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R. Joseph Rodríguez
California State University, Fresno, rjrodriguez@csufresno.edu

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VI. Section III: Engaging Pedagogy: Integrating Arts into Schools

Transcribing Arts and Identities: A Case Study on Literacies at Guadalupe Middle School

R. Joseph Rodríguez, *California State University, Fresno*

Abstract

Through single-case study research at a middle school site, students whose first language is Spanish gain instruction in an English language arts classroom using literary works with guided, close reading. Moreover, students' background, cultural, and prior knowledge are consulted by the teacher as literature comes to life via socially responsible biliteracies, which value students' identities and cultural and linguistic wealth in the presence of bilingual literary narratives. Through a teacher's literary lesson planning that complements students' social interests, students are able to communicate their developing and bridging biliteracies, increase critical literacy awareness, and practice bilingual abilities through interactive instructional lessons with literary selections.

Keywords: bilingualism, case study research, critical literacy, English language arts, Latinx, literature, socially responsible literacy, Spanish language arts

Art is in all of us.

Sandra Cisneros (1984, p. 101)

Language left him gradually, a bit at a time. One would expect words to depart predictably, in reverse order—the way a row of knitting disappears, stitch by stitch, when the strand of working yarn is tugged off the needle—but that was not the case.

Stephanie Kallos (2015, p. xi)

To be literate means to question the world as one observes, listens, engages, reads, decodes, writes, revises, and reflects in the everyday world languages and affairs of life—whether in or out of school (Rodríguez, 2017). A literate life calls for social dialogue and engagement by citizens who rely on world languages and the arts for understanding and communication. Hence, languages, cultures, and society are interconnected and interdependent—across borders and boundaries—for civilizations and citizens to thrive. Students possess background, cultural and prior knowledge relevant and responsive to schooling and education (Valenzuela, 1999; Vasquez, 2014). At the same time, politics enters the realm of world

languages and instruction as borders and spaces are further defined and enforced by the state (García, 2009).

The presence of cultures other than a dominant one creates a pluralistic society that can function with multicultural perspectives and dialogic inquiry (Juzwik et al., 2013). Specifically, Wright, Boun, and García (2015) noted the implicit bias within nations themselves and how division and hierarchies form that enter our education systems. They argued,

Because education is most often the responsibility of nation states with artificial (and contested) geographical boundaries encompassing many—and oftentimes dividing—linguistic groups, decisions about bilingual and multilingual education are highly political, and influenced by a variety of historical, economic, and sociocultural factors. (p. 1)

The intersections of these influences cannot be overlooked in instructional planning, delivery, and assessment that value a multilingual and multicultural society. Thus, teachers' knowledge of these intricacies of authority, power, and politics inform decisions as well as planning of instruction that favors students' linguistic strengths and acumen in their lived lives as emergent bilinguals (García, 2009, 2014; Nieto, 2013). A literature review was prepared prior to introducing the study, methods, and parameters.

Purpose and Significance of Research Study and Site

To get a closer perspective and understanding of the arts in the lives of emergent bilinguals, research is needed that establishes key insights on teacher and student practices related to arts, identities, and literacies. Educators can benefit from more knowledge from both teaching that unfolds in the language arts classroom and how emergent bilinguals make meaning.

Of the five case studies completed during the 2013-2014 academic year, the following single-case study is based on mostly Latinx-origin students' academic access and engagement in a language arts resource classroom at Guadalupe Middle School (pseudonym), which is located in a high-rural, low-urban area southeast of Austin, Texas.

The middle school enrollment was 963 students; of these, 86 percent were identified as Hispanic, eight percent as African American, and five percent as White. Of the student population, 91 percent were identified as economically disadvantaged and 27 percent as emergent bilinguals. The majority of the students are of working-class background. The students identified as English language learners were also considered emergent bilinguals. They possess knowledge of Spanish and gained English-language learning that supported both languages in academic and social contexts. Of the professional staff, teachers were identified as 60 percent White, 30 percent Hispanic, 5 percent African American, and 5 percent Asian.

The central area of the community was once the Bergstrom Air Force Base, which operated from 1942 through 1993, with an airfield surrounded by public schools. The primary and secondary schools were later relocated when the land use was rezoned for the city's new

international airport through a voter-approved bond program in 1997. Currently, the school district, which spans 174 square miles, serves 12,000 students across seven civic communities that are majority Latinx origin.

The purpose of this research article is to reveal the ways multilingual language arts and critical literacies are enacted for deeper questioning and reflection through the elements of literacy, which can lead to acculturation, self-actualization, and self-fulfillment through language learning and, too often, in the face of uncertainty, indifference, acculturation, and assimilation. Ethnography research was adopted with key emphasis on document analysis, instructional observation, and teacher interviews with non-participant observation. Twenty-three bilingual (English and Spanish) students participated in the study with permissions from their parents as well as the school district. Two research questions were addressed:

- How does a teaching and learning community involve the teaching of the arts (e.g., language arts, performing arts, visual arts) for bilingual and bicultural students?
- Which adolescent and multimodal literacies are enacted in and out of school?

These two research questions guided the observations and data gathering to gain more insights on the arts in instruction and students' practices outside of school settings.

Weekly visits to the site were conducted with observations of lessons delivered by a language arts teacher, administering focus group sessions, and leading structured pre- and post-interviews. Data were collected, and transcripts and records were read and reviewed that reflected students' art forms, ranging from writing and visual arts to the creation of nonfiction stories about their lives as artifacts. Students read about "defining moments" in their young adolescent lives and how English and Spanish language arts inform their sense of place along with identity and literacy formation and self-identification.

A previous assignment called for the students to write a reflection on what they would tell themselves to affirm their language and literacy learning experiences and journeys. This translated to students creating a linguistic inventory of their lives by completing an assignment named "My Literacy Journey Box," which supported transcribing and translanguaging with teachers authoring themselves, students authoring their lives, and students including their families and communities in their authorship for positive social and academic learning outcomes (Fránquiz, Leija, & Garza, 2015). Students' personal reflection and ownership of their story and journey further communicated an interest in their lives and ways of narrating, speaking, and writing about themselves.

Review of Literature

The literacy and artistic abilities of emergent bilinguals can be complemented by culturally relevant and responsive teaching approaches that include authentic literary selections and writing experiences (Nieto, 2013). In fact, young people's ways of knowing about language

arts and literacies reveals how their adaptability will transfer to application in additional world languages (Vasquez, 2014). For instance, Edwards (2015) acknowledged:

In the context of literacy learning, children learning to read in one language will be able to transfer a range of skills to other languages. They understand, for instance, that print carries meaning, that the stream of print is broken up into words, and that print has directionality. (p. 77)

These understandings are relevant in the application of the elements of literacy, which include knowing, listening, memorizing, noticing, observing, performing, questioning, reading, speaking, thinking (metacognition), understanding (you: reader/thinker/literati), viewing, and writing (wonderment) (Rodríguez, 2017). Furthermore, these elements are essential in the development, bridging, and support of an active, engaged citizenry and must include the arts for academic and social acculturation and democratic participation (Selvester & Summers, 2012). In this article, I examine middle-grade level, Latinx students' writing and visual arts in the creation of narratives about their lives. The students lived in high-rural, low-urban surroundings and revealed bilingual learning and biliteracies in practice.

Ways of engaging adolescents must also value their cultural ways of knowing, self-identity formation, and socially responsible literacies. Schools and civic communities in the United States continue to experience a "shifting linguistic landscape," which reveals the cognitive assets and advantages of emergent bilingual learners as they mature and pursue postsecondary education and enter the workforce (Gándara, 2015, p. 61). In the epigraph that opens the chapter from Kallos' novel *Language Arts* (2015), the reader is left to ponder what remains of one's language and how it is affirmed and harnessed through a culturally sustaining approach or, to one's detriment, lost in the world of language arts communication.

Can the language arts encompass a more expansive definition that leads to engagement and understanding for student learning? Emert, Macro, and Schmidt (2016) concede, "The evidence is clear: the arts positively influence reading and language skills, critical thinking, social skills, motivation, and the school environment" (p. 11). Indeed, the arts and language learning meet with culture and society influencing what we see and how we come to knowing and understanding. Instruction that values and promotes multilingualism in a pluralistic democracy engages human inventiveness with potential. In addition, students can adopt a questioning approach that values critical inquiry and dialogue about what one reads and how one interprets it in one's own life.

McTighe and Wiggins (2013) identified essential questions to guide and stimulate dialogical and inquiry learning. They believed that such learning promotes a "provocative and generative" learning that leads to "*uncovering* depth" by students with their teachers, rather than "simply *covering* it" from a teacher's point of view in a lecture-based, monologue role (authors' emphasis) (p. 3). As an illustration, in language arts, McTighe and Wiggins recommended the

following essential questions that are “not answerable with finality in a single lesson or a brief sentence”:

1. What do good readers do, especially when they don’t comprehend a text?
2. How does *what* I am reading influence *how* I should read it?
3. Why am I writing? For whom?
4. How do effective writers hook and hold their readers?
5. What is the relationship between fiction and truth?
6. How are stories from other places and times about me? (p. 2)

These questions can guide and inform readers of all ages and abilities to think critically and to guide dialogue among students and between students and educators for deeper thinking toward civic and socially responsible literacies. Thus, instruction is no longer driven by rote learning or even one-way instruction. Instead, similar to sustaining students’ cultural and linguistic wealth, Juzwik et al. (2013) explain, “In culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, moreover, a dialogic teaching stance frames differences as resources for learning, rather than as problems to overcome. Teachers taking a dialogic stance weave languages [. . .] into the life of the classroom” (p. 4). So, too, dialogic teaching is as relevant as dialogic language and visual arts in the arts classroom.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical stance, proposed by Django Paris (2012), culturally sustaining pedagogy “seeks to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling” (p. 93). Granted, for language to be present and alive, the elements of literacy such as writing must be cultivated in support of world languages and literatures as resources for understanding and communications (García, Johnson, & Selzer, 2016). In the act of writing, the writer questions and persists through the tempest of words that arrive—and before they depart—in the making of meaning. By extension, the writer begins to craft a voice as a child and then as an adolescent in the public school classroom, or other spaces outside of school, to meet writing demands, expectations, and interests (Rodríguez, 2017). However, to achieve a writer identity across genres and modes, young writers must experience instruction and planning that favors thinking and reading like a writer with both students and teachers writing and discussing the deliberations of the writing process, especially when academic English language often dominates cultural discourses and instructional planning (Sassi, Gere, & Christenbury, 2014).

To write requires questioning through uncertainty, but especially persistence and resilience in the making of meaning and creating knowledge. In the book *The Habits of the*

Creative Mind (2016), Miller and Jurecic noted the labors of “writers who practice working in the face of uncertainty” and added,

These writers ask genuine questions—difficult questions that can’t be answered simply by looking up facts—and they work to produce writing that is informed by deep learning and serious thought. They make connections between their particular interests and something bigger, something outside the sphere of their individual concerns. (p. 11).

The writers they describe are also young adolescents who create art to translate and transcribe their identities on canvas, paper, and the digital screen. Creativity, imagination, and intellect fuel ideas. These are found in all content areas and disciplines that welcome and nurture the arts.

Because schooling affects both learning experiences and expectations in the lives of young people, they often face “defining moments” in their childhood and adolescence. Also, in this article, English and Spanish language arts inform young people’s sense of belonging along with identity formation and self-identification with an asset-based approach, although deficit-oriented approaches remain present in arts education (Fenner & Snyder, 2017). Brown and Knowles (2014) observed, “Young adolescents who are from diverse ethnic backgrounds and/or English Language Learners (ELLs) have a greater challenge than European American Whites in finding a healthy identity in a majority White world” (p. 45). The dominance of White American identities in schooling narratives and literary selections can marginalize students with one dominant narrative unless there is flexibility in creating multiple literary narratives about cultural identities in adolescent development to belong and name oneself. Maintaining an awareness of how the arts can influence young adolescents’ intellect, creativity, and imagination reveals the ways that students experience the following: (1) see themselves for identity development, (2) practice their social responsibilities, and (3) enact their literacy formation.

Context of Study

Ms. Jordán, one of the English language arts seventh-grade teachers, worked with emergent bilinguals students who received additional learning support. Of Latinx descent, she had been teaching for eight years in the middle school level with emergent bilinguals, a term she favored over “limited English proficient,” she explained. As an emergent bilingual learner herself with public and bilingual schooling experience in the United States, she preferred favoring her students’ learning interests and desires in support of cultural inclusion, while not subjugating them to limitations and labels of indifference imposed by others not in the classroom.

Of her teaching processes and approaches, Ms. Jordán revealed: “The students have much to tell and show me about what they know and understand in their worlds and the ones I know when we study language arts and reading. We connect literacies to our own here in school, at home, and beyond. It isn’t enough to just read to read, but together we can make and sort meaning from what we read and have yet to experience” (Ms. Jordán, personal communications,

2014). She remained connected to the concepts that students must experience literature as a mirror, window, and door in the construction of meanings for and connections with themselves and their global neighbors. Ms. Jordán favored reading the literacies of power and assumption across societies and belief systems as advanced by Botelho and Rudman (2009). Her conceptual understanding of theories influenced her practice as demonstrated in the balance of texts and multiliteracies she supported among her students. The students were invited and permitted to share their past experiences with poetry and reading. Some of the students expressed interest in poems that rhyme, poems that include family, and poems that focus on the natural world.

In preparation for the language arts lesson under study, students were introduced to genres of writing that included poetry and prose poetry. In the course of the lesson, students learned that a poem can carry significant interpretations and meanings for readers. Interpretations and meanings alike vary based on connections, experiences, and identities the reader brings to a poem, which is a literary art form, in language arts. Additional understandings from the lesson included that the reader gives a poem, or any literary genre, a reading that reflects a meeting of author, text, reader, and society. Such a meeting is essential in the meaning making and toward developing a writer identity as revealed in the lesson.

By extension, in the book *Identity-Focused ELA Teaching: A Curriculum Framework for Diverse Learners and Contexts* (2015), Beach, Johnston, and Thein maintained,

The very notion of identity is a relatively recent phenomenon beginning with Greek drama and reflected in Shakespearean characters such as Hamlet, pontificating on his role and purpose in life. From this period to the 20th century, identity was often defined in terms of the metaphor of the “inner” versus “outer” self. (p. 3)

The lesson revealed that that art forms existed about identity and selfhood prior to classical definitions of Greek drama. Moreover, the symbolism and metaphors appear across world languages and literatures to define selfhood and community. For instance, in the making of a language arts canon in a Western tradition, some texts and even cuneiform, hieroglyphics, orature, and Sanskrit remain absent from curricula and instruction. At the turn of the century, these works are gaining more attention to articulate a more intercultural interpretation and understanding in the liberal arts without subordinated practices and bias (Dabashi, 2015; Mignolo, 2003).

Cultural Knowledge

As the lesson unfolded, key insights about what constitutes a text, which interpretations are valued, and whose cultural knowledge matters became visible by the teacher and the students. Granted colonization, imperialism, and acts of cultural superiority and erasure imposed a canonized set of texts and narratives in the making of an educated citizenry and civilizations to emulate. For instance, Huerta (2000) argued

[T]o understand many of the Renaissance, neo-classical and even twentieth-century artists and writers we must know their referents in the Euro-classical world or we are not fully educated, we are told. But when do we learn about the Aztec God of the Sun, Huitzilopochtli or the Mother Goddess Tonantzin? [W]here do the accomplishments of the Aztec prince Cuahquemoc come into play? What of his acts of bravery in the face of Spanish brutality? And reaching even farther back in pre-Columbian time, who knows about the gifts of Quetzalcóatl? (p. 16).

Of these gifts, students in language arts and other disciplines may not even study and meet in the pursuit of grade-level learning, understanding, and achievement. The inclusive study of mythologies and concepts native to the continental Américas may be absent, although many educators are beginning to recover the study of language arts toward an expansive and inclusive approach that includes the cultural heritages of their students and communities.

The strengths of Ms. Jordán's teaching included dialogic engagement with students, resembled Paris's (2012) culturally sustaining pedagogy, and favored conversation followed by writing and discussion among students and between teacher and students, with Ms. Jordán also writing with her student writers. Furthermore, her teaching can be described as "linguistically sustaining pedagogy," which Valdés (2017) argued as favoring the students' languaging assets and "invites students to value what they bring or to proudly continue to use features of their full linguistic repertoires in both formal and informal oral and written production for a variety of purposes in and out of school" (pp. vii-viii). In fact, what Ms. Jordán asked of her students she also engaged in doing and even shared her doubts through metacognitive practice and self-reflection.

"Think about what you are noticing as you are reading. Remember that we can use your abilities in English and Spanish to make sense as we read," she stated.

Through a unit of study Ms. Jordán prepared a variety of inclusive texts that reflect students' interpretation and translation abilities, community languages, high-rural environment, and cultural knowledge and interests in preparation of their learning about the environment for Earth Day in their social studies class. Various titles and copies of texts by the authors were in the school library, and some students had gained previous exposure to the authors' works in other classes and library-based lesson plans. Thus, they had learned some key vocabulary terms and concepts connected with the planned unit for English language arts with an English as a Second Language approach that favored bilingual texts and bicultural knowledge. Identity formation and affirmation were part of the lesson that further increased their connections and interests in the study of literature.

Bilingual and Bicultural Conversations with Vignettes

While reading a vignette from Cisneros' (1984, 1994) coming-of-age novel titled *The House on Mango Street*, twenty students experimented with guided close reading through a short vignette written as a prose poem. Next, students discussed the vignette and proceeded to create

poems about themselves and the natural world they inhabit, explore, and revere in their everyday community life and coming-of-age adventures. Through an anticipatory instructional approach with a blend of prior knowledge and a pre-reading launch, Ms. Jordán encouraged students to describe outdoor spaces that fill their environment at home and the landscape surrounding Guadalupe Middle School. Moreover, her instructional approach permitted students to make use of their living environments, practice sensorial language biliteracies, and invited predictions about the texts they were to read and analyze individually and as a group.

In addition to other pre-selected readings, Cisneros' vignette served as a mentor text—or a narrative to reread, study, and imitate—to model the discussion and guided close reading followed by students' own literary production and writing processes. Significant connections to the novel's protagonist Esperanza Cordero launched the pre- and post-reading dialogue. Students shared their experiences about living in the high-rural, low-urban communities of greater southeast Austin, Texas, and noted the similarities and differences compared to the main protagonist with inferences to politics, safety, and society. The dialogical inquiry further motivated students to persist in documenting their environmental surrounding and the significance via language arts application.

Cisneros's writings supported language art instruction and the teaching of literary elements across the middle grades with emphasis on both literal and figurative language. In the following vignette excerpt from "Four Skinny Trees," Cisneros' main character Esperanza defines her sense of self and belonging alongside nature in an urban area ripe with change and also with key elements of synesthesia:

They are the only ones who understand me. I am the only one who understands them. Four skinny trees with skinny necks and pointy elbows like mine. Four who do not belong here but are here. Four raggedy excuses planted by the city. [. . .] Their strength is secret. [. . .] Four who grew despite concrete. Four who reach and do not forget to reach. Four whose only reason is to be and be. (pp. 74-75)

Here, the students discussed personification and how a narrative can include elements of the environment and social awareness via poetry and prose. Ms. Jordán worked with the students in identifying Cisneros's intentional use of fragments and how these are helpful in the effort to draft complete simple and compound sentences.

Students learned about audience, publication, and author intent with the creative freedom to express oneself with words and the arts in the world. Some of the students' responses, included below, reflect in-and-out-school literacies, such as writing about their home environments and connections with their school setting, schooling experiences, and home-school understandings informed by translanguaging:

Julie (age 12): I got trees like that at my house. *Tengo bastantes. ¿No me creen? Eh, ¿por qué no me creen ustedes? No los cortamos sólo para cortarlos.* [I have

many trees. You don't believe me? (Sighs.) Why don't you believe me? We don't cut down any trees with no purpose.] Me and my mom planted them.

Marcos (age 12): Oh, I can write like that [Cisneros], Ms.

Nora (age 13): Why did the city plant them, and then they don't care? *No les importa nada del medio ambiente.* [They don't care at all about the environment.]

Perla (age 13): Look, the point is the trees can keep growing no matter what. *Van a crecer si no los cortamos.* [The trees will grow if we do not cut them.]

José (age 13): Trees [get] cut a lot.

Toby (age 13): So, maybe the trees won't bully her. She can be whoever she wanna be.

To further advance the dialogue, students were invited to read selected vignettes of the Spanish-language version *La casa en Mango Street*, translated by Elena Poniatowska (1994), and to note any uses of language that stood out for them in their second reading. Ms. Jordán explained the authors' collaboration in the making of a Spanish-language book, which was originally published in the English language. She provided a brief reference to the section named "*Agradecimientos*" by author Cisneros who thanks the translator Poniatowska for her "*continuo amor, solidaridad y apoyo hacia mí y otros escritores chicanos*" [ongoing affection, solidarity, and support of me and more Chicana and Chicano writers] (p. xii).

Ms. Jordán explained, "Underline a word or phrase you like. Circle a word or phrase you want to talk about later." An excerpt from vignette, which is highlighted here, appears with the Spanish-language diminutive suffix of "*flaco*," or skinny, as "*Cuatro árboles flaquititos*" in Poniatowska's version (1994):

Son los únicos que me entienden. Soy la única que los entiende. Cuatro árboles flacos de flacos cuellos y codos puntiagudos como los míos. Cuatro que no pertenecen aquí pero aquí están. Cuatro excusas harapientas plantadas por la ciudad. [. . .] Su fuerza es secreta. [. . .] Cuatro que crecieron a pesar del concreto. Cuatro que luchan y no se olvidan de luchar. Cuatro cuya única razón es ser y ser. (pp. 76-77)

The students' reading of the vignette in Spanish solicited new ideas about translanguaging, interpreting, and translating with adjectives, nouns, suffixes, and diminutive usage. They annotated, or labeled, text with pencils, pens, and highlighters and even coded terms in the vignette in the language of their choice. The students distinguished among adjectives and nouns and the use of prefixes and suffixes as well as literary terms such as catalogue and repetition. Ms. Jordán shared with the students the difficulties that some interpreters and translators face to make meaning in two or more world languages. Her attempts were to make connections to students' own translanguaging struggles and triumphs to make meaning.

The Making of Poems and Identities

Some of the students' written poems revealed their conceptual understanding and even identities and care for the environment, as revealed in the poems written in both English and Spanish. The critical literacies found in Spanish and English language arts, culture, and society appeared in the poems. One poem to note was titled "*El árbol perfecto*," or "The Perfect Tree." A student named José joined self and nature to name the world he inhabits through words and visual arts and with affirmations:

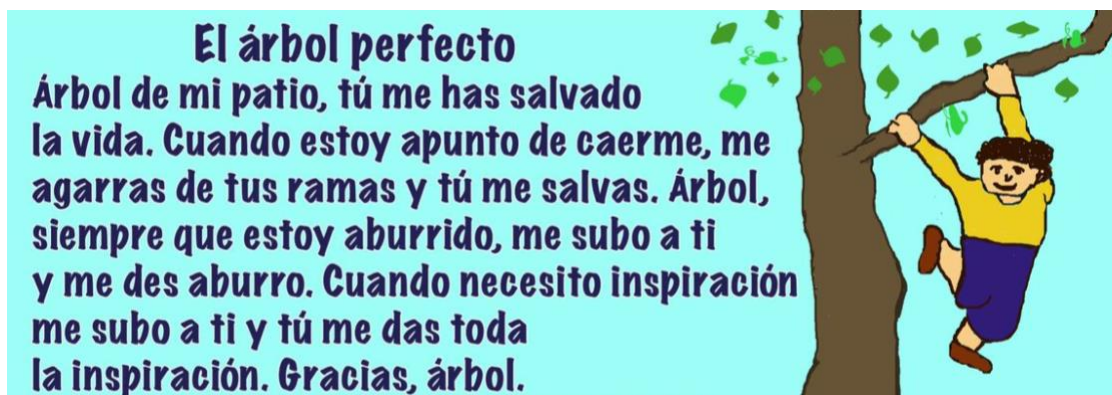


Figure 1. *El árbol perfecto*

The following translation is provided, although much of the cadence and rhythm remain in the original Spanish-language version.

Tree, from my patio, you have saved me.
 When I am about to fall, you
 reach with your branches and hold me.
 Tree, when I am bored, I climb
 and I am comforted. When I need inspiration
 I climb and you give me all
 the inspiration. Thank you, tree.

The poem appeared in Spanish and was featured on local transit buses on a large placard for passengers to read across the city routes for a literacy awareness campaign and to promote poetry reading in urban, public transport.

José's poem reveals connections with the natural world through a tree that supports and gives, yet is interconnected to him as he attempted to make meaning and connections to understand his own identity in a changing world with unpredictability. The gratitude expressed further communicates his awareness, stewardship, and social responsibility, too. Although Cisneros' text is fiction, elements of nonfiction are present that transport the reader to one's own

environment and circumstances. The character Esperanza also questions municipal motives with civic responsibility and concern. As a result, the text is not absent of society, but in the challenges of belonging and making sense of civic-based life. Later in the extended unit under study during the semester, Ms. Jordán also introduced students to the allegorical and symbolism-filled books *El árbol generoso* (2011) and *The Giving Tree* (1994) by Shel Silverstein and *Hatchet* (1987) by Gary Paulsen. Through this approach, Ms. Jordán supported a text set focused on critical literacies, environmental awareness, and self and community responsibility that translates to a multilingual, translanguaging, and transcribing environment.

Luis, an advanced bilingual writer with independent assignments provided by Ms. Jordán, read an excerpt from Paulsen's novel *Hatchet* and was asked to write in response to a prompt on surviving an accident and being in an unknown space: the wilderness. Luis's reading experience is noted here. The first novel in a book series, *Hatchet* is an engaging novel with themes of survival, divorce, and early adolescence. As a reader and writer, Luis further elaborated on his authorship role by practicing summary and action verbs in the unfolding plot about a boy named Brian Robeson who ends up spending 54 days in the wilderness. Brian's only form of survival after a plane crash in the wild is a hatchet, which was given to him by his mother before his trip. A brief excerpt from the transcript between Luis and his teacher Ms. Jordán appears here:

Luis (age 13): I like the book a lot, because I'm from a big *ciudad*, and this take place in the woods. The only time I get to see some of the woods is when I am with my family in Nuevo León [México]. There's adventure on a family ranch I like.

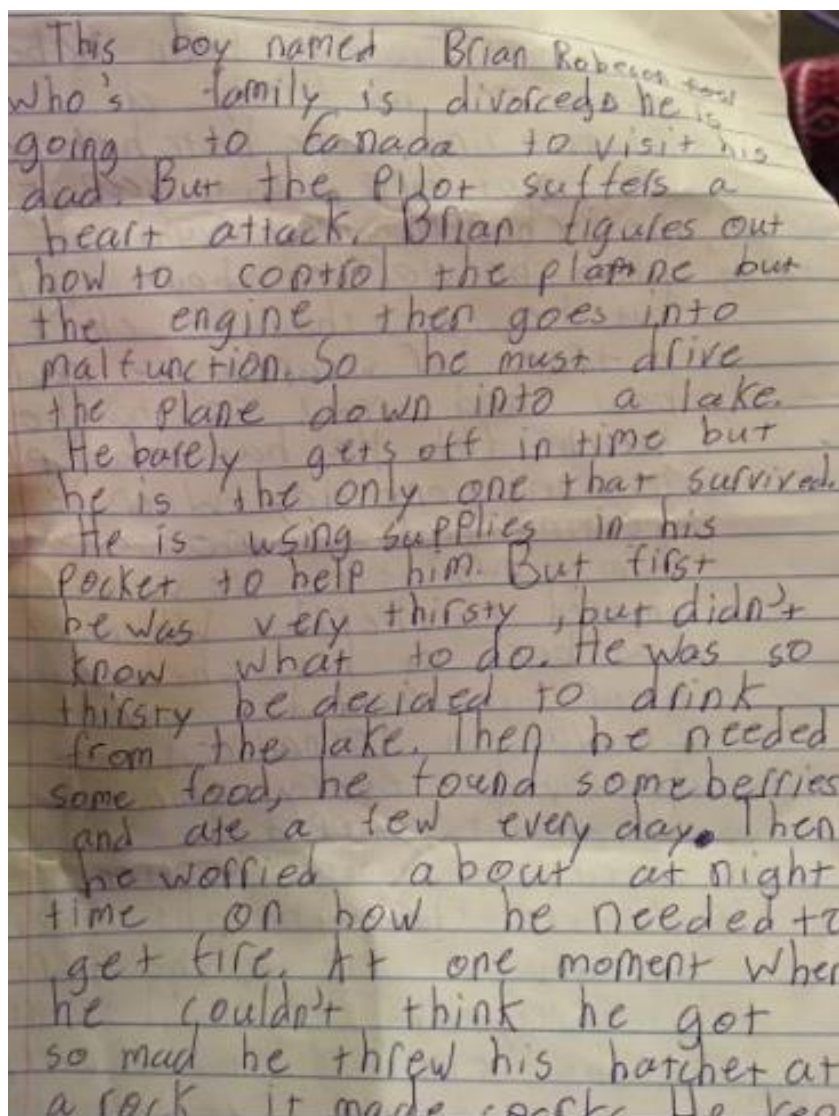
Ms. Jordán: Luis, do you think you'll read another book by Gary Paulsen?

Luis: *No sé. Bueno, creo que sí.* [I'm unsure. Well, maybe I will.] This book got me interested in reading. I want to read more by the author. The librarian told me I could read it in Spanish if I want to. That's a good idea to find out how it sounds in Spanish.

Ms. Jordán: It sounds like the book connected with you a lot.

Luis: It did. I like how Brian is able to survive even when it gets hard for him.

In the composition excerpt, which appears in Luis's handwriting and as a transcript, note how Luis applies a reading summary with his interpretation of the novel.



This boy named Brian Robeson who's family is divorced he is going to Canada to visit his dad. But the pilot suffers a heart attack. Brian figures out how to control the plane but the engine then goes into malfunction. So he must drive the plane down into a lake. He barely gets off in time but he is the only one that survived. He is using supplies in his pocket to help him. But first he was very thirsty, but didn't know what to do. He was so thirsty he decided to drink from the lake. Then he needed some food, he found some berries and ate a few every day. Then he worried about at night time on how he needed to get fire. At one moment when he couldn't think he got so mad he threw his hatchet at a rock. It made cracks. He kept

Figure 2. Reader response to young adult novel *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen.

The boy named Brian Robeson who's [sic] family is divorced. He is going to Canada to visit his dad. But the pilot suffers a heart attack. Brian figures out how to control the plane[,] but the engine then goes into malfunction. So[,] he must drive the plane down into a lake. He barely gets off in time[,] but he is the only one that survived.

He is using supplies in his pocket to help him. But first he was very thirsty, but didn't know what to do. He was so thirsty he decided to drink from the lake. Then[,] he needed some food[,] he found some berries and ate a few every day. Then[,] he worried about at night time on how he needed to get fire. At one moment when he couldn't think[,] he got so mad he threw his hatchet at a rock.

Luis described the plot and also analyzed the circumstances that lead to Brian taking action for his survival in a new, difficult environment following an accident. In the classroom, discussion centered on how students' own rural and urban lives compete with a life of survival in the

wilderness that resembled some of their own coming-of-age hardships at home. They spoke about limited resources in their environments and the inner and external conflicts that young people and adults face. In addition, the meanings Luis interprets from the novel excerpt detail his interest in sequencing the story in his own voice. His narrative included emotional descriptions with understanding about basic human needs for survival in a harsh, underpopulated environment.

Making Meaning

How do we support meaning for learning in students' lives? Vasquez (2014) explained, "A critical literacy curriculum needs to be lived. It arises from the social and political conditions that unfold in communities in which we live. As such, it cannot be traditionally taught" (p. 1). The lived lives of the students were consulted and considered in Ms. Jordán's instructional planning, delivery, and assessment. She used oral assessment and also narrative-based assignments to determine students' comprehensions and expository writing techniques. Ms. Jordán's application of critical literacies, which is informed by Vasquez's research, revealed that reading words and worlds that were mirrored in their oral production and expository writing offered value and voice to their lives. In fact, students can question and transform the conditions in which they live to create a more just society through the arts.

Schools and classrooms can expand the concepts of literacy—at macro and micro levels—to define what constitutes becoming learned in a changing, competing society. Identities are just as significant whether through labels or self-identification and literature can complement the study of community and its community members to gain deeper understanding with empathy and about ethics. In *Stop Stealing Dreams (What Is School For?)* (2012), Seth Godin advised, "Make school different" (p. 35). As demonstrated in the selected vignette, conversation, and writing, students possessed transcribing tools they enacted as strengths through their literacies and beliefs. In a supportive environment with their teacher and among their peers, students can transcribe their language and literacy lives by enacting socially responsible literacies for a more just world that honors and respects the Earth as well as their cultural, linguistic, and community-based literacies and lives.

Moreover, young adolescents can be guided through instruction to notice the intersections of identity, literacy, power, privilege, and society in their lives, question how these inform their habits and practices as active citizens, and understand their connections to the world. The emerging literacies students possessed are similar to those advanced by Edwards (2015), which emphasize transferable concepts and high expectations that education professionals must espouse daily for their students. Students enact various language learning practices with their teacher to establish contexts and become each other's linguistic and cultural resource through the arts and across the content areas and disciplines.

In *A Search Past Silence: The Literacy of Young Black Men* (2013), Kirkland explains, "Then the study of literacy is incomplete until it folds together the doing and the being, the

struggle and the sacrifice—unless the story of literacy becomes the story of us, the *literate*” (p. 13). In fact, adolescents attempt to grasp the culture of meanings and interpretations, even in moments of ambiguity and (mis)understanding, that considers both the spoken and unspoken to make meaning through orality, print, and the arts. Ms. Jordán’s instructional unit values students’ knowledge—both cultural and familiar—in becoming literate and engaged in the telling of one’s story that connects with others in society. In short, students’ linguistic and cultural strengths are additive and essential for naming their worlds and those they encounter in their schooling to make meaning and gain their identities.

Toward a Conclusion

In the introduction to the 10th anniversary edition of *The House on Mango Street* (1994), Cisneros responded to questions she receives often from readers and even poses questions for consideration and action in dialogical form as advanced by Fecho, Falter, and Hong (2015). Cisneros elaborated:

Am I Esperanza [Cordero]? Yes. And no. And then again, perhaps maybe. One thing I know for certain, you, the reader, are Esperanza. So I should ask, What happened to you? Did you stay in school? Did you go to college? Did you have that baby? Were you a victim? [. . .] Will you learn to be the human being you are not ashamed of? Did you run away from home? Did you join a gang? Did you get fired? Did you give up? Did you get angry?

You are Esperanza. You cannot forget who you are. (pp. xix-xx)

The questions posed by Cisneros and the closing statement from the novel are reminders of the transcribing that students can experience in their identity and literacy formation in classrooms, schools, and communities that value multilingualism and multiculturalism for the making of a democratic society.

By consulting students’ background and prior knowledge, literature and the arts can come to life in varied forms that value students’ cultural and linguistic wealth and sustains their identities and literacies for a pluralistic democracy. Actually, by extension, students are able to communicate their artistic biliteracies, increase critical literacy awareness, and practice bilingual abilities through interactive instructional lessons. Students as self-authors is empowering and can translate to emerging writers gaining voice and scribal identities across content areas, while experiencing the cultural knowledge and strengths of their community languages. When students have the opportunity to transcribe the words and arts in their worlds, they make meaning and connections with concepts that are relevant to their everyday lives and experiences. In short, language and visual arts offers opportunity with an additive, asset-based approach that values what they know.

To transcribe the arts and our students' formation and evolution of their identities requires reflection and action. Ek and Chávez (2015) argue, "When we make meaning of ourselves, we are authoring ourselves. [. . .] Authoring, then, is how actors respond to the world" (p. 137). The self-authoring students embark upon promotes a writer identity for themselves and for their teachers, too. Together they can transcribe identities, perceptions, and realities on paper and the digital page as they create bicultural meanings and connections about the world they name and inhabit. Students who experience writing their own biliterate narratives and who are guided by literary work that confirms and validates diverse voices of speaking, knowing, and writing across language arts gain more pathways as emergent bilingual writers to practice their writing craft (Rodríguez, 2017).

Bilingual and multilingual approaches that favor an additive model for language maintenance, resources, and support value human inventiveness and world languages that intersect with and complement the study of English (Valdés, 2017). Along the same lines, the perspective of emergent bilinguals and emerging writers supports community language participation from families, schools, and communities (Nora & Echevarria, 2016). Some of the core themes and premises, or realizations, from the single-case study include the following and list examples of practice across the arts:

- The dimensions of literacy and literacy events were interconnected through our understanding of students' social practices and behaviors in the making of meaning that included multimodal literacies. For example, this includes students experiencing the elements of literacy such as oral performance and speaking in a social exchange with their classmates and teachers.
- Literary selections that mirror students' interests in cultural knowledge and popular culture possessed more writing sustainability over time than those assignments driven by formulaic, systematic, or categorized as mandatory reading. For instance, this includes students experiencing their immediate civic and schooling communities in print and as readers in self-selected texts and even in the pre-selected texts by teachers for study, such as in Cisneros's vignettes.
- Students' use of Spanish as their community language meets a cultural and linguistic wealth competency when paired with Latinx-themed literary texts and instruction. As an illustration, today more texts appear in bilingual format as well as author interviews that reveal how they practice biliterate communications and adopt culturally linguistic innovations in digital and non-digital formats to engage young readers and thinkers across all ages, backgrounds, interests, and origins.
- A range of mentor or paired texts for student reading can enliven contemporary classics across all the elements of literacy: knowing, listening, memorizing, noticing, observing, performing, questioning, reading, speaking, thinking (metacognition), understanding (by

reader/literati), viewing, and writing (wonderment) in students' lives (Rodríguez, 2017). To take a case in point, consider digital and non-digital forms of communications to enter the classroom to demonstrate to students that, like the world, a text is not flat and absent from society, but a living text and moving document that spans various digital, literate, print, reader, and scribal cultures and identities. This was shown in Cisneros's vignette and also by the questions posed by students about adults' decision-making and the care for the environment (trees). Lastly, the student's art work with a vignette of his own demonstrated cultural knowledge, identity development, and literacy formation in the arts as a steward of one's community and environment.

The realizations presented here confirm the need to create more inclusive, interactive, and reciprocal exchanges for teaching and learning with students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. More specifically, Malott and Paone (2016) declared, "The question, *Who are Latino/as?*, could fill an entire library" (p. 5). In Ms. Jordán's classroom, every student possessed linguistic and cultural wealth resembling a library or museum and, consequently, background and prior knowledge become instructive and engaging for learning and understanding.

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