. Of course I pass all the state tests with super high scores. Learning in class is easy for me. Dad says all those books rewired my brain, got me ready for study.	p. 20	His abuelita, Mimi, read to him and his cousins’ stories as a young child. He questioned her stories. She encouraged him to read, and he found his love of books.	Representation of Agency, Power, and Identity
Border Kid	“You’re a border kid, a foot on either bank. You ancestors crossed this river a thousand times. No wall,	p. 9	A quote from his dad on the importance of culture.	Representation of Culture

Table 3, continued

Poem	Examples of Translanguaging/ bilingual dialogue	Page Number	Notes	Codes
Border Kid (cont'd.)	no matter how tall, can stop your heritage from flowing forever, like the Rio Grande itself."	p. 9 (cont'd.)		Representation of Culture (cont'd.)
Checkpoint	We just don't understand why we have to prove every time that we belong in our own country where our mother gave birth to us. Dad, like he can feel that bad vibes coming from the back seat, tells us to chill.	p. 12		Lived Experiences
Variedad Musical	Though we each have different tastes, music has a special place in my family members' lives so that we thrive, not just survive.	p.41	The family has different taste in music. Although they are all Mexican American, they respect the differences. English and Spanish music.	Portrayal of Mexican Americans

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Cynthia Villarreal Cantu earned a doctoral degree through the Curriculum and Instruction program at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley in 2022. She is specializing her research in reading and literacy. In 2000, She earned a bachelor's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies with a specialization in Early Childhood. She earned her master's degree in Education in 2004 with a specialization in Reading from the University of Texas Pan-American. She has dedicated over 20 years to teaching multilingual students and has served as a bilingual literacy and dyslexia specialist. Her topics of interest include researching literacy and bilingual strategies that will meet the needs of diverse learners. Her goal is to see the smiles on students' faces when they realize that they can become great readers. She can be reached at the following email address: cindycantu9@hotmail.com