

**2023 JOURNAL OF LITERACY INNOVATION**  
**ARTICLE OF THE YEAR**

**THE MAGIC OF INSIDER *AUTORES Y ESCRITORES*: YOUTH  
STORY TELLERS AS AUTHORS IN A RURAL MEXICAN  
COMMUNITY-BASED SUMMER PROGRAM**

**DR. STEVE DANIEL PRZYMUS<sup>1</sup>**  
**TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**

**DR. MICHAEL FAGGELLA-LUBY**  
**TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**

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**Abstract**

Set in the Central highlands of México, 73 youth, ages 10-17, became authors and writers (*autores y escritores*) of their own insider stories. A multinational/multi-institutional research team trained university students from México, the U.S., and Germany on a narrative text structure strategy, that included multimodal representations of text structure (chants, icons, visual text mapping) and in the creation of theme-based (immigration and intercultural competency) wordless picture books for eliciting oracy/literacy development, through story retells. Conducting action research, during a four-day community-based summer camp, university students leveraged magic tricks, theme-based storytelling and retelling, and the *Embedded Story Structure (ESS) Routine* to facilitate the campers' creation of their own, insider-written, theme-based stories. Forty Latinx-authored bilingual children's books about immigration and intercultural competency, were also used as mentor texts for the campers' own stories. All 73 campers completed individual, insider-written children's books. Examples of student-authored stories from each theme and of how youth leaned on the ESS Routine for organizing their thoughts and writing their stories, are shared. Observational and anecdotal data from students, including students with disabilities, are relayed through two vignettes that point to the positive impact of storytelling (oracy) and the ESS Routine on campers' increased motivation and ability to become *autores y escritores*.

*Keywords:* *autores*, Embedded Story Structure (ESS), *escritores*, magic, oracy, story retells

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<sup>1</sup> Both authors are part of the Alice Neeley Special Education Research & Service Institute (ANSERS) at Texas Christian University (TCU).

## **The Magic of Insider *Autores y Escritores*: Youth Story Tellers as Authors in a Rural Mexican Community-Based Summer Program**

### **Introduction: “The Magic of Storytelling for Developing *Autores y Escritores*”**

The previously dubious group of 31 twelve- to thirteen-year-old summer camp participants, sitting on a large, colorful carpet in the middle of an echoey, third-floor library of a rural, non-profit educational center in Central México, quietly leaned in and strained to hear the storyteller (Przymus, Author 1) explain how the *Gran Sabio* (Wizard) magically guessed the number, between one and a hundred, that the group had guessed in secret. Embedded within the magic trick was a story about how the *Gran Sabio* (protagonist) had come to their community (setting) to teach the children how they and their own stories were the knowledge wealth of the community (initiating event), and after coming in contact with doubters (conflict), the *Gran Sabio* teams up with the children (the campers) to make magic (climax) that convinces the rest of their collective power of their own stories, which they will write and leave in the library (resolution).

The above description of a literacy intervention, that leverages oracy development through storytelling, demonstrates the power of stories to tap into the community-specific funds of knowledge (Durán & Lopez, 2023; Moll et al., 1992) of youth to ignite their motivation to read, write, and become *autores y escritores* (authors and writers). We describe them as “previously dubious,” because due to the pandemic-altered school-year calendar, these middle-school aged students were still attending morning public schools in this Central Mexican community in July and were attending our afternoon summer camp, mostly to hang out with their friends and have fun. Needless to say, writing a full story about their own lived experiences around the themes of immigration and intercultural competency, was probably not on their radar. However, within minutes of attending day one of four of the afternoon summer camp, three things happened to change their minds: 1) they were given access to 40 books, written by Latinx authors, about immigration (e.g., *Soñadores/Dreamers*, Yuyi Morales, 2018), 2) they were swept-up into the charm of stories and magic at the beginning of each class, and 3) they were asked and given the opportunity to become *autores y escritores* of their own, insider stories about immigration and intercultural competency.

The study below documents how multiethnic literature was used to create mirrors and windows for students to see themselves in books and see themselves as future (and current) authors of similar books. The study also details a new, bilingual (Spanish/English) application of a model for literacy development, the *Embedded Story Structure (ESS) Routine* (Faggella-Luby et al., 2007), several innovative pedagogical strategies (magic, storytelling and student retelling, chanting, and drawing story structure), and a multinational/multi-institutional collaboration, involving university preservice teacher candidates, in a novel, international setting—a community-based summer camp in rural México. Finally, although the literacy intervention was influenced by multiethnic children’s books, written by informed insiders to an ethnic group, the overall goal of the study was that the youth (campers) themselves become the insider authors, giving voice to their own lived experiences, as members of an ethnic group. In the literature review that follows, we briefly connect our study to previous work that leverages oracy for literacy development, work that highlights the importance of making narrative text structure salient with students, examples from the literature that lift up student voices as insider *autores y escritores*, and studies

that place an emphasis on multiethnic literature for teaching about the related themes of immigration and intercultural competency.

## **Literature Review: From Storytellers to Writers**

### **Oracy to Literacy**

Even though literacy teachers and researchers will often focus on them separately, oral language development (oracy) and literacy development go hand in hand (Hamayan et al., 2013; Przymus et al., 2022a). Studies focusing on the literacy development of *active bilingual learners/users of English* (ABLE) students (Przymus et al., 2019a, 2020, 2022a; Smyk et al., 2008) and ABLE students with disabilities or those being evaluated for distinguishing between language difference or disability (Miller et al., 2006; Peña & Bedore, 2017) have shown the effectiveness of “narrative, storytelling, and analyzing language samples from stories for promoting literacy and assessing the linguistic abilities of ABLE students” (Przymus et al., 2022a, pp. 299-300).

Peña and Bedore (2017) discuss how telling a story helps to develop, produce, and understand the same macrostructure elements (characters, setting/context, initiating event, rising action, climax, resolution) found in stories that students will read and write and the important microstructure elements of language (vocabulary, syntax, morphosyntax, etc.) needed for literacy development and success at school. Miller et al. (2006) point to the functional language elicited from narrating stories and how this practice facilitates more complex language from students, resulting in a more accurate measure of reading ability in both Spanish and English, than compared to passage comprehension. In essence, encouraging students to tell stories frees them to express themselves more, leading to greater language practice and the essential practice needed to improve both reading and writing.

Storytelling can promote oracy and literacy, and at the same time be linked to content learning. Przymus et al. (2022a) relate how allowing students, themselves, to search for pictures that represent their lives and make their own wordless picture books, related to content, can help facilitate their learning of the content and demonstration of knowledge. In their study, the researchers tasked university preservice teachers to collaborate with middle school newcomer students in a U.S. school to find pictures, related to the social studies lesson on capitalism and the free market system. Students, who had immigrated primarily from México, picked pictures of people who looked like them, shopping at a typical corner store or *abarrotes*. Preservice teacher candidates and students then worked together to create a story, using the pictures, to learn about this economic system. Tapping into their lived funds of knowledge and doing it in a way that glued the content to a story, with characters, a setting, conflict, and resolution, resulted in the students being able to read, write, and talk about this content in a way that accurately/bilingually represented their knowledge. In our current study below, we connect this previous research on the importance of theme-based storytelling and story retells to how the *Embedded Story Structure (ESS) Routine* made the macrostructure elements of stories explicit and salient to the campers and how focusing first on oracy facilitated students to express themselves more fully in their insider-written stories.

### **Narrative Text Structure Research**

Research on the use of narrative text structure strategies has consistently demonstrated improvements in reading comprehension for academically diverse groups of students, including

students with specific learning disabilities (e.g., Faggella-Luby et al., 2015). Considered an evidence-based literacy practice, narrative text structure strategies enhance student learning by sharing consistent elements of story grammar across Western narratology (e.g., characters, time, place, initiating event, central conflict, climax, and resolution; see Faggella-Luby et al., 2015 for example definitions of key terms).

One example of a narrative text structure strategy is the *Embedded Story Structure (ESS) Routine* created by Faggella-Luby (Author 2) and colleagues (e.g., Faggella-Luby et al., 2007; Faggella-Luby & Wardwell, 2011; Faggella-Luby et al., 2013). The ESS Routine is comprised of three cognitive strategies (self-questioning, story structure analysis, and summary writing) to improve targeted literacy skills in English Language Arts classrooms (e.g., Faggella-Luby et al., 2013). Moreover, the intervention is taught using a student centered, mediated approach to learning via four phases of strategic instruction including (a) teacher demonstration, (b) teacher modeling, (c) student collaboration and guided practice, and (d) independent practice (see Scheuermann et al., 2009 or Coyne et al., 2010 for more).

Several studies have demonstrated the efficacy of the ESS Routine. Initially, using a randomized control trial methodology, Faggella-Luby and colleagues examined intervention efficacy during a summer program for a heterogeneous group of 79 rising high school students, including 14 students with specific learning disabilities. Following the afore mentioned four phases of strategic instruction with student groups of 12 to 14, students receiving the ESS Routine condition statistically outperformed students in a research-based control group on measures of strategy knowledge, strategy use, and unit reading comprehension. Impressively, results indicated that students with learning disabilities in the ESS Routine condition on average outperformed high achieving students in the control group (Faggella-Luby et al., 2007).

In a follow-up study, Faggella-Luby and Wardwell (2011) examined intervention efficacy as part of a three-tiered Response to Intervention (RtI; Graner et al., 2005) efficacy trial of a tier two intervention. A group of 86 fifth-and sixth-grade students at-risk for learning disability identification in an urban middle school were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: (a) ESS Routine, (b) typical practice condition working with a reading specialist, and (c) a sustained silent reading condition. Instruction strategies varied by condition, but each teacher worked in a small classroom with a white board and no more than 12 students. Results on a standardized reading measure demonstrated statistically significant differences between the silent reading group and both the ESS and typical practice conditions (Faggella-Luby & Wardwell, 2011). Unlike the previous study, this replication study also included seven active bilingual learners/users of English (ABLE) students in the ESS Routine condition, 10 in the typical practice condition, and three in the silent reading group. Unfortunately, results were not disaggregated for ABLE students.

With our current study, we specifically set out to apply the ESS Routine in a bilingual setting in order to begin to investigate its future potential use and impact on ABLE students in U.S. Schools. Results from our study below provide support that a bilingual ESS Routine could be an important biliteracy tool for other educators/researchers who utilize storytelling with culturally and linguistically diverse youth, in order to learn from their insider stories.

### **Eliciting Insider Stories from Students: Three Examples from Latin America**

The Rio Grande Valley in the South of the U.S. state of Texas is predominantly Latinx and the context of what Smith and Iyengar (2019) call *pláticas* (or chats) during Family Literacy Nights with Latinx students and their families. Smith and Iyengar tapped into youth and their families' "social, cultural, and linguistic capitals in conversation and in writing Spanish and English" (p. 316). What they learned, when they encouraged insider voices to become the authors, is that students uplifted family members as their heroes and sheroes, disrupting a "white-male-savior" narrative about who are superheroes/sheroes in society (p. 317). Family members as protagonists of insider-written stories was also a recurrent characteristic of the youth campers' stories in our study, as well, such as uncles, fathers, and mothers, who had immigrated to the U.S. in search of a better life.

A second example of community-based literacy classroom approaches, that are based in storytelling, comes from a Zapotec Indigenous community in the Southern Mexican state of Oaxaca. Przymus et al. (2019b) chronicle how Zapotec Indigenous teachers in two intercultural/bilingual (Zapotec/Spanish) elementary schools in Oaxaca task students with documenting cultural stories from community elders, in order to use those stories to write their own bilingual books. This classroom literacy practice served to increase meaningful Zapotec language practice at school and to pass along ontological knowledge of the community, that is at risk of being lost from a focus on Western, epistemological knowledge at schools.

Finally, Garzón Díaz and Hernández Jaramillo (2018), report on an effort in Colombia to also get kids to write their own stories, creating an "opportunity for the indigenous community to infuse its history and path in the urban discourses and practices... and the emergence of new narratives on indigenous rootedness and its meaning in modern life as a context for the construction of peace." (p. 14). The promotion of peace, through insider-written children's stories about immigration and intercultural competency, was also an underlying objective of our work with youth at the summer camp. Garzón Díaz and Hernández also used multiethnic children's literature as the motivation and basis to help youth identify and construct their own stories about what the creation of peace in their imagined Colombia would look like.

### **Multiethnic Authors**

A carefully selected collection of multiethnic children's books was used in our study with the objective that the summer camp participants would be inspired by how other insider authors describe similar lived experiences and in turn become, themselves, insider *autores y escritores*. As such, these books served as mentor texts, used to "show how published writers use particular concepts or strategies in their works and then guide the students as they apply these ideas on their own" (Ruday, 2020, p. 4).

Other studies have used multiethnic children's books to teach related themes to our study, including immigration, the experiences of refugees, and intercultural competency development (Crawford & Calabria, 2018; Lacina, 2014; Roberts & Crawford, 2019). Roberts and Crawford (2019) describe how picturebooks by insider authors provide greater representation, a more realistic view of the world, and in conveying "important information in their words and their pictures about war and related events...these texts serve as powerful tools for seeing impactful events through very human eyes" (p. 28). This was the goal for our selection of books, used to teach, reach, connect with, and inspire future insider *autores y escritores*. Table 1 provides a list of the books used in our study. Book titles in Table 1 are listed as they are on the actual books.

**Table 1***Bilingual multiethnic children's books on immigration and intercultural competency*

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Topic	Books/Authors
Immigration	Friends from the Other Side/Amigos del otro lado/Anzaldúa (1997) My Name is Jorge: On Both Sides of the River/Medina (1999) La Frontera. El viaje con papa. My Journey with Papa/Mills & Alva (2018) Dreamers/Morales (2018) Soñadores/Morales (2018) Bright Star/Morales (2021) Lucero/Morales (2021) My Two Border Towns/Bowles (2021) Mis dos pueblos fronterizos/Bowles (2021) My diary from Here to There/Mi diario de aquí hasta allá/Perez (2009) Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote: A Migrant's Tale/Tonatiuh (2013) El Camino de Amelia/Jacobs Altman (1994) Goodbye, Havana! Hola, New York!/Colon (2011) Lola/Díaz & Espinosa (2018) From North to South/Del Norte al Sur/Colato Laínez (2013) The Upside Down Boy/El Niño de Cabeza/Herrera (2006) Waiting for Papá/Esperando Papá/Colato Laínez (2004) My Shoes and I: Crossing Three Borders/Mis zapatos y yo: Cruzando tres fronteras/Colato Laínez (2019) Mamá the Alien/Mamá el Extraterrestre/Colato Laínez (2016) Areli es ana Dreamer/Morales (2021) Areli is a Dreamer/Morales (2021) Yo no soy tu perfecta hija Mexicana/Sánchez (2018)
Intercultural Competency	René Has Two Last Names/René tiene dos apellidos/Colato Laínez (2009) Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match/Marisol McDonald No Combina/Brown (2018) The Remembering Day/Mora (2015) Book Fiesta! Celebrate Children's Day, Book Day/Celebremos el día de los niños, el día de los libros/Mora (2009) Alma and How She Got Her Name/Martinez-Neal (2018) Alma y cómo obtuvo su nombre/Martinez-Neal (2018) Just Ask! Be Different, Be Brave, Be You/Sotomayor (2019) ¡Solo pregunta! Se diferente, se valiente, se tu/Sotomayor (2019) Side by Side/Lado a Lado: The Story of Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez/Brown (2020) I Love Saturdays y domingos/Alma Flor Ada (2004) Dear Primo: A letter to my cousin/Tonatiuh (2010) Where are you from?/Méndez (2019) The Oldest House in the USA/La casa más antigua de los Estados Unidos/Aragon (2012) The Tooth Fairy Meets El Ratón Pérez/Colato Laínez (2010) I Am René, The Boy/Soy René The Niño/Colato Laínez (2005) My Name is María Isabel/Alma Flor Ada (1995) Yes! We Are Latinos/Ada & Campoy (2016) ¡Sí! Somos Latinos/Ada & Campoy (2016)

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Przymus (Author 1) bought these books with a grant (described below) and donated them to the non-profit community educational center, where the study took place, to continue to grow the center's third-floor library, and specifically to add to the library's small collection of bilingual books. The selected themes of immigration and intercultural competency were chosen for the following reasons. First, one stated purpose of the grant is to promote literacy and intercultural understanding. With this objective in mind, Przymus researched and considered current educational topics of importance to the Mexican state, where the community educational center is located. A major identified topic of this region, was the lack of intercultural understanding around immigration and the cultural, educational, and linguistic lived experiences of youth who flow between the U.S. and México border. This Central state of México has one of the highest populations of citizens that emigrate to the United States. Also, much research around the educational experiences of transnational students (e.g., students who were born in México, emigrate to the U.S. at a young age, attend much of their schooling in the U.S., and for various reasons return to live and finish their schooling in México) has been conducted by researchers from this Mexican state (see Mora-Pablo et al., 2015; Przymus & Serna-Gutiérrez, 2022b; Serna-Gutiérrez & Mora-Pablo, 2018). Finally, due to the ages of the summer camp youth (described below), Przymus chose some books on immigration, meant for the older summer camp participants, but also decided to include books about cultural differences and intercultural competency development that would be more appropriate for the younger participants.

Founded in 2009, the educational center is located in rural Central México, is volunteer driven, and is a place of collaboration with local, national, and international individuals and families to promote education, culture, and health. The center is open all year and provides on-going courses for community youth and adults, ranging from swimming lessons to equine therapy for children with disabilities. To raise interest and excitement about the *Autores y Escritores* course of the summer camp, we invited community youth to visit the center's library and read the new donated books about immigration and intercultural competency. We anticipated that these new, bilingual (Spanish/English) books would be of interest to the students and that the topics of books might resonate with students, who have family members in the U.S. We also hoped that having books on very specific themes would help the students focus and organize their thoughts quicker on their own stories, which was important, due to the limited time (four days) of the summer camp. Finally, although many students did explore and spend time with the new books, prior to the summer camp, we would have liked to have had more time to include these mentor texts in a more structured way during the four-day camp. We will take these thoughts up further in the limitations section below.

## **Study Context, Participants, and Procedures**

### **Methodology**

Procedures for this research study are consistent with action research methodology in education, primarily undertaken when one or more members of the research team are involved in the practice as a mechanism for reflection and practice improvement (e.g., Ip, 2017). Action research is appropriate in education to promote thoughtful investigation of new practices or iterations of practices with new participant populations (as in the current study) while maintaining a certain level of objectivity in presenting the results (Stringer & Ortiz Aragón, 2020). Action research is typically described as a dynamic cycle comprised of the following elements: (a) problem identification and plan development [Plan], (b) plan implementation [Act], (c) observation and

evaluation of results [Observe], and (d) reflection with next steps consideration [Reflect] (e.g., Johnson & Christensen, 2017). This process is then commonly repeated to form a cycle of inquiry. In this particular case, the opportunity to work with youth participants of the *Autores y Escritores* course and preservice teachers from three international universities presented an ideal opportunity to address learner needs for enhanced literacy instruction with adaptations of the previously validated Embedded Story Structure Routine, first over a four-week university course and second during a four-day summer program. Below we further explicate study details by outlining our positionality, the unique international research context, study participants, and procedures.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Both authors are white, non-Latinx professors in a college of education at a mid-size, private university in the South Central of the United States. Przymus is an associate professor of educational linguistics and bilingual special education and Faggella-Luby is a full professor of special education and literacy. In 2010, Przymus conducted Fulbright research in México on bilingual education and since has collaborated with Mexican professors, teachers, families, and youth, across seven different Mexican states. Przymus was named the 2022 Richard Ruiz<sup>2</sup> Distinguished Scholar in Residence and this grant, dedicated to promoting community literacy, language, and intercultural competency development in Central México, provided the opportunity and funded the resources for this study. Faggella-Luby has conducted multiple studies in the United States regarding the ESS Routine.

### **Context**

The context for this study can be divided into two settings: 1) the aforementioned four-day community summer camp for youth, ages 10-17, at the rural educational center and 2) a four-week long study-abroad/summer session course at the principal public university of a Central Mexican state. Teaching the *Autores y Escritores* course at the four-day summer camp was the culminating experience for university preservice teacher candidates, enrolled in the four-week study-abroad/summer session course that Przymus co-taught at the main public university. The 14 course participants were made up of seven undergraduate American students from a large public university in the U.S. Southwest, two master's level German students from a university in Germany, and five undergraduate Mexican students, from the university hosting the course. The course, *Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Exceptional Learners* provided a theoretical base and practical approach to the study of students from diverse backgrounds with special education needs including language, cultural, and learning differences. The course met Monday-Thursday for two hours each day, for four weeks. Beyond course readings on bilingualism, bilingual special education, intercultural competency, and the experience of transnational youth, the following three course activities prepared the students to facilitate the below-described literacy intervention with summer camp youth, who participated in the *Autores y Escritores* four-day summer camp course:

#### ***1. Two-Day Workshop on the Embedded Story Structure (ESS) Routine***

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<sup>2</sup> Dr. Richard Ruiz was an internationally recognized scholar of language policy and multilingual education. The Richard Ruiz Distinguished Scholar in Residence, funded through the University of Arizona and Resplendor International, was developed in his honor, after his death in 2015.

Faggella-Luby prepared a pre-recorded, detailed overview of the ESS, and Przymus spent two days of course time, leading the students through the elements of the routine and practicing the routine for the Spanish-language context of the summer camp (e.g., translating the ESS to Spanish). Images 1 and 2 show the overview of the ESS Routine, including story structure elements, story structure pictures, story structure icons, and summary. We will show in the results section how the university students taught youth at the summer camp how to use this visual structure to write their own stories.

### Image 1

Page 1 of the ESS Routine

### Image 2

Page 2 of ESS Routine

Images 3 and 4 give insight into how university students prepared by translating the ESS questions and writing prompts into Spanish.

### Image 3

Questions, translated, with ESS icons

### Image 4

Writing prompts, translated, with ESS icons

## 2. *Story Structure Chants*

After having learned the ESS Routine, Przymus worked with university students on how to implement the routine with 10–17-year-old summer camp youth. Przymus taught the university students how to convert the story structure elements (e.g., characters, setting, initiating event, climax, etc.) into a Spanish language chant (adapted from Prath & Palafox, 2017) to teach to the summer camp youth. This resembled a melodic, call and response rap, including body movements, such as pointing to faces while singing and repeating, *Los personajes (los personajes), son las personas (son las personas) de la historia (de la historia)* and shrugging “where” with shoulders and hands and pointing to a watch, while chanting *El escenario (el escenario) es donde y cuando (donde y cuando)*.<sup>3</sup> Other story structure chants included teaching the initiating event by using a concerned face and a shrugging motion and saying *El problema (el problema)-¡Oh no! ¿Qué pasó? (¡Oh no! ¿Qué pasó?)*; teaching the turning point of the story by pointing to the brain and putting a finger in the air, while saying *La solución (la solución), tengo un plan (tengo un plan)*; and teaching the end of the central conflict/resolution with a sweeping hand motion and saying, *La resolución (la resolución), nos resolvemos todo (nos resolvemos todo)*.

## 3. *Teaching the Use of Wordless Picture Books for Story Retells.*

Finally, Przymus prepared the university students for the culminating summer camp experience with youth, by 1) teaching them how to develop a wordless picture book, related to a theme, 2) how to tell a story based on the picture book to a whole group of students (core instruction/tier 1 universal supports), and 3) how to get students to produce and practice story retells (small group/tier 2 intervention) with the wordless picture books. University students used course time to collaborate in teams to think of, develop, and practice telling a story with theme-based wordless picture books.

Five university students (three Americans and two Mexicans) were in Team 1, which was tasked with working with the high school (ages 14-17) group of summer camp youth, to develop student/insider-written stories about the theme of immigration. Team 2 was comprised of five university students (two Americans, two Mexicans, and one German) and were responsible for working with the elementary school (ages 10-11) group of summer campers for writing individual stories about intercultural competency. The final team, Team 3, included four university students (two Americans, one Mexican, and one German) that worked with the middle school (ages 12-13) group of campers, also on writing individual stories about intercultural competency.

Because Team 1 was assigned to the high school group (ages 14-17) of summer camp youth, it was decided that it would be most appropriate for this group to work with the sensitive topic of immigration. Team 1 developed a story, entitled “Omara y los viajes de vida” (Omar and her life journeys), about a girl who was born in México and emigrates to the U.S. with her family at around the age of two. To both tackle the theme of immigration and the experiences of transnational youth, the students found pictures that told a story of how Omara was bullied in U.S. schools, because of her language, and how she encountered the same struggles in Mexican schools, after having returned to México, around the age of 12. Their images and oral story end

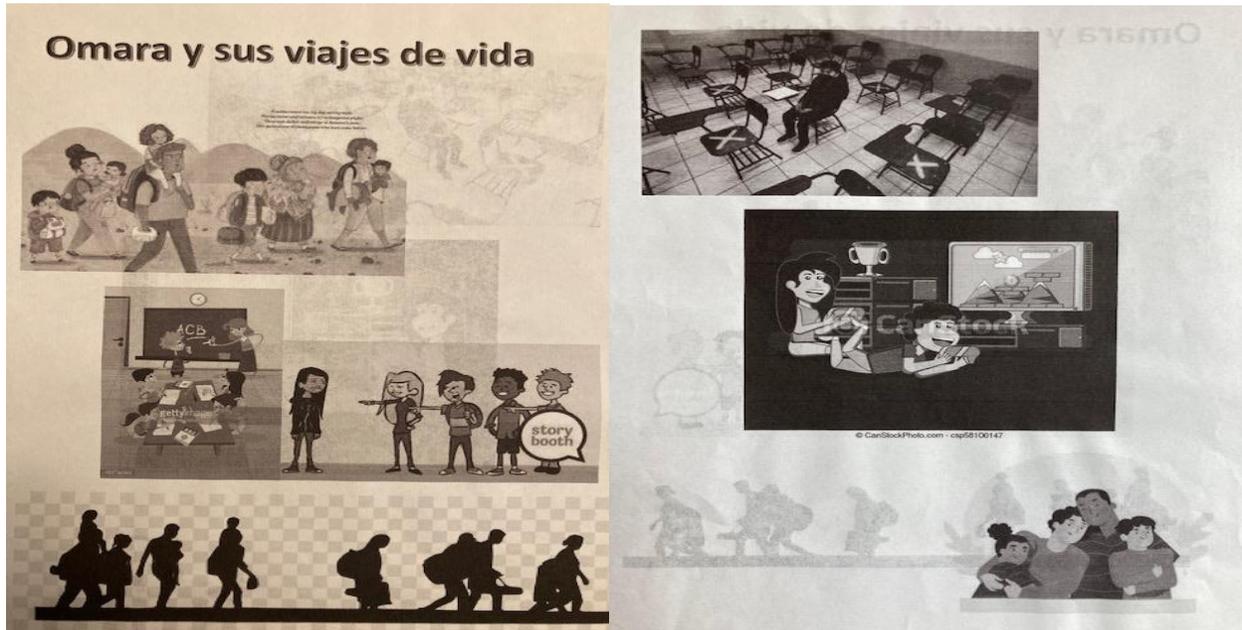
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<sup>3</sup> The English translation would be “The characters (the characters) are the people (the people) of the story (of the story)” and “The setting (the setting) is where and when (where and when).”

with Omara finding friendship in interest-based communities of practice in México, that value her English skills (e.g., gaming communities of practice), Omara finding happiness, and ultimately starting her own family. Images 5 and 6 illustrate this wordless picture book, used to teach the struggles of immigration by attaching that content to pictures and a story.

## Images 5 & 6

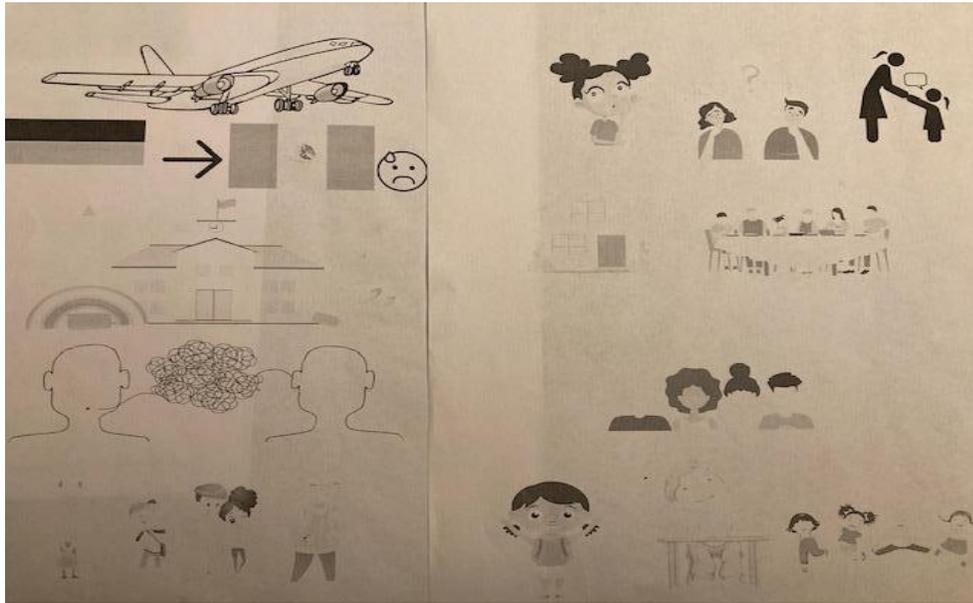
*Wordless picture book “Omara y los viajes de vida,” used for the immigration theme*



Due to the younger ages of the other two summer camp groups, elementary (ages 10-11) and middle school (12-13), it was decided to not take up immigration, but rather have the university students help these campers develop stories about intercultural competency. Teams 2 and 3 collaborated to develop and practice an intercultural competency theme-related wordless picture book (Image 7) about a girl from Germany who moves to México. The girl is misunderstood, due to her language and customs, and it takes the courage of a classmate to invite her over for dinner to learn about her and befriend her. Image 7 shows the story structure elements of setting, characters, conflict, and resolution and both Team 2 and Team 3 practiced telling similar stories that they would tell to each of their summer camp groups, at the beginning of each summer camp session.

## Image 7

*Wordless picture book used for the intercultural competency theme*



As with the story developed by Team 1, about immigration, these stories were then retold in small groups by the summer camp youth, each day. The ESS routine of (a) teacher demonstration (students seeing a magic trick, with a story), (b) teacher modeling (students hearing teachers/university students tell a theme-based story), and (c) student collaboration and guided practice (students retelling the theme-based story, with their own words, in small groups), all facilitated (d) independent practice (students working individually to produce insider-written stories, based on their own lived experiences).

The second setting of this study took place at the rural educational center, during the four-day (July 5-8, 2022) summer camp for community youth. The educational center is a three-story concrete block building that sits on a hill on the outside of a small town of 700 people in a Central Mexican state. The first floor has a bathroom, large open classroom, and a kitchen. The second floor has another bathroom and four classrooms. The third floor consists of a large open area, which doubles as a classroom and library, and there is a small room with computers. The third-floor library was the setting of the *Autores y Escritores* summer camp course. About eight kilometers to the East is another small town of 700 and eight kilometers to the Northwest is third small town of 900. Upwards to 175 youth from all three communities attended each day of the four-day camp. A total of 73 pre-registered for the *Autores y Escritores* course.

## Participants

As this was the 12<sup>th</sup> year of the community summer camp, word had caught on that it would be fun, there would be lots of different courses to choose from, and likely the courses would be facilitated by international university students (as was the case for our course). The 73 youth participants of the *Autores y Escritores* course were divided by age into three groups/classes: 17 students, ages 14-17, made up the high school course, which met each day of the camp, from 4-

4:55pm; 31 students (ages 12-13) comprised the middle school class, that attended each day between 5-5:55pm; and after a short break for snacks, 25 elementary school students (ages 10-11) climbed up to the third floor for class, from 6:30-7:25pm. Attendance at the community summer camp was strongly encouraged, but ultimately, voluntary. However, students who signed-up for the *Autores y Escritores* course quickly became excited on day 1, after receiving their own colorful, hardcover journal, and very few students missed even one of the four total days of the class.

## Procedures

As described in the previous paragraph, Przymus and the 14 university students only had 55 minutes with each of the three groups, each day of the four-day camp, to try to get the youth to write their own stories. To this point, we have also described a complex oracy to literacy intervention, that includes doing magic tricks, telling theme-based stories, having students retell the theme-based stories, teaching/using the Embedded Story Structure (ESS) routine, and giving students time to write their own stories. Table 2 lays out the structured class routines, by providing the same bilingual course activity map that Przymus provided the university students. Table 2 comes from the first day of class with the high school group of students. The only difference between this schedule and the other two (middle school and elementary school) groups, was in the theme and theme-based story used in the course with older students. All other activities (e.g., starting with a story with magic, continuing with the theme-based story, breaking into small groups, having students retell the theme-based story, using the ESS Routine, story structure icons, pictures, chants, brainstorming with the students, and giving students time to work on their own stories) all were the same, across the three, age-level groups.

### Table 2

#### *Summer camp “Autores y Escritores” course procedures*

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Day 1

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4:00-4:10 Story related magic trick (dinámica) con preguntas (¿Quiénes fueron los personajes principales, cuál fue el escenario?, etc.

- Day 1 will be “el mago quien puede adivinar los números de niños”

4:10-4:20 Introduce and tell for first time the theme related story (e.g., Omara y sus viajes de vida) – I will model how to weave in English (translanguaging)

4:20-4:40 Break into small groups (Tier 2) and work with students

\*I will help small groups pick 2 students to audio record their individual story retell on your phone. (Day 1 & Day 4 only)

1. Have all students retell the group’s theme-related story (e.g., Omara y sus viajes...)
2. Start brainstorming with students about their own immigration related story
3. Use the “embedded story structure” routine (questions on one side, story arch on the other side) to guide students to thinking about all that goes into a story. Use Omara (or other theme-related story) to guide the discussion.

4:40-4:55 Give students time to work independently, with one-on-one (Tier 3) support as needed.

1. Give students their hardcover notebook and have them put their names and other brainstorming notes in the back of the book. Have them draft their ideas in the back and write their final story, starting from the front.
  2. Have students turn in books at the end of each day.
-

## Results

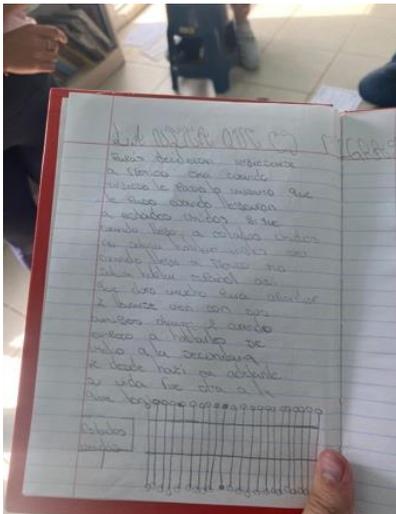
### Overview of Insider Youth *Autores y Escritores*

#### *Number of Books and Examples from each Course and Theme*

All 73 youth participants of the *Autores y Escritores* summer camp course completed an individual story. This alone, considering we only had four 55-minute class periods to work with the students, was a success. Digging into their stories, however, is where the real success stories come to life. The 17 high school students showed vulnerability in writing about their fathers, uncles, older brothers, and other family members, who have emigrated to the U.S. and who have experienced hardships in search of a better life for their families. These stories were in no way all rosy or Pollyannish, however. Several stories included conflict of missing or not even knowing family members and most included dangerous settings, such as border walls and harsh deserts. Image 8, “*La Niña que es Migrante,*” displays an accurate depiction of the tall, skinny, but too-close-together-to-slip-through, rusting poles of what many parts of the U.S./México border wall looks like. Even though most stories had elements of struggle and reality, a theme of doing what needs to be done to help out their families, was in every story. Images 9 and 10 of “*La Adventura de Juan Pablo,*” tell the story of a *niño* (boy), named Juan Pablo. The highlighted parts of Image 9 relate how he realized that his family did not have enough money, had a dream to go the U.S. to make money, got really sad, and decided to leave and find work. While away, he missed his mom and was sad. On Image 10, we have highlighted Juan Pablo returning home and how his mother’s eyes filled with tears as she saw him and how he fulfilled his dream.

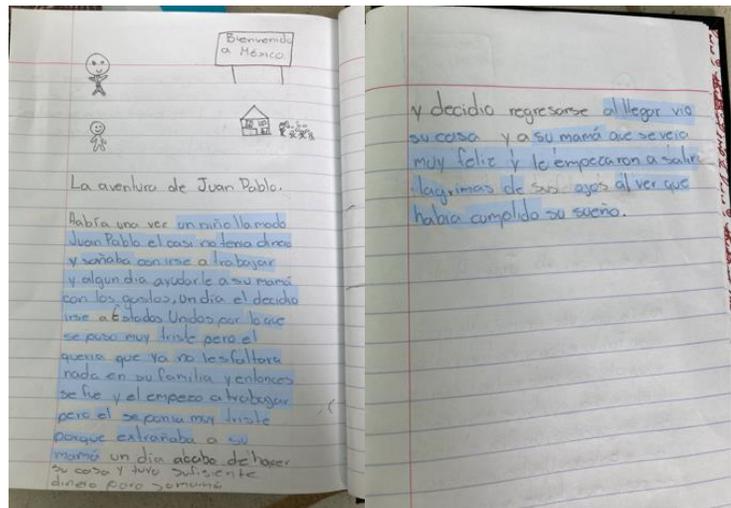
#### Image 8

*Girl who crosses the border wall twice*



#### Images 9 & 10

*Boy migrates to the U.S. to earn money for his mom*



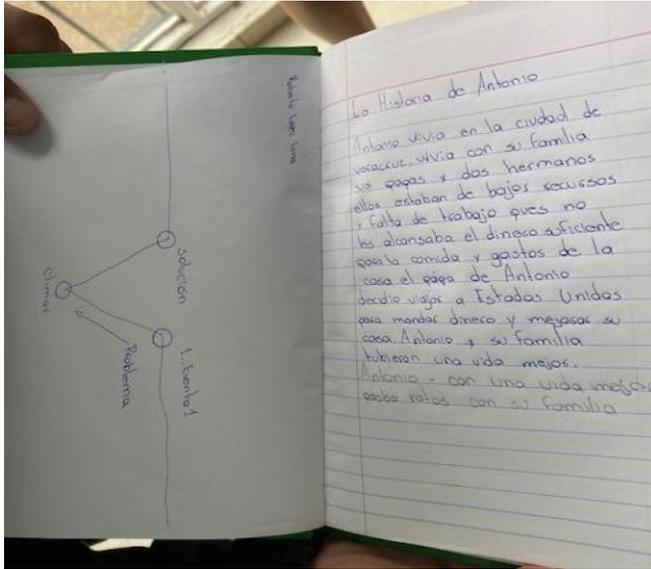
Writing these stories was greatly influenced and informed by the students using the Embedded Story Structure (ESS) Routine. Image 11 shows an ESS story picture (setting, conflict, resolution, etc.), in the journal of a high school student’s draft story about a boy’s father who emigrates to the U.S. to find work.

## Image 11

### Immigration theme-based story, with ESS notes

Translation: "The Story of Antonio"

Antonio lived in the city of Veracruz. He lived with his family, his parents, and two siblings. They had little resources and there was a lack of work, so they did not have sufficient money for food and household expenses. Antonio's father decided to travel to the United States to send back money and improve their situation. Antonio and his family had a better life. Antonio, with a better life, spent time with his family.



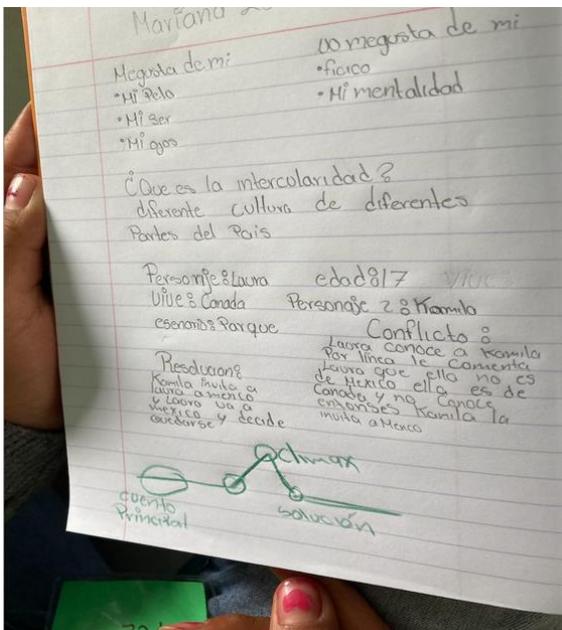
All 31 students in the middle school (12–13-year-olds) group also completed stories. These completed stories, like the other groups' stories, all averaged at least one and

a half pages in length, with some students writing more than 10 pages. They also worked closely with the university students to leverage the ESS routine to plan their writing; stories that included all story structure elements, embedded. Image 12 shows a middle school student's notes, with organized ESS elements and story arch picture.

## Image 12

### Intercultural competency theme-based story, with ESS notes

Translation:



A list of the author likes and dislikes about themselves

What is intercultural competency? – Different cultures, from different parts of countries

**Characters** – age, where they live, name

**Context/scene:** the park

**Conflict:** Laura meets Kamila online and learns that she is not from Mexico, but from Canada. Kamila moves to Mexico.

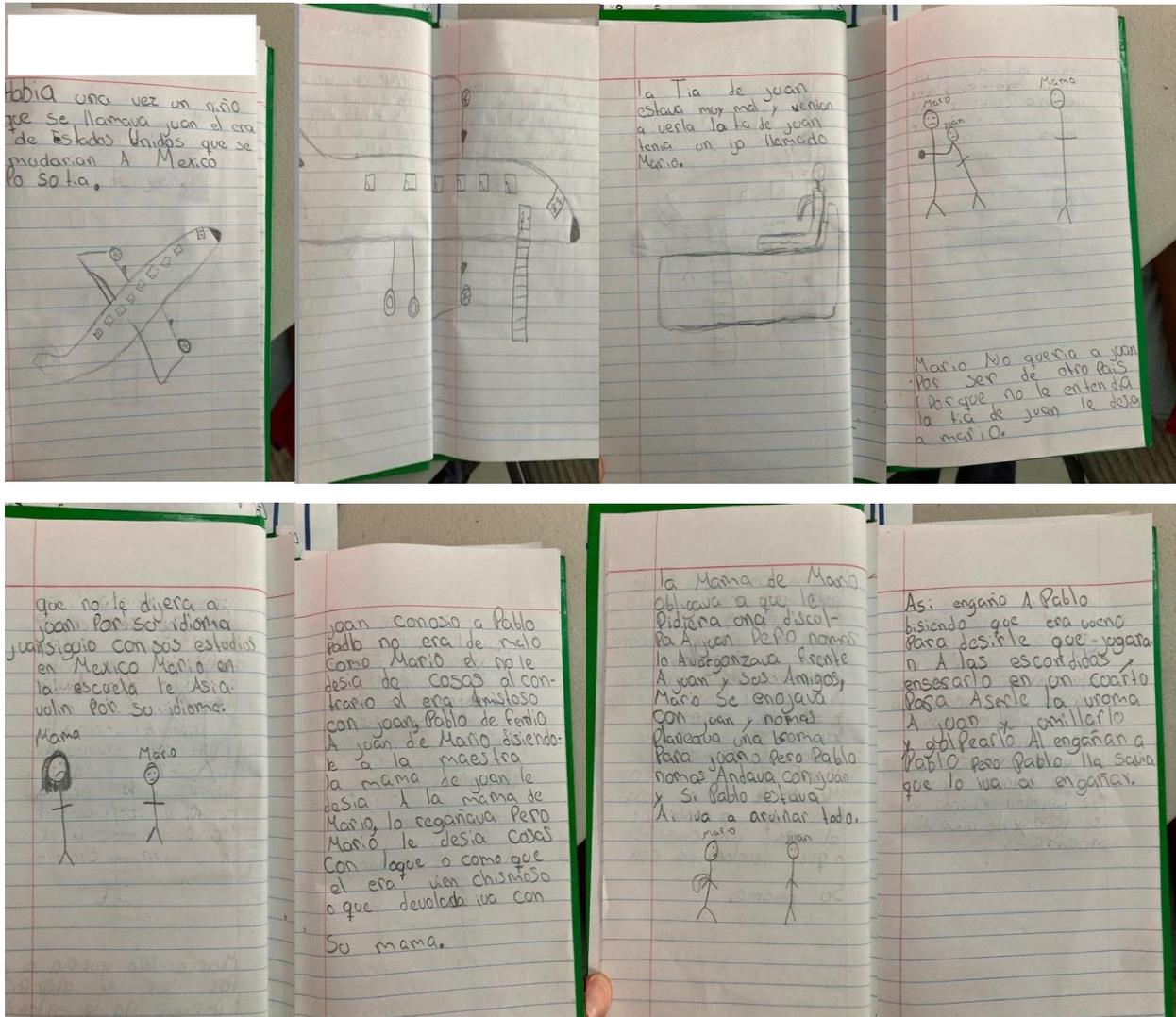
**Resolution:** Kamila invites Laura to Mexico and she decides to stay.

The 25 completed elementary age student stories also took up themes of intercultural misunderstandings and stereotypes. Images 13-22

are thumb nails of a 10-year-olds' completed story about a boy (Juan) from the U.S., who is ethnically Mexican. Juan moves to México to be with his sick aunt. His cousin, Mario, does not like him, because Juan is from the U.S. and speaks English. Mario is mean to Juan at school in México and bullies him for his *pocho*<sup>4</sup> Spanish. Juan is befriended by Pablo, who sticks up for him. Pablo foils a plan by Mario to beat-up Juan and tells the teacher. The teacher takes some time to teach Mario about Juan, his U.S. culture, and that he is not a bad person to fear or make fun of. In the end, they all became friends.

### Images 13-20

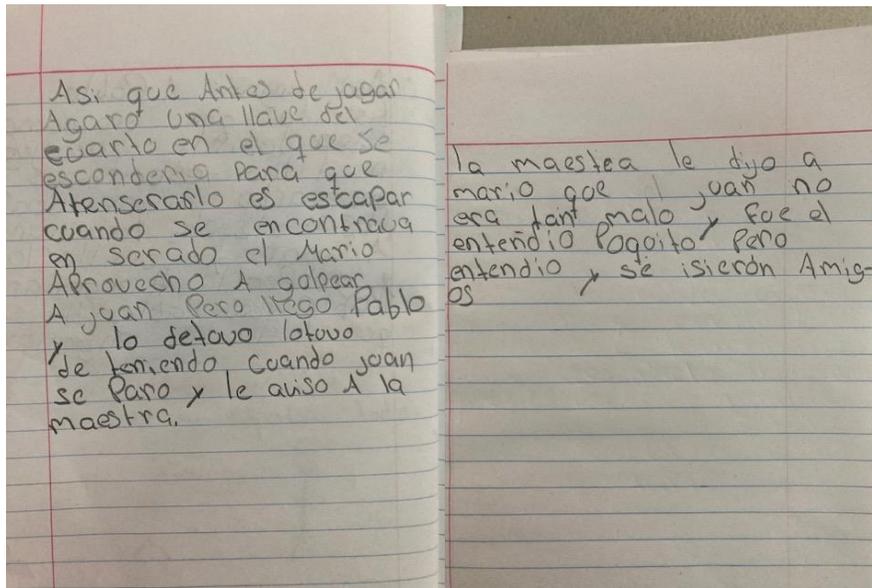
First 8 pages of complete story about intercultural competency development



<sup>4</sup> Derogatory word to describe a person of Mexican ethnicity who speaks Spanish with a foreign or different accent, as a result of having lived in the U.S.

## Images 21 & 22

*Final pages of complete story about intercultural competency*



The above story, written by a 10-year-old, very closely captures the reality of many transnational youth. These youth (like Omara in the high school picture book), who were either born in México and emigrated to the U.S. as children or who were born in the U.S., now attend school and often struggle in México. Kasun and Mora Pablo's (2022) edited book on the experiences of transnational youth in Mexican schools is a great resource for learning about how these students' experiences of having lived in the U.S. can position them as traitors in the eyes of their Mexican peers, how their language is a source of humiliation/bullying, and how teachers in Mexican schools are not always prepared to adequately serve them.

We conclude this results section by highlighting the work of two students, who due to having a disability, are also either not adequately served at school, or not served at all. These are also two concrete examples of the influence of oracy on literacy and storytelling's potential as a dynamic classroom literacy strategy. The two vignettes of Manuel and Amelia sketch the experiences of two students with different disabilities and how the structure and activities of the *Autores y Escritores* summer camp course motivated them and allowed them to use their full identities and funds of knowledge to be able to demonstrate their academic potential more accurately.

### **Vignettes of Insider Student Stories**

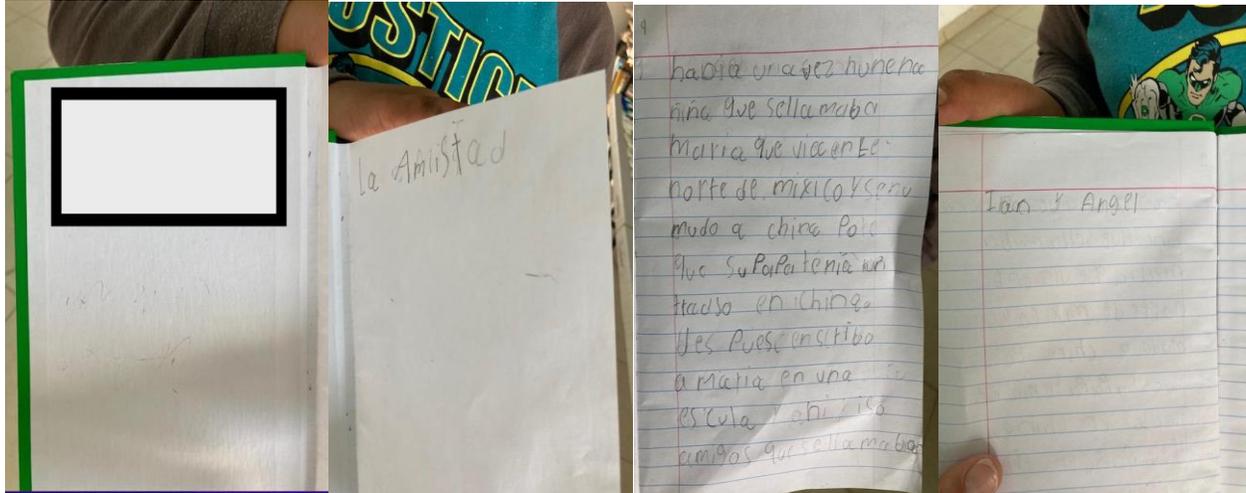
#### ***Manuel***

Manuel is a 10-year-old, who was in the elementary summer camp group. At the end of the second day, Manuel confided to one of the university students, assigned to his group, that he has a learning disability in reading and writing and normally hates this sort of activity, but was loving this course. Manuel paid close attention to the magic trick stories at the beginning of each day, to the intercultural competency wordless picture book story, told by the university students

at the beginning of each day, retold that story in small groups on days one, two, and three, and worked diligently for three and a half days to write his own story (see images 23-26 below).

### Images 23-26

*Manuel's complete story in his hard cover journal*



(Translation: Front cover, with name blocked out for privacy. Title “Friendship” on the second page. Page three, “Once there was a girl named Maria that lived in the North of Mexico and moved to China because her dad got a job in China. Maria was put in school in China and there she made friends that were named [page 4] Ian and Angel.)

Although he did not write as much, compared to the majority of other students in his group, we believe that this story is perhaps the most that Manuel has ever written for a school assignment. Several things may have contributed to his motivation and increased production of content, such as the different, less academic setting of the social/fun summer camp and the fact that we gave him his own, hard cover, bright green journal/notebook to keep. However, we also observed something else. On day three, immediately after asking Manuel to retell the group’s story in small group, a university student worked with him individually (tier three intervention) to have him orally tell her the story that he wanted to write. After struggling to begin writing, this practice of asking Manuel to tell the story orally helped him begin to write his ideas down. On the final day, day four of the *Autores y Escritores* course, the same university student again worked individually with Manuel. She again asked him to orally tell his story to her. This time she recorded him with her phone and played it back to Manuel. This again facilitated his ability to organize his ideas, practice including story structure elements, and finish writing his story.

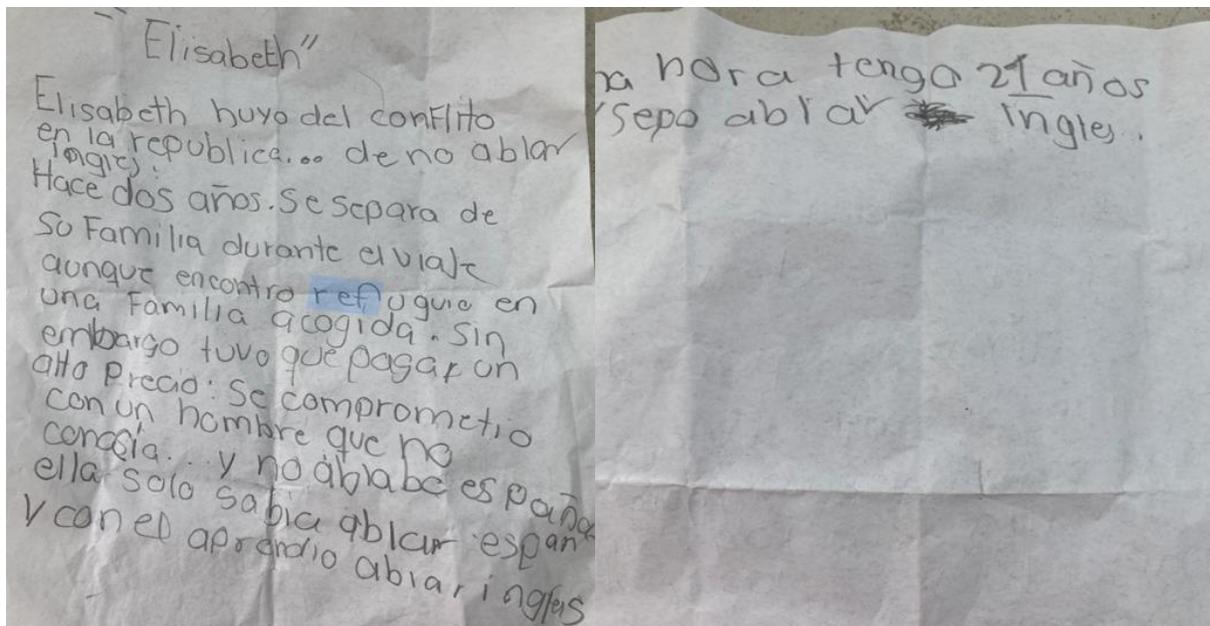
### **Amelia**

Amelia is a 15-year-old, who attended the high school summer camp group. Amelia is no stranger to those who live in the community and volunteer full time at the educational center, where the summer camp took place. Due to having Cerebral Palsy, Amelia’s family does not send her to school, but does allow her to spend time at the educational center, where she learns how to cook, swim, and participates in equine therapy. I (Przymus) first met Amelia, the week prior to the beginning of the summer camp. It was morning and quiet at the educational center, as most kids were attending school in their communities. I was sitting on the floor of the third-floor

library, organizing the 40 bilingual books, that I had recently brought, by age and content, when Amelia walked in, sat down beside me, and started flipping through books. I engaged Amelia by asking if she wanted to read one of the books with me. She picked a dual language book about immigration and started reading it. The book “My Journey with Papá/El viaje con Papá was a Spanish/English dual-language book and was organized like 95% of dual-language books are (see Przymus & Lindo, 2021) with English written first, on top of the translated Spanish. I did not know if Amelia could read, but explained in Spanish to her that this book was written by a man who was born in that same state in México, where she lives, and is about his journey to the United States with his dad. I also explained to her that the book is written in both Spanish and English, but that the English is listed first. Amelia picked up the book and I was immediately surprised and delighted to hear her read the English! She did not understand most of the English that she read, but her ability to decode and pronounce the English words, let alone the Spanish (of which her fluency was even better) was remarkable, considering her lack of schooling. She expressed much interest and motivation in learning to read and understand more English, which we believe is reflected in the story that she wrote, during the camp (see Images 27 & 28, below).

### Images 27 & 28

*Amelia's immigration theme-based story*



(Translation: First page begins with the title, “Elisabeth.” Two years ago, Elisabeth escaped from conflict in her country...she spoke no English. She became separated from her family during the trip, but found refuge with a foreign family that took her in. Nevertheless, her price for refuge was steep and she became engaged with a man that she did not know. He did not speak Spanish and she only knew Spanish. With him she learned to speak English. She now is 21 years old and knows how to speak English.)

It was clear that Amelia’s focus, interest, and effort in the camp was accompanied with great joy at being able to study with youth her age and by being asked to write down her ideas. The images of her story above are of crinkled paper, as she took her book home each night and practiced writing multiple drafts. Amelia’s disability (CP) makes her speech hard to understand and the

motor skills needed for writing, slow and laborious, but her ideas are rich and her ability to express herself and tell a story in writing is strong. We are grateful that she had the opportunity to show what she could do and to become *una autora y escritora*. It is not our intent to criticize and judge the decision not to send Amelia to school, but this experience goes a long way in demonstrating the impact that innovative and multimodal literacy instruction, through storytelling, could have on students like Amelia, who are underestimated and have low expectations placed upon them, due to a disability.

### **Implications and Research to Practice**

Telling stories is how humans learn about and understand the most complex and sensitive themes of our world. The award-winning children's book author, Yuyi Morales, tells a migration story of how it takes up to three generations for monarch butterflies to fly from Central México to Canada, having offspring, before dying in Texas and along the way to Canada. Each generation of offspring, along the journey is stronger than the previous, creating a super monarch that is able to make the whole journey from Canada, back to Central México, in one generation (Personal communication, July 26, 2022). She relates this to human immigration and how the act of moving to another land is a natural one, in the journey to become stronger and have a better life. A simple story, like this one, can make a complex issue more accessible to students and motivate them to write their own stories. Engaging students in storytelling not only provides practice on needed micro and macro structures involved with literacy, but it also can give students a voice to discuss and address social inequities. García-Mateus (2021) documents how a teacher was able to engage “students to dialogue about undocumented immigration through the implementation of process drama” (p. 107).

Too often, students' identities at school are ascribed upon them by other people's stories. Even stories by multiethnic authors, that may mirror students' lives and provide windows of possible futures, are not students' own stories. What we learned from this study and our previous studies, mentioned above, asking students to write their own stories (e.g., newcomer students in the U.S. and Zapotec students in Oaxaca, México), is that there is a real sense of engagement and appreciation displayed by students when they have this opportunity. Others, such as García and Gaddes (2012), have documented similar engagement and identity development impacts from asking students to become authors and to examine “issues of race, power, voice, and linguistic identity through the use of culturally authentic literature” (p. 143). We see this as an important step toward providing instructional equity and educational opportunities where students' whole selves and funds of knowledge are acknowledged and celebrated.

### ***Instructional Equity***

The ESS Routine's story structure pedagogy is one example in a growing body of literature around instructional equity (IE; Faggella-Luby, 2022). The hallmark of this approach is rooted in person-centered planning, acknowledging student funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), experiences, and skills. IE mediates learning by meeting students where they are, setting shared instructional goals, and engaging them in skill development through mediated experiences of learning such as guided practice, independent practice, and timely feedback. These features are synonymous with many models of instruction, including explicit instruction (e.g., Scheuermann et al., 2009) and direct instruction (e.g., Coyne et al., 2009).

Though considered an evidence-based practice, the ESS Routine efficacy had previously lacked examination of outcomes for ABLE students, including children learning internationally (outside the U.S.). Moreover, while previous studies included a variety of types of narrative stories, no efforts were made to draw from multiethnic authors that reflect the lived experiences of participants. Finally, the ESS Routine had only provided a structure for writing a summary of read stories and as a literacy intervention, had not been used as a scaffold for writing narrative texts exploring student lived experiences. Our current study addresses almost all of the limitations of previous studies on the instructional equity (IE) effectiveness of the ESS Routine.

The international and novel context of a rural community-based summer camp in Central México and the use of the bilingual ESS Routine as a scaffold for writing insider stories about students' lived experiences adds multiple dimensions that were previously not assessed. And although the campers in our study were not ABLE students, attending U.S. schools, they were all active bilingual learners/users of English (ABLE) students who participate in the Mexican public education system's English as a foreign language program that starts in kindergarten in all public schools. Finally, all 40 of the multiethnic children's books used as mentor texts for insider stories, in our current study, were Spanish/English dual-language books. Exposure to these books prompted many campers to attempt to also write bilingual narratives about the immigration and intercultural competency themes. We believe that our study could be replicated in other contexts and begin to inform what a similar intervention would look like in U.S. schools, with ABLE students.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

The brief amount of time to interact with the campers (four days) placed considerable constraints on potential pedagogical and research activities. Knowing that we really only had three full, 55-minute sessions, plus around 30 minutes on the fourth day, that also included a certificate ceremony, we were strategic in carving-up our time with the campers to include the rich storytelling, magic, and ESS Routine intervention strategies. However, this only left about 15-20 minutes of actual individual writing time each day. Reflecting upon what we would have done differently, if we had more time, and reflecting upon how others might replicate this study with more time, we have identified several specific modifications. First, by extending course time we would suggest allowing for more individual writing, such as sandwich writing (individual writing, sharing out, and more individual writing/revising). This strategy would also promote more engagement with the bilingual, children's books, as mentor texts. Due to our limited time during the summer camp, students were exposed to the thematic, bilingual books, through their own volition and through our before and after class encouragement. Purposefully building in time for read-alouds with these books, sandwiched between individual writing time, would provide for richer discussions around and learning about these themes. Lewis (2022) contextualizes the use of mentor texts in this way as "tools for recognizing and affirming biliterate identities, responding to texts by taking a stance, and the re-cognizing of social issues to create alternative figured worlds" (p. 14). Finally, due to the brief interaction with the campers, we believe that choosing the themes, ahead of time, for the insider stories was the right choice. However, for future studies with more interaction time with participants, we would suggest expanding thematic options and/or opening-up student choices for themes. Through the use of different mentor texts, such as stories about Indigenous communities and languages in México, students may find interest in other themes that reflect their own lived experiences.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Overall, 73 youth in Central México went to a community-based summer camp to hang out with friends and have fun. They left as “published” *Autores y Escritores* of their own, insider-written stories. Their stories, left to be permanent contributions to the educational center library, now become the new community knowledge, the new examples of literature, the new ways of understanding complex concepts, such as immigration and intercultural competency. We do not believe that they saw themselves at the end of the camp, the same way that they did at the beginning. A twinkle of pride in their eyes, as they placed their books upon the library shelves, tells its own story.

Leveraging storytelling (oracy) for literacy development, opens-up opportunities for holistic language use, or the translanguaging needed for ABLE students to successfully show what they know in U.S. schools. It is without a doubt that they have their own, insider stories of their lived experiences. This kind of practice, as documented in this current study, also facilitates an important differentiation of instruction for students with disabilities. To tell stories is a basic and primary human act. As literacy teachers and researchers, we should want to tap into this ability and harness its power in our own classrooms.

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## Author Bios

**Steve Daniel Przymus, Ph.D.**, is an Associate Professor of Educational Linguistics at Texas Christian University (TCU). Dr. Przymus teaches courses in TESOL, Bilingual Education, Bilingual Special Education, and Sociolinguistics. Dr. Przymus is a former middle school and high school Spanish and English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher and has lived and worked in the United States, la República Dominicana, and México. Dr. Przymus' work has recently been published in *The Reading Teacher*, *The International Journal of Multicultural Education*, *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, and the *International Journal of Identity, Language, & Diversity*

**Michael Faggella-Luby, Ph.D.**, is a Professor of Special Education at Texas Christian University (TCU). He is also the Past-President of the Division for Learning Disabilities of the Council for Exceptional Children. Dr. Faggella-Luby teaches courses related to special education, literacy, and instructional methods for academically diverse learners. Dr. Faggella-Luby is a former high school administrator and teacher of both English and Chemistry. Dr. Faggella-Luby's work has recently been published in *Frontiers in Psychology*, *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*, and *The Reading Teacher*.