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RETHINKING LITERACY INSTRUCTION



**VOLUME EIGHT, ISSUE TWO
SUMMER 2023**

**SPECIAL THEMED ISSUE: THE MULTIETHNIC EXPERIENCE IN CHILDREN'S
AND YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE**

ISSUE CO-EDITORS: DR. TIFFANY A. FLOWERS AND DR. SEAN RUDAY

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CO-EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

DR. TIFFANY A. FLOWERS & DR. SEAN RUDAY

ISSUE CO-EDITORS

The purpose of this special theme issue was to publish new theoretical frameworks, models, and practice paradigms regarding multiethnic literature in the classroom. As co-editors, our goal was to delve into the ways in which multiethnic literature is used in classrooms and communities. As literacy researchers, we define multiethnic literature as authentic books written by informed insiders of an ethnic group (Walker-Dalhouse, 1992). Our expectation was that we would receive manuscripts which focus on grassroots community engagement initiatives (Flowers, 2020) related to implementing authentic texts with varied representations. We opened our call up to include research from educational sites not often featured within the research literature such as Saturday schools, community-based programs, summer enrichment programs, tutoring programs, community education programs, university-school partnerships, online learning communities, book clubs, communities in schools' programs, adult education programs, prison programs, Even Start, Head Start, library programs, charter schools, private schools, and public schools. Additionally, we wanted this issue to delve into both traditional and nontraditional inquiries and methodologies from various disciplines which could include literary analysis, content analysis, critical analysis, action research, critical race theories, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, survey research, cross-cultural, critical ethnography, longitudinal, mixed methods, and descriptive research.

Drawing on the pivotal work of noted scholars within the field of literacy (Bishop, 2001; Harris, 1997; Henderson, 2005; Martin, 2004; Moll et. al, 1992) we challenged our authors to build on the existing research within the field to ensure the research line regarding multiethnic literature within the field remains in the forefront. As earlier scholars note, the importance of ensuring that children have authentic texts within the field of literacy and exposure to various storylines can help children develop a lifelong love of reading. Since the start of the pandemic, there have been repeated challenges to diverse texts within the headlines. As we navigate book challenges within the 21st century, it is imperative that we ensure the texts children interact with daily provide both representation and authenticity.

This special theme issue highlights work set in communities which include multiethnic children's literature. In *The Magic of Insider Autores y Escritores: Youth Story Tellers as Authors in a Rural Mexican Community-Based Summer Program*, Dr. Przymus and Dr. Fagella-Luby center Latinx-authored bilingual textbooks with children at a community-based summer camp. In the article, *A Picture Says a Thousand Words and Texts Uncover Myriad Images* by Dr. Iyengar, she uncovers unsettling realities regarding books published in India for children. *Among the Mosaics: Values of Being from Ibi Zoboi's Black Enough* by Dr. Murray examines nuanced storylines within Young Adult literature for Black and Brown teens in America.

We anticipate this special theme issue will be of great importance to various fields and disciplines. The research-based projects in this issue provide a window into the level of commitment, creativity, and rich research experiences in regards to investigating multiethnic literature for children.

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Co-Editor Biographies

Dr. Tiffany A. Flowers is an associate professor of education at Georgia State University Perimeter College in the department of cultural and behavioral sciences. She has authored publications focused on her research interests in African American literacy development, family literacy, urban education, children's and young adult literature, field experience, and the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Dr. Sean Ruday is a professor and the program coordinator of English education at Longwood University. He is particularly interested in inclusive and equitable teaching in the English classroom. He has written 16 books for educators, all published by Routledge Eye on Education.

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

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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

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-

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

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*

Topic	Books/Authors
Immigration	<p> 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) </p>
Intercultural Competency	<p> 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) </p>

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 Ruiz² 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:

² 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.

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

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)*.³ 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.

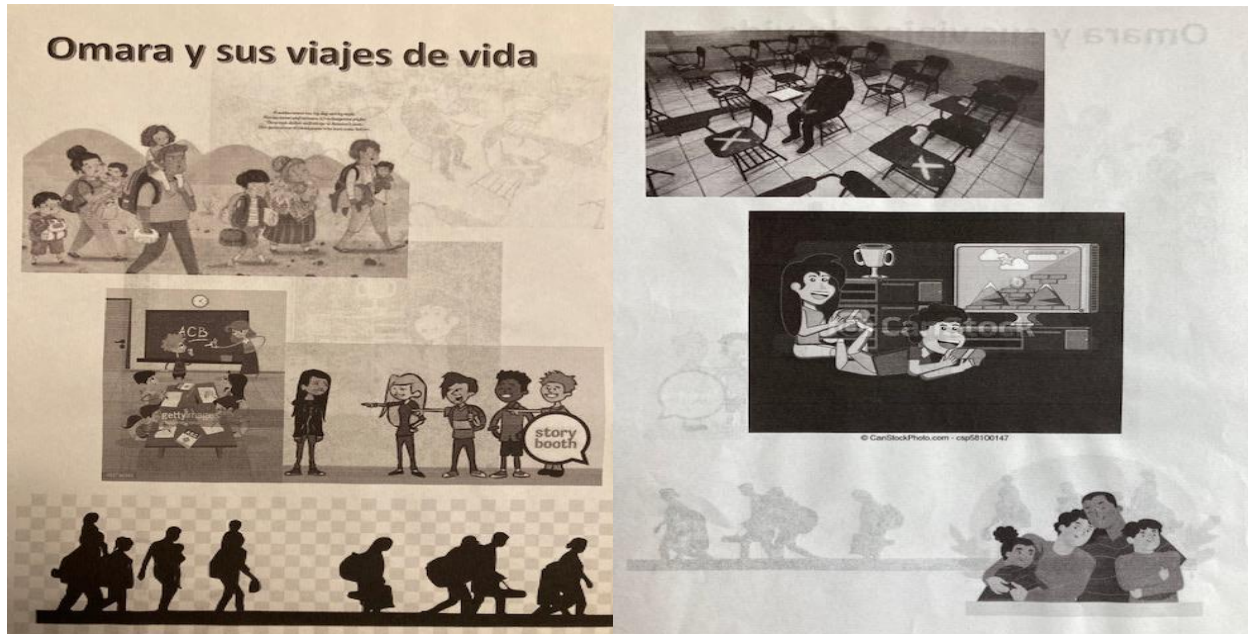
Because Team 1 was assigned to the high school group (ages 14-17) of summer camp youth, it was decided that it would be most appropriate for this group to work with the sensitive topic of immigration. Team 1 developed a story, entitled “Omara y los viajes de vida” (Omar and her life journeys), about 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

³ 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).”

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 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

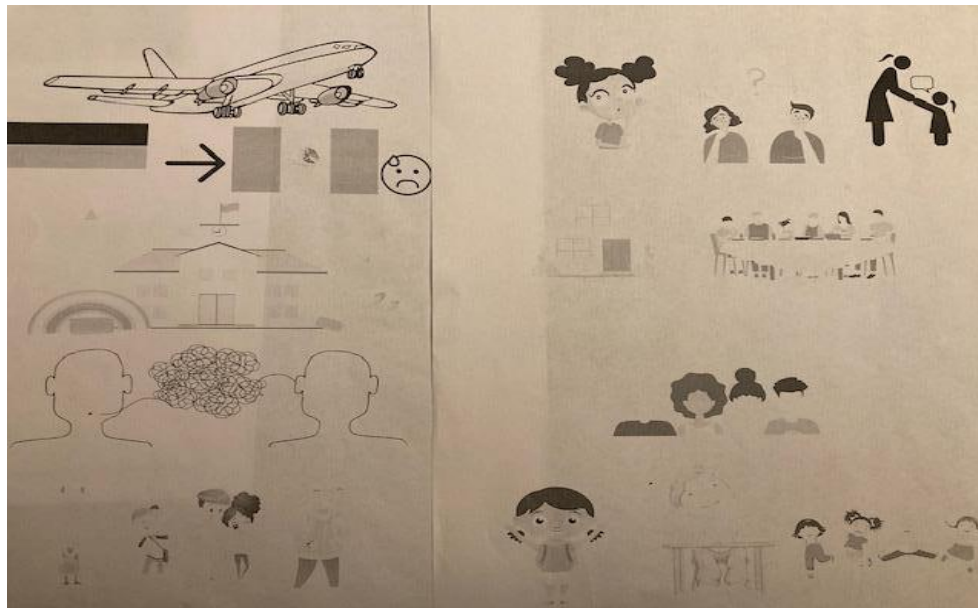
Wordless picture book “Omara y los viajes de vida,” used for the immigration theme



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 12th 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

Day 1

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

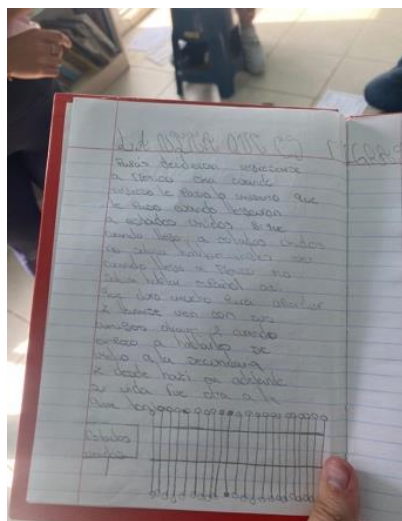
Overview of Insider Youth Autores y Escritores

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 Aventura 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.

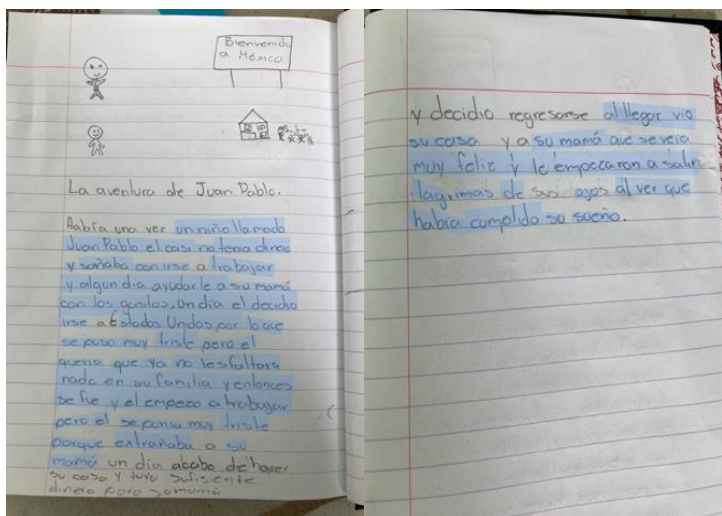
Image 8

Girl who crosses the border wall twice



Images 9 & 10

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

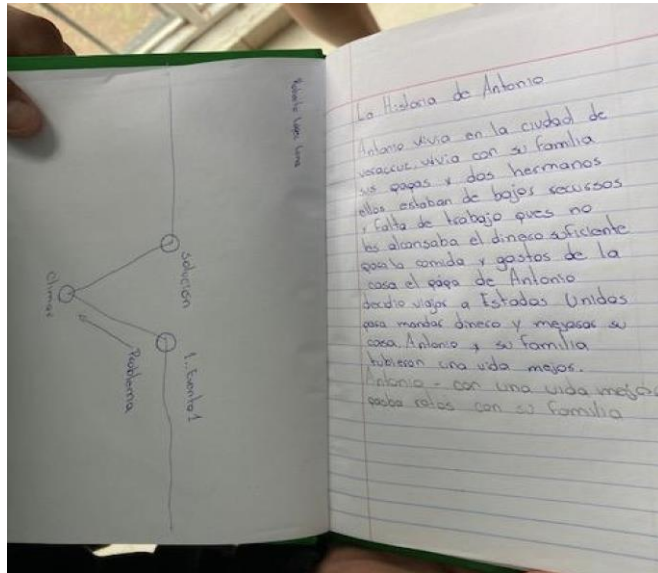


Writing these stories was greatly influenced and informed by the students using the Embedded Story Structure (ESS) Routine. Image 11 shows an ESS story picture (setting, conflict,

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



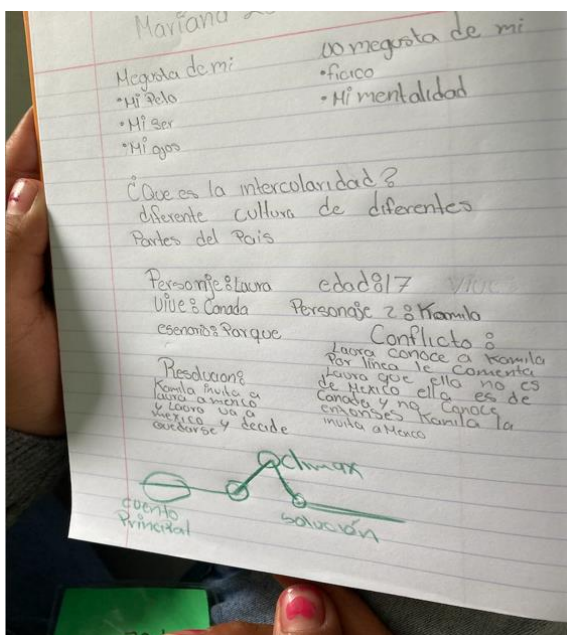
Translation: "The Story of Antonio"

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

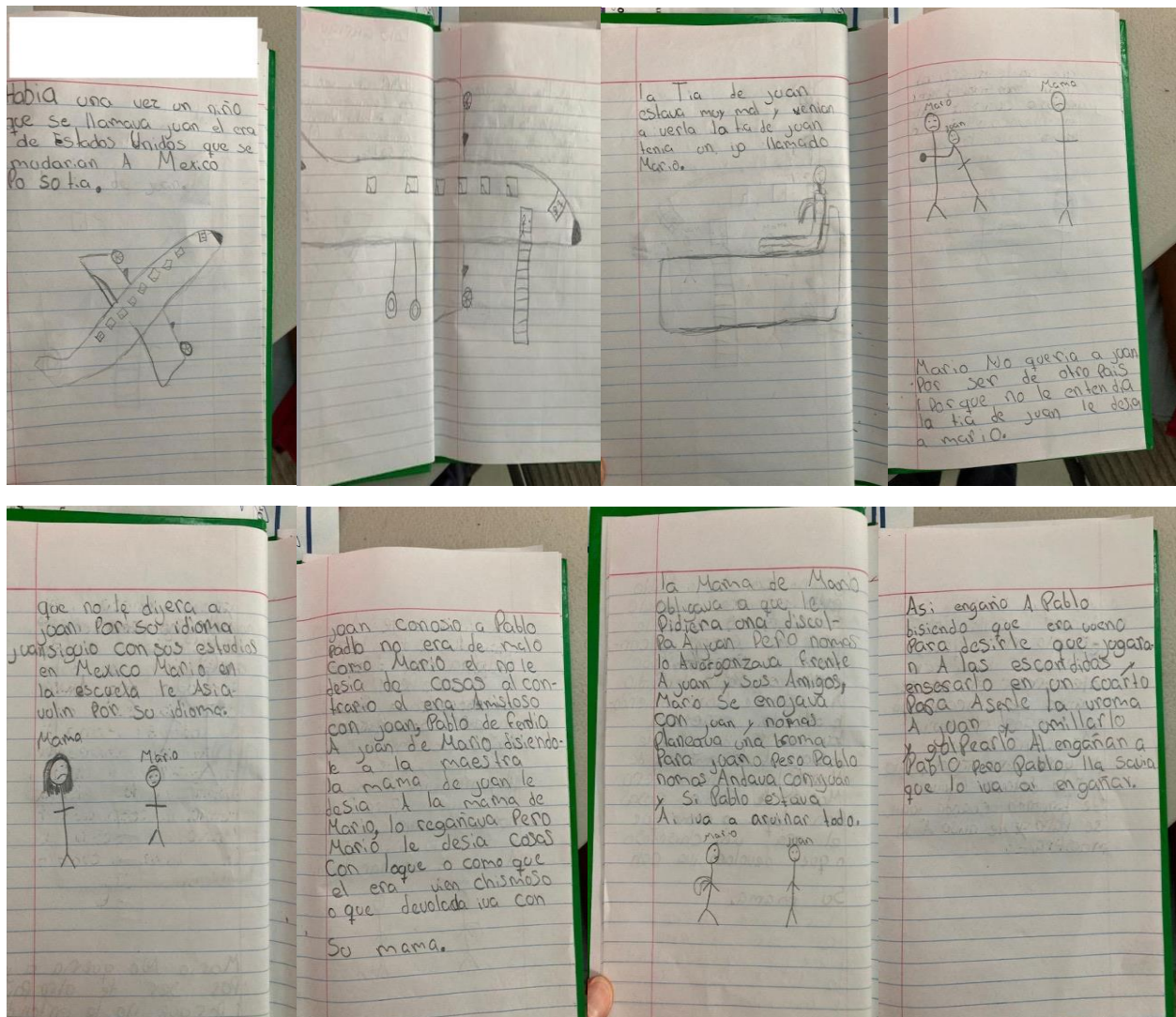
Conflict: Laura meets Kamila online and learns that she is not from Mexico, but from Canada. Kamila moves to Mexico.

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*⁴ 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

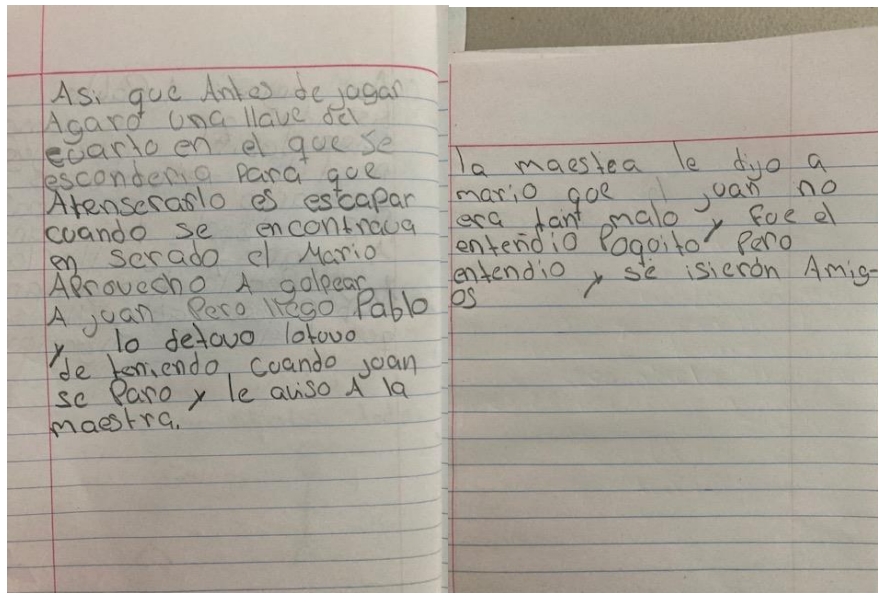
First 8 pages of complete story about intercultural competency development



⁴ 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

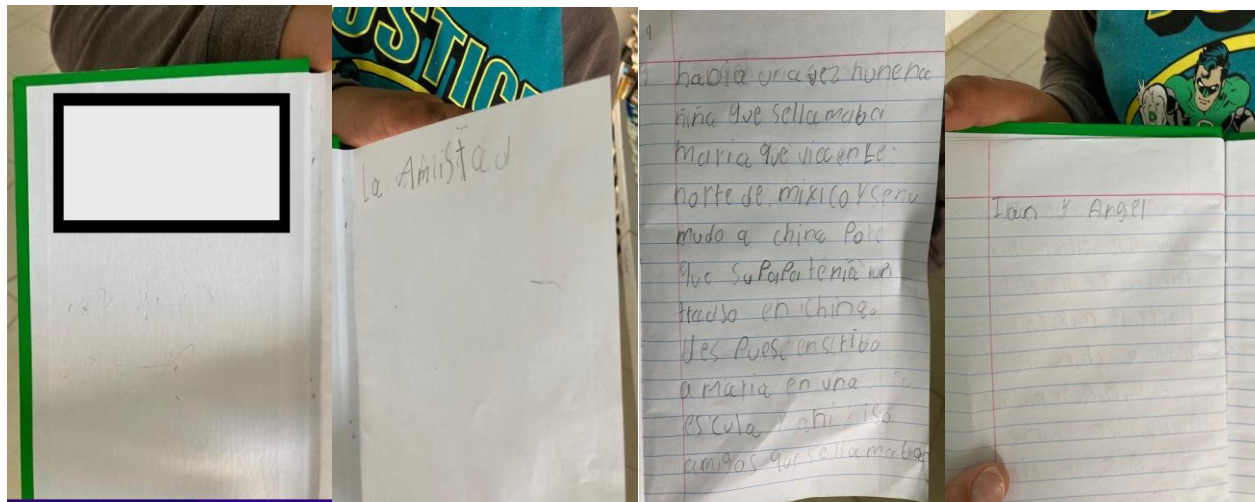
Manuel

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.

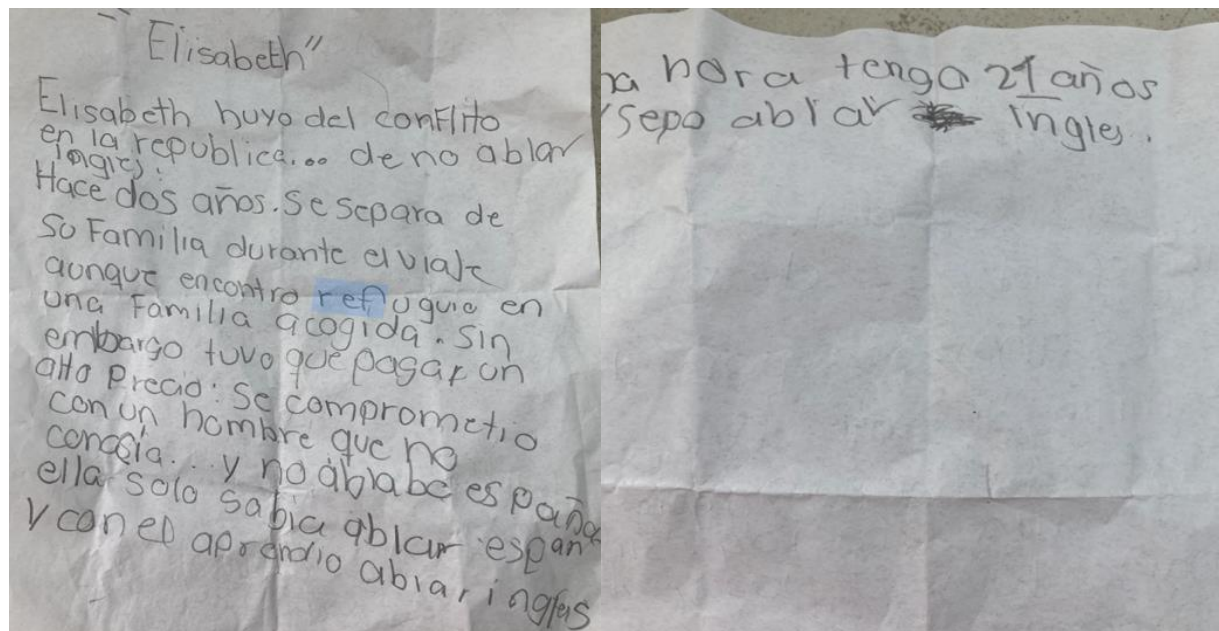
Amelia

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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A PICTURE SAYS A THOUSAND WORDS AND TEXTS UNCOVER MYRIAD IMAGES

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Abstract

Multicultural children's literature (MCCL) (e.g., picture books) may be trivialized as a pedagogical resource to teach young children literacy skills and other important aspects of culture, language, and literacy. The research literature reports a dearth of authentic representation of images, discourses, ambience, and other cultural aspects that fortifies Indian children's identity construction. While often undervalued, MCCL is an effective literary tool for children to develop deeper understanding of their heritage (Galda & Short, 1993). This exploration examined and analyzed six picture books published in India. Illustrated MCCL is a new genre, especially for literacy educators in India. There is a lack of publishing houses that print authentic picture books available to educators and parents. The review through *Critical Visual Discourse Analysis* indicates that the representation of characters through images in MCCL would affirm children's literacy development, healthy ethnic identity construction and social skills.

Keywords: Asian (i.e., East) Indian, Authenticity, *Critical Visual Discourse Analysis*, literacy, picture books

A Picture Says a Thousand Words and Texts Uncover Myriad Images

Introduction

Individuals from a cultural group share common experiences. They create artifacts, embrace their traditional knowledge systems (e.g., Indic-centric) (Venkat, 2021), and have ways of living that include rituals of worship and other cultural activities. People have unique heritage and cultural practices that they aspire to teach their children. The students in our classrooms represent a variety of manifestations of society. If we offer an education that is not inclusive of multiple cultures, the mainstream will bolster the school curriculum with biases and perspectives of dominant group, which disadvantages children from diverse and minoritized groups. Smith et al, (2016) posit that "children's literature can have a lasting effect on young readers" (p. 25). Further, Saha (2007) documents the rationale for over emphasis of canonical literatures and its

detrimental impact on multiculturalism, “over the years, it became evident that there was an inherent inaccuracy in reading, analyzing, and teaching [multicultural] texts in the same way as I did Western writers” (p. 2).

An important component of equitable instruction is authentic MCCL. Several researchers in the area of children's books (e.g., Bishop, 2011; Harris, 2008; Möller, 2016; Smith, 2016) have called attention to potential weaknesses in these books. Harris (2007) posits that the shortcomings are profuse in children's literature. The genre of picture books as a pedagogical tool is new in India (Beckett, 2021). Illustrated children's literature, which portrays people's lived experiences in books is beneficial and contributes to their academic and emotional growth. Such materials engage learners through representations of familiar characters, relatable issues, and culturally relevant stories. Multimodal, multicultural curricular materials offer the added advantage of stimulating a broad set of Indic-centric epistemologies and world views.

According to Scarborough and Dobrich (1994), picture books facilitate literacy development in young children. Such books support vocabulary development, culturally appropriate rhetoric, pragmatics, and syntax. Although illustrated books (i.e., comic books) have been utilized for storytelling by the various communities in India, such books focus on classical plays (e.g., *Abhijnana Shakuntala*, *Nala Damayanti*), history (e.g., *Cholas*, *Hoysalas*, *Pandyas*), mythology and the religious epics (e.g., *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*) (Khanduri, 2010; McLain, 2009). Several other scholars (c.f., Bus, et al. 1995; Parikh, 2022; Snow, et al., 1998) concur with this proposition.

It is an established conclusion that children benefit from pictorial representations of people and images in books. Greenhoot et al. (2014) study revealed the cognitive benefits of visual representation of characters in books. Similarly, Levin (1981) surveyed the perceptions of children and their relationships with pictures in language skills enhancement. A word of caution is that not all picture books are encouraging to the readers. Pictographic representation alone is insufficient, but it must be authentic depiction.

Literature Review

Piaget's (Huitt & Hummel, 2003) 'Age and Stage' theory suggests that children form opinions beginning at age three onwards. Additionally, scholars (c.f., Aday, et al., 1996; Rich, et al., 1983) also found that children develop an understanding of adults depending how the child is introduced to people from a young age. Isaacs and Bearison (1986) advance that elementary school children are capable of surmising what adults are based on how the books present the adults. Robinson et al. (2007) conclude, “Because negative representations and stereotypes in media productions targeting young children can influence perceptions, exposure to media images and portrayals during a young child's formative years can leave indelible impressions that are carried into adulthood” (pp. 204–205). Therefore, illustrators must be intentional when caricaturing images of people, so they resemble real people and not fictionalized, romanticized, exoticized, or distorted versions.

In reference to the possible psychological effects, illustrations may stimulate children. Schwarcz (1982) discusses *visual literacy* (a term defined by Sinatra, 1986) as “the active reconstruction of

past visual experience with incoming information to obtain meaning” (p. 57). Schwarcz (1982) further argues that repeated visual stimuli found within images hold substantiation in the development and construction of ideas. Defined as the *cumulative effect*, illustrated books serve as a directing force of “humanization” for young children, “such is the nature of the superior aesthetic message that it influences the whole child... it develops [the child's] self-perception and his [/her] comprehension of the world he [/she] lives in, his [/her] ability to understand his [/her] own intimate experience and to relate more meaningfully to others” (p. 195).

In accordance to Schwarcz’s (1982) assertion, the influence of picture books holds far greater value than simple entertainment or for educational purposes. Illustrated books have the ability to “direct children's perceptions of reality” (p. 546). Young children’s understanding of images represented in picture books have been documented by several scholars (c.f.; Roedler, 1998; Schwarcz and Schwarcz, 1991).

Visual Literacy: Semantics

Galda and Short (1993) discuss how art is a medium through which children learn about their world. Picture books are visual representation of people and the world that children live. Young people understand the social perception of reality through visuals including movies, multimedia, and other genres of books (e.g., picture books). Shrum and O' Guinn’s (1993) analysis merits the claim that children acquire literacy skills through picture books. However, these visually stimulating books can help children form new knowledge about people, biases, and other implicit stereotypes if the images are not carefully crafted into the book. Images can predict children’s perception of people and place, etc. (Bishop & Krause, 1984; Robinson & Anderson, 2006; Robinson et al., 2007). If images are presented in a stereotypical manner, then children construct negative images of others. For example, if people of color are characterized as “lazy”, “unintelligent,” “and ugly,” children’s perception of people of color will be comparable to that model presented in the book students read.

Multicultural Children’s Literature: Characteristics

Children’s books are an exceptional genre for young learners to acquire Cultural Rhetorical Knowledge (Iyengar, in press), learn code of conduct, and develop a worldview, etc. Illustrations help children form first impression about the story and have a better impact on children (Chen & Chan, 2019; Rabago-Mingoa, 2009). In addition, “when reading images, we are looking for recognizable external tokens of emotions, because this is how we use theory of mind in real life” (Nikolajeva, 2013).

Words also help enhance literacy development, especially in emergent readers (Nuemann, 2018). Stewig (1980) proposed three ways picture books can impact learning in children. The three areas are – (1) language input, (2) visual input, and (3) catalyst for orality. Children master language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, writing [LSRW]) through vocabulary enhancement and images can facilitate meaning making of the illustrations. Visual cues enable children to decipher meaning and also invent ideas about the story. Finally, for children who come from oral story telling cultures (e.g., China, India, Korea), depictions of plot points in a story provide ideas for discussion. The rationale for these traits in picture books is to address the

affective/emotional needs of children; especially those from under-represented groups (e.g., Asian Indian).

Further, Sipe (2008) also lists the following characteristics in picture books:

1. Authentic and believable details with age-appropriate discourse
2. Truthful setting with natural 'habitus' represented
3. Real images that venerate lived experiences of people
4. Information based on insiders' perspective and not exoticized, disparaged, or biased/stereotyped
5. Rudine Sims Bishop's concept of how narratives must be interesting to children inside of the culture
6. Social issues described using multiple viewpoints and not that of the mainstream

Additionally, Nikolajeva and Scott (2006) recognize five essential ways how illustrations and discourse enhance the story in a book. Text-picture congruence is the first criterion. The images and the description must be aligned so the child can make sense of the story through exploring both of the modalities. The second trait is the relationship between the script and the pictures used in the book. The images and words must work concomitantly to fill in any missing ideas in the story. The third value lies in the significance of the pictures and the description of the visuals. Details must be convergent to the illustrations and not divergent. *Counterpoint*, one of the crucial elements, affords readers with the ability to expatiate on the story for better understanding of the plot points. Finally, *Contradiction*, may mislead the readers to misconstrue the story. Further, Nodelman (1988) argues that:

The pictures 'illustrate' the texts - that is, they purport to show us what is meant by the words, so that we come to understand the objects and actions the words refer to in terms of the qualities of the image that accompany them - the world outside the book in terms of the image within it (p.131).

Positive Attributes in MCCL

Research (c.f., Ansello, 1997; Darling, et al., 2020) also credentials the benefits of positive depictions of female characters such as strong, intelligent, and literate women. These attributes may aid in children's insights of women as models and as contributing members of their communities. In addition, the location (e.g., market, garden) contributes to the sense of an "Indian ethos." Perhaps, most important is the perspective (e.g., mother's concern) or Indic-centric worldview (e.g., divine intervention, Karma).

Other aspects that help children venerate their heritage are - cultural artifacts (e.g., clothing, jewelry), performing arts (e.g., *Bharatanatyam*, *Carnatic* music), nature (e.g., flora [*Tulasi*]/fauna [Bengal tiger]) or natural wonders (e.g., rivers [*Ganga*, *Kaveri*]). There are also human-made constructions (forts [Red fort]), iconic architecture and structures (e.g., Belur Temple, Taj Mahal, *Vidhana Soudha*) and notable people from the culture (Indira Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, Shakuntala Devi). As children are introduced to members of their cultural community, they are more likely

to develop positive cultural/ethnic identity. These visual components, when integrated into MCCL, help to establish authentic representation.

To encourage learning and enhance literacy development, authentic images and culturally affirming representation must be considered in picture books. Educators struggle to locate authentic materials that celebrate diverse cultures and incorporate minoritized groups in meaningful and respectful ways (Adam, 2021; Gunn, et al., 2021). The lack of publishing house that prints authentic books is also an additional pitfall in India.

Culturally Efficacious Practices

Flores and Smith (2009) have articulated the difficulties even experienced teachers have when addressing cultural diversity. Therefore, compiling a children's bibliography of culturally inclusive titles and culturally efficacious pedagogical practices is challenging. Moreover, culturally sustaining instruction can be achieved through:

- (1) Inclusion of images and themes outside of the mainstream
- (2) Acknowledging difficulties and victories experienced outside of the mainstream and
- (3) Integrating culturally affirming activities to counter hegemony.

While not an exhaustive list, the above criteria are necessary components of culturally efficacious pedagogy (Gist, et al., 2021). Judiciously selected books represent the children's cultures authentically meaningfully, and faithfully that render the books real and relatable to children.

Stereotypical Representations

Research documents the adverse effects of negative representation of people on children. For example, Anderson and Hamilton's (2005) findings on how fathers, "significantly under-represented and presented as unaffectionate and indolent in terms of feeding, carrying babies, and talking with children," (p. 149) can impact the children's perception of a father's role in the family. Old people are also misrepresented in books. Instead of focusing on the wisdom or their life experiences for mentorship, aged people are characterized as demanding, sick, ailing, differently-abled, and waiting to die (McGuire, 1993). Seniors are portrayed as needy and insignificant people. Instead of directing our attention to the wisdom and the richness seniors bring to the younger generation, old people are considered not important or burdensome in children's lives.

Hyper representation of boys as thinkers and intellectual beings and depiction of girls as the mere holders of domestic chores, child rearing, and other tasks associated with hospitality is an unjust portrayal. Non-leadership roles is an extreme case of marginalization and have questionable effects in young children. Absence of women in certain areas (e.g., STEM, politics) is unjust to women and such an absence can be detrimental to the construction of professional identity in young girls (Allen, et al., 2021; Nkrumah, 2021). Girls may internalize this notion and not want to aspire to achieve in life and internalize subservience. According to McCabe and

Newhouse (2014), “these stories of inability, inferiority, and immorality become institutionalized, [fossilized], they become ideology” (p. 3).

Flawed, Deficient Depiction of People

Multimedia including television is a popular domain that influences children’s perceptions of people. Singnorielli and Kahlenberg (2001) hypothesize that characters are stereotypically depicted in the media. Research also documents the deficient depiction of women (Adella & Irawan, 2020), old people (Crawford & Bhattacharya, 2014), LGBTQ (Forni, 2021), differently-abled (Sotirovska & Vaughn, 2022; Tondreau & Rabinowitz, 2021) are featured as people with weaknesses or pathological in society.

Furthermore, Gooden and Gooden (2001) posit that gender misrepresentation is a prevalent issue in picture books. This misrepresentation manifests itself in various insidious ways. For example, gender role stereotyping, genderized occupations, exclusion of women, function of women as adornment are the various deficit ways (Milner, 2008) that women are represented in books that young children may read. Women “virtually vanish from the screen in major, positive, and powerful roles. They tend to be both underrepresented and over victimized, isolated, infirm, and often ridiculed” (Gerbner, 1997, p. 93). Concurrently, Signorielli (1983) argued that women are, “more likely to be unsuccessful than successful and, when involved in violence, were much more likely to be hurt than to hurt others” (pp. 110–111). Women are also characterized as abusers and victims of abuse.

Although another body of research presented positive images of women, who offered mentorships to the young readers, women are not caricatured as successful and independent. For example, intergenerational bonding was depicted through images and discourse (Shamsabadi, et al., 2022). Women are assigned with roles that allude to nurturing, child rearing, nursing, and care-takers. There is a lack of representation of women, especially women of colour, as professionals and educated, contributing members of communities (Bazner, et al., 2021).

Symbolic Violence, Microaggression

The acts of symbolic violence and micro aggression comprise harmful characteristics including stereotyping, linguisticism (e.g., classism, misrepresentation, disparaging monikers [name calling]), exoticizing, “othering,” and derision through inauthentic, inappropriate, or insulting images along with corrosive discourse. This is just as true in MCCL as in Bollywood movies. All materials including multimedia influence children.

For example, the aesthetics of skin color and social stigma within the Asia Indian community is well established (Bhogal-Nair & Lindridge, 2021; Khanna, 2020; Peters, 2021). Pigmentology and colorism, pervasive throughout minoritized groups, refers to the attitude that individuals with brown or darker skin color are inferior. Putative traits of darker-skinned individuals include less intelligence, untrustworthy, poor hygiene, uncivilized, or less desirable than those with lighter skin tones (Jablonski, 2021).

Singh and Azeez (2021) document how Dalits (i.e., people from lower caste) are misrepresented in movies. Roy (2016) and Bhat (2019) describe the misrepresentations of ethnicities and their hierarchy in Indian movies. While Roy (2016) focuses on caste system, Bhat (2019) and Li and Zhang (2022) discuss the depiction of Muslims as terrorists in Bollywood movies. Such negative portrayal may prove to be detrimental to children's perception of certain groups of people in society.

Method of Assessment

The goal of this project was to assess, a-priori, the authenticity of depicting images, ambience, discourse, and setting of Indian people in selected MCCL. In order to locate configurations of the characteristics mentioned above, I developed a coding table. The descriptors from the table were utilized to assess authenticity of representation of images and discourse. Standards applied to assess the picture books (i.e., features such as images, ambience, and discourse) failed to document the voids that I noticed as I perused, posteriori, the features in the six selected books. Content analysis studies (Dellmann-Jenkins & Yang, 1997; Hummert, Garstka, Shaner, & Strahm, 1994; Robinson & Anderson, 2006; Robinson et al., 2007) supported the classification of themes in this study. The environment was authentically depicted so children would recognize the social milieu. Discourse was appropriate to the community the various people belonged to.

However, I noticed disturbing language (both verbal and body) when certain marginalized groups were presented in these selected books. I surmise it may be the same with several other publications. Through conducting content analysis, I quickly realized that the six books chosen for exploration embedded social ills that would send disturbing messages to children. Hence the books merited Critical Visual Discourse Analysis.

Visual Discourse Analysis (VDA)

Albers, Holbrook, and Flint (2014) define VDA as “decoding and understanding the meaning of visuals and what they were intended to represent as well as how the audience interprets them” (p. 95). As we obtain cultural representation through images, situations, or discourse in picture books, if the text is not respectful, that telegraphs negative messages to children who read these books. My intention is to confront authenticity and representation of images and discourse in MCCL through VDA in this article. Mere inclusion of images and authentic *habitus* do not exclude disparagement and conveying hurtful, harmful messages to children.

Discussion

I offer an iteration of VDA (i.e., Critical VDA) as an analytic, where I focus on the perilous elements in images and discourse in selected MCCL published in India (the books are also available in the States). For the purpose of this analysis, I offer disrespectful images, disparaging language, and discriminatory genderized roles as portrayed and described respectively in the following six picture books: (1) *The Boy Who Asked Why*, (2) *My Name Is Gulab*, (3) *Gajapati Kulapati*, (4) *Henna on My Hands*, (5) *Jokhu and The Big Scare* and (6) *Srinivasa Ramanujam: Friends of Numbers*.

Social Class (Mis)representation

One of the purposes of reading MCCL is to obtaining cultural representation through images, situations, and discourse in the books children read. If the text is not respectful in depicting people from a particular group, it may become tarnish children's perception of people. The image on one of the pages from the book, *My Name is Gulab*, evokes unpleasant feelings about a particular class (or caste) in society. The man featured on the page is sad and dirty with mud splattered all over his body. He is not portrayed in a dignified way and children may presume that all people from this caste are unhappy and unclean like the man in the picture. The illustrator went beyond suggesting that the man was dirty by embellishing his skin to the point where uncleanliness is a major component of the visual identity.

For example, the man's hair and moustache are the color of the dirt. The artist specifically chose the color to compare with the dirt. The image evidences the indecent depiction of a man, who cleans gutters, as unclean, unhappy, and smelly. As a product of Critical Visual Analysis, this character is presented as physically dirty and for that reason, he is meritorious of dispersion from society. The paralinguistic features exacerbate the unpleasant situation. Such images transfer disrespectful and less than popular ideas of people from certain communities.

Textual Analysis: The comparison to the machine that Gulab designed to replace her father is an example of linguisticism (i.e., linguistic racism). This discrimination based on language or dialect is evidenced here - *so it [the machine that cleans gutters] is just like your baba (father)*. Gulab's words, *it is not like my baba. My baba has feelings and the machine doesn't*, is an attempt to humanize her father, who was commodified by the bully.

Social Inequality

Another book that describes a famous *Dalit* (marginalized) leader from India (Dr. B.R. Ambedkar) is called *The Boy Who Asked Why?* I examined one of the pages that introduced children from the lower caste with disparaging and less than enthusiastic language. The book offers an example of a teachable moment around caste system and inequality. The train station is dirty, but the station-master is wearing white clothes. White color, in this context, symbolizes authoritative role that the man holds and it is also a sign of hegemony, whereas the other people standing near the train are wearing colored clothes. White connotes power, position, and highest caste (i.e., Brahmin). The visual white, while khaki is the assumed color for uniforms in India, is the mismatch in the image provided on the page. The white color is also representative of socio-political power or social inequality. As a cultural insider, using a familiar cultural lens, I view everything on the page that is darker except the station master, as a misrepresentation and power structure that exists in that society. In addition, the station master's hand position signifies distancing.

Textual Analysis: The language or discourse is equally reproachful. The words exemplify disrespect, "casteism," and abhorrence (e.g., *untouchable children!*). The authority figure's change in attitude and disposition is captured well in this line. Hatred, here, is arbitrary, which is striking because the man himself lists all of the positive attributes of the children that were visible. Despite the obvious exemplary characteristics that the station master rightly commented

earlier, his disposition changed upon learning the caste the children belonged to. This is an indication of blatant attitudinal discrimination based on “casteism.” All of the positive tends to leave the man in power due to his hatred or bias to a particular caste in society.

Caste system in India is perceived as divine decision and hence individuals from the upper caste tend to justify their discriminatory acts towards people from lower castes. It is very difficult to surpass social stratification in India. In the hands of a skilled educator, the text can help children understand that discrimination is arbitrary and unfounded. Children tend to internalize the situations that they are put into, so teachers can help children understand that bigoted practices are indiscriminate and based on implicit bias. The lesson through the text, disparagement, may not be based on anything negative that the others have done, but based on the thinking of the other person who is engaged in discriminatory practice. Prejudice is based on opinions we form about people and ideas. The station master functions merely with his preconceived notions and utilizes slurs to offend the people from lower caste. Bach (2018) posits that, “slurs are loaded words...because their meanings add the property of implied contemptibility to that of group membership (p.16).

Gajapati Kulapati, an illustrated book, features a school teacher and a grandmother in one of the pages. These two characters are given different treatment by the illustrator. In one of the pages, the teacher is portrayed as an educated woman. Her sari is colorful, full length, and she is featured wearing footwear. On the other hand, the grandmother is featured in a disrespectful way. Her sari does not cover her legs and her midriff is showing, which is indicative of uncivilized manner of wearing the attire (i.e., sari). She is not wearing any shoes. Her hands are placed on the hips, which is a sign of cultural appropriation (Perfecto, 2019) and bossy nature. The overtly stereotypical “grandmother” from the Indic-centric background is featured as an uncouth, improper, and demanding woman. The facial expressions are also glaringly different between the women. The grandmother has an ugly, stern, and questionable face, while the teacher has a scholarly gait and a look of wisdom.

Textual Analysis: The grandmother’s comment, *all of you need a bath*, is judgmental. The teacher’s suggestion, *go to the pond*, suggests that she has book knowledge.

Depiction of Girls as “Fun-seeking” and Scary Characters

Many picture books feature girls as fun-loving and party-seeking individuals. They are not assigned with professional roles (e.g., engineers, professors, scientists) that are exemplary for the younger generation. The book titled; *Henna on My Hands* describes a young girl celebrating her henna painting on the cover page. The implicit happy girls are white girls. An additional problem with the representation of the girl is she does not have the Indian phenotype, but looks western. Her skin is lighter and her hair is almost brown. The lips are too wide and the teeth are smudged that is an unrealistic portrayal of a little girl. Such a depiction can instigate an inferiority complex in dark-skinned children (Ayub, 2021). It reinforces the notion of pigmentology, which may also interfere with child’s self-worth and have an effect on children’s psychological well-being.

Another unreal and scary character (Jokhu) is from the book, *Jokhu and The Big Scare*. The protagonist, a young girl is demonized with Dracula-like teeth and horns that are placed improperly on the hair throughout the book. The green eye colour is unrealistic and scary, especially to children. The hair is unruly and kinky that is not the authentic hair texture for an Indian character. Such exaggerated portrayal of people can mislead children and create discord. This illustration may also be pejorative to young women from African lineage.

Textual Analysis: *She sharpened her teeth* is not realistic and may misguide children about dentistry because humans cannot sharpen their teeth. It also insinuates that girls are likened to animals. *She sharpened her even longer claws* is suggestive of dysmorphic and inaccurate description of the body. The tangled, disheveled hair is suggestive of unruliness, ugliness, and dehumanization. Such descriptions also reinforce stereotypes around people of color. These images are negative and harmful to the child's cognitive development.

Boys as Thinkers and Intellectuals

In many illustrated books, boys are featured as thinkers and intellectuals. The book on the famous mathematician, *Ramanujan* features the young boy's aspiration to explore math concepts in everyday life. He is imagining numbers and patterns even in the bath water and the *temple gopuram* (i.e., steeple) in one of the pages. Such a promotion of concrete thinking through a boy's story can mislead young girls to thinking that only boys are capable of learning math.

Textual Analysis: The young lad here is depicted as a thinker and an intellect. ...*he would look up at the rows of gods and goddesses carved on the temple gopuram...there were patterns in them*, help explain Ramanujan's fascination with concepts. His imagination, *were there patterns in numbers too* is an indication of the young boy's preoccupation with mathematics. The illustration is a breach from the normal goings-on in a young child's life, especially as he passes the busy market place. Instead of looking at the eatables or toys, like most young children do, he is featured as a thinker.

Conclusion

This exploration advanced that authentic MCCL is an impactful and valuable resource that can be utilized in rigorous literacy instruction as it supports the development of social skills. MCCL is not for mere entertainment, but for educational purposes. Judiciously chosen MCCL will foster literacy development and publishing houses must be mindful of elements discussed in this chapter before printing this genre to help facilitate language learning in children. This paper suggests that educators should acquire additional awareness with regard to MCCL and how it can influence and impact children learning about their world through texts (i.e., script and images) (Smith, et al., 2016).

Children also experience unprecedented life events more than ever due to the pandemic (e.g., Covid), war-torn trauma (e.g., Russia-Ukraine attack), displacement (e.g., Mexico-U.S. Border human crisis), religious persecution (e.g., Rohingya Muslims fleeing). Gopalakrishnan (2011) claims, "Death, war, starvation, terror, violence- everything is part of children's literature now, as it is, unfortunately, a part of some children's lives" (p. 121). Positive, affirming, and

reassuring images and discourse in MCCL can help children gain confidence in their development of a healthy ethnic identity. In addition, authentic MCCL (i.e., script and image) communicates to young learners' cultural pride and respectful membership in society.

Implications

Teachers must be judicious in selecting MCCL to foster children's literacy development along with instilling cultural pride in young readers. Some of the ways MCCL can be integrated into classroom instruction are as follows:

1. Textual Connections (*text-to-self; text-to-text; and text-to-world*) (Readwritethink) is a strategy that teachers can utilize to help students understand and comprehend the books they read. Classroom practices should make textual connections. When teachers are in the process of selecting materials, they must choose texts that relate to children's lived experiences. Identifying another text that is similar in content of one text also aids in forming new knowledge. Educators can guide students to write (e.g., essay, newspaper, poetry, report) about world events that has been discussed in the text, so learners form an idea about the world they live in.
2. National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2016) recommends the *Race Related Teaching Practices* (RRTP) with children's literature. Current research discourages or disapproves a "color blind" approach to teaching about race related topics. Such an approach will not broaden learners' perspective and understanding. MCCL can be a resourceful tool to address sensitive/polemical issues. The book titled, *The Boy who Questioned Why?* can be utilized as a mentor text to introduce the topic of caste-like system in India.
3. Critical Reader Response (CRR) (Smith & Iyengar, in press) along with classic Reader Response (Rosenblatt, 1982) can enable teachers help children explore societal problems through the Language Arts. Social justice issues along with learning about people, places, and events presented in the books they read must be taught with intentionality. CRR is a strategy that enables teachers help children investigate controversial topics in the assigned books, so children can form/refine an opinion about topics that may be challenging to understand. MCCL can be utilized to teach children about microaggression and discriminatory practices in communities. One example is the book titled *My Name is Gulab*.
4. Teachers may focus on *Cultural Rhetorical Knowledge* (Iyengar, in press), where students, both insiders and outsiders, can learn about different cultures. Teachers can design activities based on elements that pertain to a particular cultural group as presented in the readings. One example is the book, *Srinivasa Ramanujam: Friends of numbers*. In order to develop a clearer understanding of culturally-based practices, teachers can leverage MCCL to teach CRK. This can be accomplished through writing using different rhetorical modes.

5. Higgins' (2010) criteria for evaluating MCCL is important for teachers to consider while selecting MCCL. In order to dispel or disrupt stereotypes and the perpetuation of pejorative thoughts, the writer suggests that teachers make use of matrices or an inventory. During the process of text selection, these points will ensure that the educator is choosing authentic materials. The various standards Higgins (2010) proposed include - (1) High Literary quality, (2) No distortions or omissions of history, (3) stereotyping, (4) loaded words, (5) Lifestyles, (6) Language/Dialogue, (7) Standards of Success, (8) The role of women, elders, and family, (9) Possible effects on a child's self-image, (10) Author's and/or illustrator's background, (11) Illustrations, (12) Relationships between characters from different cultures, (13) Leaders and S/Heroes.

Authentic (MCCL) (e.g., picture books) contributes to the academic and social development of learners. MCCL is a culturally relevant pedagogical tool that scaffolds children's development of a deeper understanding of their heritage and all members of society. Therefore, it is vital that teachers conduct an assessment of socially progressive MCCL before introducing it to children.

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AMONG THE MOSAICS: VALUES OF BEING FROM IBI ZOBOI'S *BLACK ENOUGH*

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Abstract

Black Enough (2019) edited by Ibi Zoboi is a collection of rich fictional short stories by prominent authors of children's and young adult (YA) literature whose backgrounds have been traditionally silenced, underrepresented or misrepresented. The stories engage diverse and many nuanced ways in which the "Black Experiences" of American youths exist in contrast to problematic monoliths. The key question being answered is: how by reading YA literature centered on diverse lives and perspectives of Black and Brown youths in America, readers can better access nuanced narratives, actionable plans and contextualized values as they relate to their specific milieu?

Among the Mosaics: Values of Being from Ibi Zoboi's *Black Enough*

Introduction

Black Enough: Stories of Being Young and Black in America (2019), edited by Ibi Zoboi, is a collection of richly complex fictional short stories that engage with the diverse and many nuanced ways in which authenticity, agency, voice, identity and authorship participate in defining Blackness and the "Black Experience" for young people in the United States in twenty-first century. Zoboi's collection functions in contrast to widespread literary monoliths. These essentialist, overused tropes of blackness found in popular Western, British and American young adult (YA) literature exist outside of and through the canon. In addition, they continue to be reproduced in current YA literature that even become longstanding bestsellers.¹ Early resistance against these workings can be found in *The Brownies' Book* (1920-1921), a juvenile magazine produced by, for and about Black people.² The literary inheritance passed down from the Harlem Renaissance to the Civil Rights Movement to the ongoing Black Lives Matter global reach have

¹ See Ebony Elizabeth Thomas' *The Black Fantastic* for extended discussion.

² See Johnson-Feelings & McNair's (Eds.). *A Centennial Celebration of The Brownies' Book*, Brigitte Fielder's article "Before *The Brownies' Book*," and Michelle H. Martin's *Brown Gold* for historical overview and contextualization.

placed on their shoulders children's and YA authors such as Leah Henderson, Jason Reynolds, and Tracey Baptiste. These literary and cultural descendants, among fourteen others, come together in Zoboi's anthology to craft intersectional realities (Crenshaw, 1989) and imaginations that help readers to identify cultural values, pathways to authentic selves and challenges of placemaking while living and navigating as a young adult of the African Diaspora (Chandler, 2019). Writings explore diverse adolescent trajectories, center situational life narratives and draw on the processes of becoming that rely on personal agency. The authors of the anthology convey profoundly nuanced details of authentic needs, interests, sentiments and voices of real, living young people their fictional characters represent. Through each story, I locate strategies in managing conflict, elements that foster positive outcomes and boundaries negotiating personal comfort levels. Given the paucity of Black and Brown YA authors (Chandler, 2019), what I argue here is the importance of authors in this anthology and the variety of ways they are sketching aesthetically relevant guideposts for young adult readers which amplify the kaleidoscopes of "being," of "Blackness," of being "enough" in the twenty-first century United States.

In March 2021, book sales for YA literature rose 26%. The growth of YA literature from a long-term perspective runs contrary to the decline of other areas in book publishing (Fitzsimmons and Wilson, 2020, p. ix). Uniquely so, Black and Brown YA literature by Black and Brown authors as part of a recent and sustained growth trend in the publishing market should become more accessible (and varied) to wider audiences. YA literature has the potential to help break from past tropes of Blackness and amplify broad spectrums of storytelling centering Black and Brown adolescence. The stories gathered in Zoboi's anthology do this by highlighting diverse adolescent trajectories, centering various situational life narratives and drawing on the different processes of becoming that rely on young adult agency.

Third Space and Black YA Literature

Under the general theoretical framework of Third Space³ instead of thinking through positions of binaries, modes of consideration of literary works are developed from places of tension, ambiguity and otherness - an otherness that is created along the edges of zones of contact and intermingling. Hierarchical thinking becomes destabilized when critical readers recognize constant hybridities of becoming that implicate embedded heterogeneous interactions (Bhabha, 2004). This can take the form of empowerment, resistance, and alternative epistemologies recentering from the margins (hooks, 1994). However, deficit or damage-based thinking is also in tension with desire-based theorizing. Both possibilities can hold wisdom and hope (Tuck, 2009). Yet, desire-based frameworks, as Eve Tuck discusses, emerge from specific locations of knowledge production and "are concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (p. 416). In this manner, the "becomings" assembled in Zoboi's anthology, are examined - from a prospective that disrupts and depathologizes experiences of historically dispossessed and disenfranchised people. Historically and culturally,

³ Consider the various writings of Edward Said, Homi Bhaba, Guyatri Spivak, Gloria Alzandúa, and bell hooks. First Space can be considered the dominant culture and Second Space is the nondominant culture. Third Space therefore is the zone of contact of intermingling and hybridity.

Blackness exists in tension with Americanness as integral pieces to a diversified yet unified whole. It can also be considered that adolescence exists in tension with childhood and adulthood. The metaphorical evocation of the mosaic refers to where and how youth and Blackness are located in the United States.

Short stories analyzed in this chapter are necessary and valuable pieces of YA literature that center Black and Brown youth identities in diverse environments as a way of uncovering and critiquing placemaking, identity and becoming. Tuck's argument for assemblage is applied to how the featured authors pick up on "distinct bits and pieces" of Black and Brown young adult lived experiences, "without losing their specificity, become (sic) integrated into a dynamic whole" - a national and diasporic whole. Conversely, Nilay Erdem Ayyildiz contends that identities emerge among constant reciprocal relationships that are incomplete. The process of 'becoming,' in interaction with others, is what gives a sense of identity (2020, p.135). Young adult characters are written with complexity, and contradictory desires. Readers are shown how characters' desires reach for, at times, "contrasting realities, even simultaneously" (Tuck, 2009, p. 418). Desire-reaching and becoming are liminal states woven into the nature of each featured short story as characters exist in these kinds of sustained thresholds such as departing from childhood and entering into adulthood.

Critical Content Analysis Methodology

"I stood at the border. I stood at the edge. And claimed it as central. I let the rest of the world move over to where I was." - Toni Morrison

Critical Content Analysis (Johnson et al., 2017) as a methodology necessitates attention to inequities in real world power dynamics. Through understanding Western hegemony, institutional and everyday racism as functions within U.S. society, literary commentary goes beyond isolated aesthetics and examines "values and beliefs that lie at the core" of texts (p. ix). It is in this manner, analysis begins with tension. My positionality as an African American woman scholar from the Northeast United States living and working in an international context is also part of the methodology as it requires immersion. The content and style of texts are pseudo-static productions which can give way to static understandings involving structural elements of a perceived autonomusness of a text. From this perspective, readers can assume, subsume, or resist possible textual understandings that are considered to be fixed (Hunt & Ray, 2005, pp. 41-57, 71-88). However, it is useful to recall reader-response research such as Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of the Literary Work (1994). Rosenblatt explains that, "Every reading act is an event, a transaction... Certain organismic states, certain ranges of feeling, certain verbal or symbolic linkages, are stirred up in the linguistic reservoir" (p. xx) Meaning is not found only in the text, but outside as well. There are multiple meanings that are contingent on who is reading, for what purpose and in what context. I am engaging the historical social construction of Black youth in the United States by selecting this anthology (Freire, 2005). I am also filling in gaps of traditional non-inclusion in YA literature in the scholarly field.

The objectives hereto are to highlight the importance of nuanced narratives for young adults written by, for and about people of the African Diaspora, as proposed in Rudine Sims Bishop's theoretical model of windows, mirrors and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990); to extrapolate

actionable plans for navigating life's challenges, and to consider the idiosyncratic convergences among narratives that may suggest deeper communal connections beyond the imposed social constructions of race. Zoboi's collection opens opportunities to engage critical, fierce and brave conversations on many levels (Singleton, 2014; Scott, 2017; Brown, 2018). The short stories have been rearranged into thematic clusters. They work with youth identity and strategy building. Margrit Pernau writes, "Reading provides children with the space for an imaginary experience of the unknown, which they can both observe and participate in by identifying with the characters – whether the emotions they mimic are the same as the author imputes to his protagonists or whether their mimesis is built upon a cultural misreading" (Frevert et al., 2014, p. 251). Critical awareness of these stakes involved and appreciations for the emotional spectrum also form part of the analysis.

The dialectical nature of this methodology implicates the researcher as reader in which, "the subtle interrelatedness of text, context, readers and writers is sensitively explore[d]" (Hunt & Ray, 2005, pp. 81-82). After appreciating the aesthetics of a first reading, I perform a close reading to draw out from each story features of focalization, voice, time, place, and significance. I do this while locating power distributions, situating myself and circumstances, recognizing collective histories and global connections are part of the analytical process. The premise of this work therefore, is based on the idea that there is a need to:

- Augment and amplify the intersectional realities and imaginations of Black and Brown young adults in literature.
- Present multiple pathways toward being and becoming one's authentic self and
- to challenge placemaking within the self, the local and regional communities, the United States and the greater, international world platform.

Finally, I open discussion to question, revisit and extend the exploration of each short story as a unit of analysis, each cluster as an invitation to cosmopolitan thought and each literary posture as an act of self-relocation beyond Western hegemony.

Definitions and Historical Context of Black YA Literature

Black and Brown YA Literature as a genre is a complex composition of polemical vertices that on one hand seeks autonomous definitions and on the other hand needs to be fully recognized and integrated into the expansive literary mosaic of the United States - a nation where separate is never equal and assertion breeds tension. Competitive capitalist markets of publishing and transmedia industries that intertwine with social media potentialities also complicate working definitions. Michelle Martin (2004) considers the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s as significant for its self-proclaiming aesthetics and connections with community. Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, however, highlights that definitions and "academic criticism of Black African and African diaspora literature, media, and culture for youth and young adults has ... been largely out of the hands of scholars of African descent" (2020, p. 3). Thomas goes on to observe that, "Despite these challenges, a number of key Black scholars of literature for young people have emerged... – Rudine Sims Bishop, Pauletta Bracy, Capshaw, Brigitte Fielder, Johnson-Feelings, Violet J. Harris, Martin, MacCann, McNair, Althea Tait, Nancy Tolson, Cynthia Tyson, ... Nazera Sadiq Wright,...[and] KaaVonnia Hinton." Martin (2004) in examining primary sources,

institutions and scholarship from the mid-nineteenth century to present day, she keenly discusses the complexities and contradictions to define a genre by author identities, intended audience or characters' and experiences alone. An inclusive approach is practical. It is also just as practical and pertinent to know who is controlling the narrative. These concerns are indicative of the genre's difficult, intermingled nature where good intentions do not suffice.

Engaging with definitions of Black YA literature contributes to the expansion of literary themes, the appreciation of subtle emotional depths and the important task of reclaiming childhoods (Chandler, 2019). In considering roles of expansion, appreciation and reclaiming Black literature, Keith D. Leonard, similar to Martin, looks at the 1960's Black Arts Movement to point out that Black authored literary works documenting experiences of joy in togetherness in childhood disrupt monoliths which constantly amplify togetherness in suffering (Leonard, 2013; Henderson, 2005). Notwithstanding, from centuries past, Black and Brown childhoods and adolescence have been stolen, displaced, negated and even today are trying to be ignored or denied through silence, adultification, sexualization, and commodification. So one must ask in terms of published works: Whose stories are being told, by whom, in what way and for what purpose? Who are the regulators of what stories can and cannot be told? How are distances among fiction and reality or truth-telling or emotion-selling measured? What and where are the barometers of being "Black enough" and how are they being constructed? In examining the content and themes of selected works by Black authors, Candice Pipes explains that some authors "were often criticized for their 'airing of dirty laundry' and exposing of the nasty secrets locked deep within the closets of the black community (2010, p. 3)." There is power in naming and speaking the unspeakable, thus breaking long traditions of silence. Zobo's collection does not shy away from harsh realities, nor do the short stories cast more far-reaching tropes of pain, suffering and gloom. Instead, they craft multifaceted vignettes of humanity, in very specific terms of youth, race, class, location and imagination.

Rather than attempt an impossible all-encompassing definition of Black YA Literature, I approximate functional definitions of twenty-first century, Black and Brown YA literature through different anchoring points. One could look to its predecessors from the United States' Reconstruction period, also known as the Golden Age of Children's books or the turning point of objectivity in journalism. It is during this time domestic terrorism and Jim Crow laws reached its documented nadir from 1880 to 1947 in which more than one thousand African Americans were lynched including small children (Logan, 1954; Mindich, 1998, p. 118). Imminent writers and scholars such as Benjamin Brawley, Charles Chestnutt, Pauline Hopkins, Ida B. Wells and Ana J. Cooper were not writing for young adults per se as one would understand it today but writing with up-in-coming youths in mind to give hope, to tell our stories, to speak truth to power, to reclaim our lost heritage, to establish formal literary recognition, to challenge the horrific social practices and to counter the widespread pernicious monolithic depictions based on hate, bias and ignorance.

The Brownies' Book magazine published by W.E.B. DuBois, Augustus Dill, and Jessie Fauset was an early organizational initiative directed toward Black children and families. There was also the work of librarians such as Charlemae Hill-Rollins, Augusta Baker, Spencer G. Shaw, and Pura Belpré who focused on Spanish speaking communities. Karen Sands-O'Connor cites,

among others, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale's action plan to produce reading material that would instruct children how to become both self-aware and proud (p. 202 Article 7).

Looking through the lens of YA literature created by and about Black and Brown individuals and collectives, one can visualize its production in terms of waves. There is a clear ebb and flow pattern. First wave authors of Black YA literature such as Water Dean Myers, Virginia Hamilton, Julius Lester, and Mildred D. Taylor come from the 1960s and 70s. Their work defined a variety of experiences, feelings and concerns of Black adolescents that were previously excluded from literary discourse, especially canonical (Brooks and McNair, 2015; Thomas 2020). Second wave authors such as Angela Johnson, Christopher Paul Curtis, and Jacqueline Woodson began emerging in the 1980s. In general, their work portrayed agency, humanity and negotiations of past, present and future in young adults within the greater society. From the 1990s to the early part of 2000, there was a noticeable ebb in which publications declined as documented by the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC).⁴

Moving toward the second quarter of the twenty-first century, multigenerational authors of the African Diaspora have become more connected. Stories have become even more nuanced. Young adults have more attention, voice and power than previous generations. Multidimensional political and economic movements have called-out gross systematic biases in the literary publishing and transmedia industries. Social justice imperatives that advocate immediate shifts in these harmful social and economic practices are groups such as We Need Diversebooks, Social Justice Books or World of Books are just a few. Authors Nnedi Okorafor, Maika and Maritza Moulite, Kacen Chandler, Kwame Mbalia and Antoine Bandele are examples of current YA writers from various Diasporic backgrounds that contribute to the expansion of literary themes of science fiction and fantasy. With their endeavors, while poised upon ancestral shoulders of giants, modern creators, curators and consumers continue to define the expansive spectrum of Black and Brown YA Literature.

Black and Brown YA Literature is understood in this work as an ever-expanding literary cartography for young people locating sites of possibilities to weave real and imagined temporalities connected by hybrid African Origin and Diaspora storytelling experiences into forms of becoming. Definitions of "being" and "becoming" by their very nature are dynamic and fluid. Attention to the fuzzy edges of race and age are part of the core literary discussion as willing or unwilling constituents as Samuel Delany carefully explains in a 1998 interview in the *New York Review of Science Fiction*. Moreover, people who may have physical differences, neurodiversities, gender variations or invisible identity qualities that constitute their being intersect with race and age.⁵ For these reasons, the definition applied here aspires to capture deep understandings of the authentic needs, interests, sentiments and voice of the real, living young people fictional characters represent.

⁴ See "Data on books by and about Black, Indigenous and People of Color published for children and teens compiled by the Cooperative Children's Book Center, School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison." Available at: <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/literature-resources/ccbc-diversity-statistics/books-by-about-poc-fnn/>

⁵ See J.I. Murray (2020) "Socio-cultural Positioning of Age Identities in Picturebooks" for a discussion on how race and age intersect.

Book Summaries, Analysis, and Instructional Applications

The stories in the anthology *Black Enough* (2019), edited by Ibi Zoboi are grouped into thematic clusters. Each cluster of texts responds to topical interrogation informed by the analytical positionality, literary discretion, and aesthetic sensibility of the researcher. The thematic clusters are grouped as follows:

- being unapologetically oneself,
- responding to complicated relationships,
- dealing with the tensions of touch, and
- pulling the threads of commonality among differences.

One of the guiding questions for the criteria of the first grouping was: Which stories show characters asserting themselves unapologetically in different situations, by different methods and with different outcomes? Another example of critical questioning using Third Space was to think through how characters negotiated their personal space and/or comfort zones. I examined intimacies, touch and emotional weights of time and place as conditioning variables.

There is no one size fits all solution or answer for any of the varied situations depicted in each short story. Just as the stories themselves provide openings, I allow tensions among these openings by their very grouping. The reason for doing this can be reflected in the words of Mari José Botelho when she states, “Analyzed side by side, texts can generate intertextual ties, connections, disconnections, and questions, while allowing the reader to take notice of the context of the text” (2021, p. 122). The tension and flow of in-betweenness within and around the short stories support traversing boundaries of suppositions that also bind them. With this understanding, it is quite possible for these seventeen stories to be regrouped and to have different organizational themes.

Cluster 1: Being Unapologetically Oneself

What does it mean to be unapologetically yourself? In one sense, it could mean breaking away from an established identity and expectations. In another sense, it could mean fully leaning into your identity even with all its awkwardness and idiosyncrasies. It could also involve reclaiming stereotypes. Being unapologetically yourself is asserting your own categories, labels and definitions. You speak your truth in your own way with your own voice. Leah Henderson, Lamar Giles, Jason Reynolds and Nic Stone craft stories about protagonists who manage to assert themselves unapologetically and take different pathways that get them to that point. Leah Henderson’s “Warning: Color May Fade,” main character is a generationally affluent teenager in an elite boarding school who is “a rarer-than-rare Black legacy kid, and a board of trustees member’s daughter,” who finds a way to be her own advocate. Lamar Giles’ “Black. Nerd. Problems” on the other hand, shifts to a young, middle-class mall worker who loves writing, all-things-scifi and Dayshia Banks. He doubles down on what he already knows himself to be while stepping out of his comfort zone. In “The Ingredients” by Jason Reynolds, a group of friends return from the city pool talking about their gastronomic appreciations and cosmopolitan tastes

despite lower-income limitations. Finally, “Into the Starlight” by Nic Stone offers a romantic story about a rich girl who likes a not-so-rich boy from the other side of town.

Each protagonist, like their authors, come from very different social and economic realities, yet each of them, in their own way, figures out how to be the truest version of themselves. In Henderson’s work, Nivia has parents who don’t see her art as a future career option. Giles’ protagonist, Shawn, a keen observer, writer and self-proclaimed nerd, has to navigate an evening at the mall during a series of ever complex encounters. Jamal, Big Boy, Flaco, and Randy, a cast of characters created by Reynolds, occupy the hybrid geospace of Brooklyn in the summer where they already know, “Cool ...[is] not becoming a melted version of yourself in the heat” (p. 46). Makenzi, Stone’s main character, is a girl who falls for a guy and tries to manage overlapping, yet separate worlds of truth, lies and possibilities.

Generating the theme of asserting oneself without regret or shame using the works of Leah Henderson, Lamar Giles, Jason Reynolds and Nic Stone involved their diverse authorship in their creative presence which shines a light on what lived experiences and epistemologies they bring to storytelling. The authors’ skilled writing and deeply informed cultural knowledge base gives authenticity to their writing and the manner in which they transform delimiting situations. Nivia, Shawn, Jamal, Big Boy, Flaco, and Randy and Makenzi have decisive attitudes toward the world despite their moments of doubt. The details of their agency in locating the seat of their decision making within themselves are specific to them and their situations, but also appeal to greater complex negotiations between otherness and belonging as young adults.

For example, Nivia, despite her reticence, ultimately dominates conflict by using her best tools - her artwork. Instead of anonymity, she literally and figuratively amplifies herself. She manages to ingeniously expose her friend’s plagiarism while garnering her parents support and admiration for her art. By not pursuing direct conflict and fully concentrating on her craft, Nivia, from outside a zone of comfort, resolutely marks her stance. Being a rich Black girl from a Black legacy family in a very elite, mostly White, educational space bears multiple weights of parental expectations, a friend’s betrayal, general academic excellence and the endemic social tension aligned with power dynamics of race, wealth and inheritance. It is crucial to understand the multiple trappings of these variables in such situations in order to appreciate Nivia’s process and self-assertion. One can empathize with the limited impositions to creatively overcome fetters and obstacles instead of passively accepting given situations and actions. The propagated negative images of Black and Brown women and girls standing up for themselves, speaking against wrongs or simply asserting themselves, especially in predominantly White spaces is a discrete kind of social compliance that functions to curtail non-White self-assertion.

Conversely, Shawn is consistent in asserting himself through the way he dresses, talks and shows his particular likes and interests. As a young man, he actively engages with the materiality of pop culture and its limitations. However, he resists limiting stereotypes of the suburban, middle class, Black boy, even when his friends and coworkers tease him or directly challenge him. He owns his coolness or lack thereof and embraces available labels as evidenced by his tendency for nicknames including himself, The Nerd, and his friends, The Eccentric and The Sneakerhead. Shawn’s critical and sometimes funny insights on converging differences in himself and among others are especially poignant. He reflects, “Whenever I wrote stuff about the mall, it always

struck me how all of it, all of us were connected, even if we didn't know it - or didn't want it..." (p. 81) This kind of awareness speaks to a larger dynamic of belonging and placemaking. Shawn is posed slightly in tension with imposed identities of Black masculinities. Dayshia is a girl he finds attractive. Yet, he is very cautious about risk-taking, despite his friends' support. Coolness and confidence are cultural capital which he is hesitant to lose. Shawn incorporates humor as a strategy in affirming his intellect, defending his interests, and managing his relationships. More importantly, he outwardly engages in truth-telling to disrupt social bias and to ground himself despite not knowing outcomes.

For Jamal, Big Boy, Flaco, and Randy, truth is layered through conversing about the best New York sandwich imaginable. Young Black and Brown boys moving unapologetically along metropolitan streets after a day at the pool is by itself a social pressure point. White police officers are a constant specter.⁶ The weighted history of NYC pools, segregated, defunded and unkempt with many Black children not knowing how to swim grates like menacing treble. Despite these racial threats, social aggressions and economic injustices, the young men emanate joy in discussing their vast food knowledge, cultural proficiencies and culinary desires. Through desire-based paradigms of imagining and the fellowship of being, Jamal, Big Boy, Flaco, and Randy manifest a shared delight in their creative banter. Their banter is also a refusal to despair over limited access they have to the very types and quality victuals of which they speak. Their hunger is not made invisible, nor the pressure it brings. Unflinchingly, at the end of their walk, all four boys eat a bowl of cereal and milk with additional sugar to placate their hunger and assuage the psychological violence of being survivors of food apartheid. This moment is not sensationalized, but left in tension with the advantages and anti-humaneness of multicultural communities or as Elijah Anderson (2011) identifies, the cosmopolitan canopy. Brooklyn is such a cosmopolitan canopy where some neighborhoods fall short of simple aspirational realities such as eating a good, nutritiously rich sandwich. The cultural process the characters expressed through their language is not from a deficit-based perspective, quite the contrary. However, their actions are encased in damage-based conditions. Jamal, Big Boy, Flaco, and Randy use multiple epistemological sets to navigate their lives, excite their creativity and assert themselves fully in designing the most delectable, healthy and culturally informed comestible possible.

Makenzie asserts herself when she breaks through differing kinds of silos of Black communities in pursuit of a relationship with Kamari. They share wisdom and hope, values and beliefs that aren't directly seen on the page, but understood.⁷ However, the social economic divide within cities and towns among people of the African Diaspora are interrogated as "Mak" breaks her promise by eschewing her mother's caveat, "Bad company corrupts good character, and I won't have my daughter acting all ghetto..." (p. 347). Not focused on White flight, the concerns of this short story deal with the intermingling of those from a Black exodus who have economic prosperity and intellectual capital with those from struggling Black communities where these very parameters shift toward economic survival and disenfranchised intellectual capital. Mak's

⁶ See Kaylee Jangula Mootz's discussion "Who are these Books for? Police-Violence YA, Black Youth Activism and the Implied White Audience," in Fitzsimmons and Wilson, eds., 2020.

⁷ For example, Mak and Kamari value family, have a shared interest in Rick Riordan books and their interest in Star Wars can be seen as symbolic understandings of universal themes of humanity, literacy and knowledge, good and evil, and imagination and desire.

five siblings are a testament to her family's wealth while multiple children of her Aunt Trish mark poverty. Makenzie is attracted to Kamari's natural hair as it can be seen as a rebellion against her own processed hair. Even the wording regarding teenagers being sexually active with planned birth control options are pitted against the same veil of promiscuity labeled as "fast" with abortions at its moral faultline. Makenzie is placed in tension as various features of these silos emerge. Alternative epistemologies are recentered from the margins by Mak realizing the separate and overlapping social economic worlds of Blackness are blurred with misinformation, misunderstanding and misrepresentation. Ultimately, Makenzie asserts herself by disrupting, traversing and interrogating these spaces in order to make her own decisions.

Cluster 1: Critical Literacy Invitation as Tools

This first cluster of stories examined the processes and conditions in which protagonists become unapologetically themselves. Being unapologetically oneself is a liminal state composed of doubt, possibility and desire that are fluid and shifting points of growth and maturity in modern society. Authors have crafted authentic characters and scenarios to fill the missing gaps of contemporary YA literature. Yet specific participation within the capitalistic machinery of the United States casts reasonable doubt on the legitimacies of each of these stories as authentic productions. Yet, performance of transgression, mimicry of epistemologies such as coolness and swag or uncomfortable interrogations to which there are no absolute answers provide degrees of truth as perceived by readers and agents of transformation. These are disruptive sites of the pleasure of power, confidence and knowledge in literary form. They are also sites of anxiety, contradiction and doubt. While attention is concentrated on the protagonists who unapologetically own their circumstances and who they are, these stories frame their social, political and economic worlds as much as they frame the reader's own understanding of different cultural worlds of Blackness that continues to be in constant interrogation.

Through interrogation of these stories, educators can extend from the aesthetic to the didactic as tools of understanding complexity and diversity of being and becoming, especially as Black and Brown youths in the United States. Critical, fierce and brave conversations require the establishment of trust, respect and openness with your students where power and knowledge is decentralized (Freire, 2005; Johnson et al., 2017; Singleton, 2014; Scott, 2017; Brown, 2018). Based on pre-established conditions for safe, equitable and respectful conversations, educators allow for tensions as students share their thoughts and opinions based on the readings. Active listening is necessary in order to engage various levels of questioning that move beyond yes/no, fact based, description based or possible conclusions answers. Instead, let's foster critical questioning to the broader conversations of what strategies characters used in different situations and why. By comparing, contrasting and inferring about the protagonists' different situations and strategies, students can determine the legitimacy, how effective characters were or were not and possible alternatives. To continue to broaden conversational spaces, readers can share kinds of knowledge they have from their own lives that are not traditionally found in books. Invite connections, disconnections and ambiguity with the stories about how to be unapologetically oneself.

Cluster 1: Theory to Practice

Adolescent literacy instruction happens in various forms and with distinct approaches, methodologies and techniques to bolster reading habits, enrich vocabulary, deepen comprehension, encourage writing, and advance critical thinking. Short stories about asserting oneself are valuable for teaching YA literature to teachers-in-training as well as to actual adolescent readers. “Warning: Color May Fade,” “Black. Nerd. Problems.,” “The Ingredients,” and “Into the Starlight” provide examples in which there is either character development and/or self-empowerment. Literacy instruction must develop and empower students with rich relevant content, practical skills and strategic interdisciplinary transferability. Leah Henderson, Lamar Giles, Jason Reynolds and Nic Stone craft relatable and inspiring characters who serve as role models in demonstrating how they overcome their unique challenges and find their own particular voices. Adolescent literacy instruction must center learners' points of growth and help to bring forth students' own voices. Nivia, Shawn, Jamal, Big Boy, Flaco, and Randy and Makenzi are fictional characters who demonstrate the importance of leaning into their authentic selves, of expressing themselves fully and of their abilities to make a difference in their own lives. Each story is an opportunity to explicitly identify how protagonists enact specific attitudes and behaviors that align with youth readers' own capabilities. Literacy growth and achievement significantly improve possibilities of future outcomes for students in poverty, rural isolation or urban blight. Through reading these short stories and scaffolding literacy skills, abstract concepts such as “being unapologetically oneself” are made more accessible.

Cluster 2: Repairing, Rebuilding and Resisting Relationships

Knowing how to repair or restore, rebuild or replace, and even resist or reconcile relationships is an important life skill. The cluster of stories grouped here work along relational spaces dealing with families, friends and supporting communities. Situational pressures mature into processes of alerity, adaptation or acceptance. The protagonists experience thresholds of “becomings” through interactive engagement with others. Renée Watson, Kekla Magoon, Brandy Colbert, and Dhonielle Clayton arrange broken pieces from different kinds of relationships into pluralities of storytelling that advance extremely nuanced cohesiveness of Blackness, youth and intersectionality. Renée Watson’s “Half a Moon” focuses on the relationship between two sisters with different mothers while they are at an outdoors, sleep away camp. “Out of the Silence” by Kekla Magoon is an unnerving tale about resisting a queer identity and reconciling with unexpected tragedy. Brandy Colbert’s “Oreo” delves into the complex matrix of family dynamics and the intergenerational relationships that impact definitions of the self and being part of a Black collective. Finally, Dhonielle Clayton crafts a multilayered mental health narrative detailing how a surviving twin is expected to carry out the roles and responsibilities of her dead sister in “The Trouble with Drowning.” All these short stories dynamically balance the specificities of the personal with the universalities of placemaking and identity through participation within a collective.

The emphasis on relational contingencies, as a form of understanding the liminal and intersectional self, take the authorships of Renée Watson, Kekla Magoon, Brandy Colbert, and

Dhonielle Clayton as creative resistance to monolithic situational life narratives often perpetuated as isolated, singular or dislocated. Authenticity is rendered through agentic voices of the protagonists who struggle with the boundaries of edifying cultural practices which serve as placemaking elements for young adults of the African Diaspora. Renée Watson initiates her short story from the standpoint of Raven who blames her younger half-sister, Brooke, for her Dad leaving. From a different storyline, in a series of fugacious interactions, Kekla Magoon's protagonist, Cassie, reminisces about Tessa, a fellow classmate, and their possible attraction before Tess' untimely death. Brandy Colbert's protagonist, Joni, deals with her family and plans for the future as family conflicts involving accusations of cultural erasure, performance, negation and emergence pass from one generation to the next. Lastly, Dhonielle Clayton weaves intricate relationships of color caste, stereotypes and mental health through Lena, the main character as an intentionally blended self. The diverse adolescent trajectories presented in this cluster unfold unique developments of individuality through social networks that are upheld by various referent-relational communities of Blackness and the personal agency of each young adult depicted. Raven, Cassie, Joni and Lena are protagonists on very different trajectories who struggle with their own sense of agency and self-determination because of how they perceive and manage certain relationships. Cassie maintains ambivalent feelings toward Tessa, while Raven feels resentment towards her half-sister Brooke. Joni feels judged by her family, especially her cousin. Lena, however, is emotionally adrift. The unresolved feelings of these protagonists complicate their thinking and behaviors to repair or restore, rebuild or replace, and even resist or reconcile the very relationships through which they encounter definitions of self and modes of being.

To begin, Raven and Brooke are placed in tension as unreconciled step-sisters coming from contrasting economic situations and as natural-haired Black girls out in nature. The restoration of Raven and Brooke's sisterhood is a restoration of Black family which disrupts and depathologizes common portrayals of broken Black families and internal fight-for-resources mentality. Spirituals, stand-up comedy, lip syncing, spoken word, doing hair and dancing the *Soul Train* line are several examples of intertextual, edifying cultural practices and placemaking elements. However, epistemological gaps of these converging experiences can also produce instruments of exclusion. Such is the case when fellow campers criticize Brooke, remarking, "She don't look like she dance at all'... 'Living all the way out there.., she probably never even seen a *Soul Train* line'" (p. 11). Raven, by contrast, has had these knowledge features passed on to her through community and intergenerational relationships. In realizing the importance of familial and community repair, Raven holds herself accountable for participation in the defining web of identity and placemaking for Brooke. There are also textual reminders that the great outdoors are the ancestral places of coming together, healing and worship. The gospel song, "There is a Balm in Gilead" referenced in the story is one of the many literary devices, such as the descriptions of nature, that replaces impressions of loss, feelings of less than and notions of displacement with an aspirational hope and restoration.

Cassie, however, does not experience restoration and is very much emotionally displaced. She represses obvious emerging attractions and yearnings for her classmate Tess which are ambiguously reciprocated. In a moment of flippancy, Cassie is named as part of the LGBTQ+ community and considers this label with the possibilities of a new landscape for living. Positioned within the greater societal framework, Blackness and homosexuality is a contested

space. Instead of replacing adherence to heteronormative relationships, the sudden death of her classmate, Tessa, deters Cassie from moving forward with homonormative relationships that would not necessarily subsume her identity matrix, but possibly afford a sense of liberating hybridity. Through a mostly uninterrupted monologue, Cassie reveals the multiple facets of her in-between states that already align with categories of alterity, yet the disruptive power of naming deconstructs the false veneer of sexual coherence and at the same time allows for continued cognitive and sexual dissonance. When Tess dies, the burgeoning sapphic relational web dies with her. Cassie reverts back to a muted contested resistance of self and amplifies the silenced melee of becoming under the hegemonic dictates of society, youth, gender and race. Joni experiences similar frustrations about understanding and asserting who she really feels she is within the societal context of family, class, and race. Against her parents' wishes, Joni wants to go to a HBCU.⁸ She outwardly engages with the ambivalences of the very relationships that help her to define who she is and where she belongs. Most notably her cousin Junior, who can't afford to go to culinary school, follows in his father's footsteps and complicates family relationships based on figurations of complex emotions and measurements of Blackness. The tension among family relationships is reworked in conjunction with the problematic economics of silos of affluence, place designation and knowledge distributions. Indirectly, readers are asked to consider the political world of the deeply embedded entanglements of Black and Brown histories and wealth distributions. Exemplified in the family's reoccurring rhetorical jab, "What do you know about...?" equivocating humor, knowledge circulation and places of belonging are challenged. The different worldviews from Joni and Junior's families frame understandings of interlocking issues that define certain ways of Black life. The story asks, what is Black youth contextualized through family dynamics and wealth that mirror concerns of fragmented communities within the larger context of the United States? Although absolute answers are not proffered, for cousins, Joni and Junior, it means moving away from judgment, apologizing to one another and restoring the significant relationships that they depend on to sustain them.

Conversely, Lena's significant relationships, however, are destabilized by the death of the twin sister Madeleine. Lena blurs herself with the ghost of her sister which confuses not only the reader, but Lena, the protagonist, as well. Madeleine was depressed, practiced self-harm, rebelled against the strident perfectionism of their mother and romanticized the occult. Her behaviors were placed in opposition to Lena's comportment. However, Lena, after Madeleine's drowning, begins to assume these traits while trying to uphold familial expectations such as participating in the debutante's coming out ball. Similarities can be drawn from Lena's psychotic episodes to the practice of within group alterity. Lena's understanding of self was always in a dichotomy with her sister, so she was never her own complete self but a constant separating self from an insalubrious relationship of interdependence. This relationship draws parallels to the layered and lasting legacies of pre-bellum color casting apartheid and the anxieties associated with the warped cultural fracturing of racial economic privilege, punishment and place. Lena remembers her grandmother explaining how living on the Gold Coast is a place where, "...rich Black people got away from the poor ones. But still don't have to live with White folks" (p. 273). Brokering stereotypes such as "Black people don't swim" and "Black people do not ever have mental health issues," reflect the complicated and relevant situational life narratives which many Black and Brown youth face.

⁸ Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Cluster 2: Critical Literacy Invitation as Tools

This second cluster of stories examined the social construction of the self through transactional relationships and intersectional realities that respond to complicated points of contention. Communal identities alongside isolated outsider identities bring attention to how interactions with family, friends and community foster or complicate managing definitions of self. Black and Brown young adults are in a constant flux of ongoing development toward a subjective position of being that is situationally and relationally dependent. The stories resituate a range of cultural identifiers that condition relationships and show deeper communal connections beyond superficial or stereotypical placeholders or markers of race.

Through critical engagement with these stories, educators can model broader reading practices and transformative sentiment advancing Black aesthetics, social justice and culturally informed pedagogy. The foundational praxis arises from student generative reader-responses. Each of the short stories lays bare processes of becoming in interaction with others. Students can discuss the textual and non-textual details of interactions that help, hinder or alter a sense of identity for the protagonists. Great distinctions such as the wealth gap or colorism among Black and Brown collectives are societal forces that influence evolving definitions of self. Differentials in wealth means differentials in the kinds of access young adults have to the quantity, quality and variety of resources of all kinds. Students may be invited to interrogate defining voices or silences of these types of social economic forces among characters. Teachers may encourage deeper reflections about how definitions of self arise between reciprocal relationships that are incomplete.

Cluster 2: Theory to Practice

Adolescent literacy instruction becomes more powerful when emotions, contexts and peer groups in the narratives are relatable. Short stories about knowing how to repair or restore, rebuild or replace, and resist or reconcile relationships are extremely important in the teaching of YA literature, especially along intergenerational lines. “Half a Moon,” “Out of the Silence,” “Oreo,” and “The Trouble with Drowning” explore various kinds of relationships in different ways, yet all the narratives move their characters toward developing self-awareness, empathy and better communication skills. Literacy in the twenty-first is sanctioned with more media, transmedia and communication modes than any other generation prior to it, necessitating dexterity in broader registers, modalities and content regulation. Renée Watson, Kekla Magoon, Brandy Colbert, and Dhonielle Clayton entangle developmental emotional intelligence and embedded generational fractures with socio-cultural relationships among friends and family. Adolescent literacy should include students’ learning of how to navigate their emotions and negotiate interpersonal and intergenerational communication through the exploration of literary texts. Raven, Cassie, Joni and Lena are protagonists who are identifiable through their relational contingencies and who disrupt prescribed attitudes and behaviors in how they are imagined to face dilemmas or make choices. The theory and practice of repair or restore, rebuild or replace, and resist or reconcile relationships are elucidated with these short stories and are better understood when youth readers are encouraged to think critically and consider the consequences of different actions. Teachers

can accompany readers in their analysis of situations, then evaluate options. By thinking metaphorically inside and outside the box, readers can extrapolate models of choosing, then engage in their own decision-making processes based on personal values and beliefs as reflected by family, friends and community.

Cluster 3: Managing Intimacies, Touch and Emotional Weights

Adolescent literacy instruction does not readily associate with themes or content perceived to be taboo, but rather skills-based topics. Intimacies among young people are not infrequently moralized as transgressions and as current trends reflect, banned or censored materials. Descriptions of activities relating to desire, consensual/ non-consensual touching or just naked bodies help young people to explore, negotiate and understand about boundaries and corporealities, to strategize about selfhood and to gauge their personal comfort levels and emotional spectrum. The deeper emotional weights involved in physical intimacies involving sex/sexuality and consensual/non-consensual touching are also compounded by age, gender and race. Liara Tamani, Jay Coles, Tracey Baptiste, and Justina Ireland render explorations of intimacies with great care of the emotional toll societal moralizations have on Black and Brown youth corporealities and personal becomings. "Stop Playing" by Liara Tamani tells the tale of a girl at a church beach retreat who is indecisive about her affections for two boys which culminates in the exposure of the infamous naked selfies. In Jay Coles' "Wild Horses, Wild Hearts" two young jockeys move forward with their mutual attraction in the midst of a longstanding family feud that comes to a head in the year's most important horse race. "Gravity" by Tracey Baptiste chronicles a story that occurs in a matter of seconds in which a girl has to decide how to handle a public sexual assault in a dance club. Lastly, Justina Ireland sets "Kissing Sarah Smart" in a cozy southern town where a summer-before-college romance blooms between a visiting urbanite and a non-biracial local.

Each of the authors offer complex portrayals of the subtleties and modes of communication among their different characters that hedge and traverse the boundaries of intimacy management and maturity. At the same time, the geospaces in each of the short stories provide a kind of echo chamber to the depths and dimensions of the protagonists' actions. For example, Tamani uses the beach setting to reverberate Keri's, the main character, conflicting attitudes about body politics, Christianity and fickle understandings of intimacy. Conversely, Coles' more emotionally mature protagonist, Tank Robinson is set in the open expanse of America's farmland, standing in direct contrast to the insular local attitudes regarding specific fraternizations. In a dramatic turn, Baptiste captures the fragmented violations and unavenged abuses of touch, her protagonist, Clara, must navigate within the pulsing cacophony of a night club and island memories. Finally, Ireland shows multiple intersecting thresholds that present topophobia and topophilia as tools for engaging transformative spaces for the main character, Devon, and her exploration of intimacy.

The on-going process of development and decision making are particularly evident in Keri, a church-going teen who lacks real intimacy with herself as much as with others. Indicative of broader societal tendencies, Keri is easily manipulated by pop culture, religion and other people. She allows these forces to dictate her actions. Like most of her peers, she lacks effective strategies to resist, to gauge emotions, to deeply self-reflect and to make confident decisions. Yet, this superficiality is held in tension as it keeps Keri from becoming entangled in the

emotional needs of Brandon, but on the cusp of fulfilling Lucas' desires to send a naked selfie. Young Black and Brown naked bodies are in an extremely fraught space historically and contemporarily - first, as public spectacle and dually, as private shame. The modern precarious interactions of young adults mediated through online socializing often become amplified in negative ways and not without the misogynistic and patriarchal blight upon racialized bodies. Dara, a perceived enemy, keeps Keri from sending a naked selfie. For Keri, Dara's solidarity is a novel and rewarding intimacy. In a public bathroom, they bond over their similar pictures of their naked female bodies posing in awkward stances. The privacy of the naked self becoming public is morphed back into the privacy of a shared moment of female bonding, laughter and self-realization. The transgression of nakedness in the digital sphere is disrupted and reconfigured as confidence building, exploration of selfhood and female comradery.

The reconfiguration of relationships is an ordeal that Tank Robinson has navigated on several levels, but not without effort. Tank's family is highly religious, very protective of their children's intellectual stakes and deeply competitive in showing Black excellence. Skyler's family on the other hand are feuding White, racist, atheists who live next door, embittered by Tank's win at the last North Salem Horse Races. The literal property line dividing the farms is a space that blurs the conceptual divisions that would keep the two lovers apart. Eventually, imaginations of touch and taste shift into real kisses and Tank confesses, "I felt at home for once" (p. 223). This an important sentiment because he and his family have never been welcomed in their small mostly White rural community filled with Confederate flags. Tank enjoys Skylar's reciprocal support during broken moments and the young couple dismantle imposed divisions of othering and transgression. Tank is a conscientious decision-maker who understands and empathizes with the emotional needs of others while toeing boundaries. In walking away, hand-in-hand, from their families and the triennial group competitor photo, normative relationships of intimacy involving race and gender push back against definitions that have been captured from the past.

Another example of pushing back is Clara's story. It occurs in "infantismal units" between immigrant flashbacks of a Trinidadian homeland and the seconds of being grabbed by the crotch. Clara is dispossessed. Her imaginary homelands are destabilized as she recalls those liminal cautionary tales of family secrets, immigrant sacrifice and weathered stories of insalubrious female passivity in the face of aggravated intimacies. For Clara, the male space is antagonistic and predatory - an abstract topophobia in which girls are always at fault no matter the circumstances. As she is violated in public by a stranger and memories of her participation in female shaming unfold, Clara literally falls upon the solution. She liberates herself from invading fingers and the entanglements of female-blaming for sexual assault thus breaking a socially and culturally inherited cycle. Black and Brown girls struggle through dichotomies of apathetic victims and licentious seductresses fetishized racially through notions of magical innocence or salacious temptation. Clara is neither. She mobilizes basic theories of physics with the basic need to flee the physical, social and emotional entrapment. Clara does not follow the rules of engagement and adopts an unanticipated course of action. In doing so, she repositions power in her favor to create a counter-narrative that makes public the non-consensual touch and the aggressor, victim of his own travesty.

Safe spaces and precarious places also work to shape Devon's consciousness of constant ambiguity. As a biracial child she frequently feels in-between races having a Black dad and

White mom. As a military child, Devon has acclimated to big cities, small towns and being in-between places. As a child of divorced parents, she regularly navigates the tensions between the mental health demands of her mother and the military service demands of her father. So when she mulls over where she may find herself on the sexuality spectrum, kissing girls does not create a disruption. More than having Sarah as a girlfriend, for Devon, disruption happens by questioning the circumstances of her mother's accidental drug overdose, her father's draconian adherence to authority and challenging her White grandmother's avoidance of certain streets and Black neighborhoods. Abstract and concrete places negotiate Devon's notions of topophobia and topophilia as planes of emergence and intersecting becomings. Sarah helps Devon to recognize two emotional versions of herself: "the old one, who tucks her feelings away... and the new Devon, who knows exactly what she wants and isn't afraid to say so" (pp. 304 - 305). But it is the awakening to reformative definitions of sex that broadens Devon's carnal knowledge of physical and emotional intimacies as transformative locations of being.

Cluster 3: Critical Literacy Invitation as Tools

Managing intimacies, gauging touch and handling the emotional weights linked to the corporeal are complexities that are part of Black and Brown self-liberation explored in this third cluster. Keri, Tank, Clara, and Devon are protagonists who show how especially crucial these experiences are to the processes of becoming and the dynamics of self-worth. Their authors write from a place of ownership and power. The historical significance of owning, documenting, and sharing narratives of the modern-day African Diaspora from a place of power and voice disrupts and resists the pattern making of recurring contexts that are limited to certain codified family structures, social themes, displays of emotions and geospaces. The short stories amassed provide alternative discourses for Black and Brown youths of today regarding physical, emotional, and social intimacy. Moving beyond the binaries of one decision or another, characters develop and are transformed through an evolution of ongoing decision-making practices which influences the nature and understanding of their own sexualities.

Educators need to be comfortable, willing, and ready to deconstruct with their students, the various sexual metanarratives in current society dealing with racialized and gendered intimacies. They need to most importantly listen to their students and actively consider their views. As an option to frame ongoing conversations, educators can propose the possibility of adolescence as a biological truth with legal implications that have racialized social-cultural, politico-economic basis constructed from the past with futurist notions in tension with these short stories. The literary texts serve as safe places for students to imagine, practice and empathize with multiple situations that portray Black and Brown youth sexualities in very specific contexts of intimacy. Teachers should encourage through open, non-judgemental conversation that students create actionable plans based on each story or recreate the different scenarios with their own personal twists. In this way, students can construct various modes of responding to sexual indecision, unwanted intimacies, female-blame, emotional vulnerability, and the social consequences of certain intimacies.

Cluster 3: Theory to Practice

Adolescent literacy instruction does not readily associate with themes or content perceived to be taboo, but rather skills-based topics of vocabulary enrichment, summarizing text, making inferences, drawing conclusions, and so forth. Short stories about intimacies among young people whether positive, negative, neutral, confusing, or affirming are needed. "Stop Playing", "Wild Horses, Wild Hearts," "Gravity," and "Kissing Sarah Smart" offer insights into how characters in various social settings and dynamics develop a sense of urgency, self-preservation and social responsibility during pressurized interludes of intimacy. Teaching literacy is a multifaceted process. From one aspect, students learn skills related to reading, writing, speaking, and listening, which are essential for effective communication and comprehension of written and spoken language. From another aspect, Liara Tamani, Jay Coles, Tracey Baptiste, and Justina Ireland demonstrated how their protagonists learn to challenge assault and/or unfairness, to promote solidarity and/or inclusivity, and ultimately to enact the necessary valor in showing agency against bullying, discrimination, and social inequality in its various forms. Critical literacy teaching goes beyond basic literacy skills and engages power dynamics, social values, and ideologies that can be apparent as well as covert. Keri, Tank, Clara, and Devon are protagonists who acquire deeper appreciation of the emotional weights involved in the consequences of physical intimacies whether consensual or non-consensual as they balance the social pendulum of approval or disapproval. Youth readers from multiple perspectives need to be critical and need to use their voices. Students can have the opportunity to vicariously embody characters and their situations before recognizing and practicing similar or alternative techniques and strategies in their own lives.

Cluster 4: Finding the Lines of Commonality Among Differences

The United States is home to more than 40 million people of African descent—a diverse community whose primary ancestry derives from the Black racial and ethnic groups of Africa. They came to the United States not only from the “mother continent” but also from Caribbean islands, Europe, Asia, and South America.

- Monique W. Morris

Not one story, nor one collection of stories cannot fully represent the cultural identities or experiences of every reader. Black and Brown cultural identities are complex and complicated by the power relations of race, ethnicity, class, and language (Fox & Short, 2000). Varian Johnson, Tochi Onyebuchi, Rita Williams-Garcia, Coe Booth and Ibi Zoboi capture big, but also very small and significant details of confluence which inform and contradict the unique, fluid, and nuanced realities of young adults from African Diaspora within the United States. They work with and through differences to capture moving points of shared knowledge, emotions and humanity. In the story "Black Enough" by Varian Johnson, the protagonist's singular focus is to impress a girl. It occludes his attention from larger, disturbing social events and as a result, he finds himself unexpectedly displaced in an already contested space for belonging. Tochi Onyebuchi's short story "Samson and the Delilahs" positions debate club and hard rock jam sessions as unlikely partners in the segmented journey for self-expression and realization of a confident scholar who becomes interested in a confident musician. Rita Williams-Garcia in "Whoa!" subverts the slave narrative tale in a supernatural encounter between a queer college freshman and his cis enslaved 18-year-old forefather who connect over space and time by means of a family heirloom. Coe Booth's "Hackathon Summers" features a high school student who

likes a Muslim teammate at a computer technology program. As they share their frustrations about emotionally laden parental relationships and discovering who they are, the details that set them apart fall forward from the background. The final story of the collection, “The (R)Evolution of Nigeria Jones” by Ibi Zoboi, is a scathing satire that pokes fun at limited definitions of inclusivity within an emancipatory movement.

Johnson’s protagonist Cam narrates how he and his cousin Myron go to a summer party. Readers can notice the differences in the ways two cousins perceive how spaces are occupied (such as the barber shop), how money is spent (especially on clothes and sneakers) and the changing nature of communication through digital spaces (such as TikTok, Instagram, and Youtube). Cam and Myron depend on the materiality of definitions to assert a prescribed commercial Blackness that depends on buying and performing with associated symbols and semiotics. Competing expectations of composite identities in different places (for example the West and the South) facilitate practices of code switching and cultural brokering. Simple activities, simple details, and simple wishes quickly intertwine among the greater webs of modernity, the machinery of nation through the trappings of capitalism and the continued violence against Black people. At the party, Cam asks the girl he likes why she shuns him. She explains that a boy from the neighborhood had been shot by white police officer the same day Cam posted a photo of himself surrounded white classmates. Even though people decried the shooting on social media, Cam did not know about it. Solidarity in social justice needs protest as much as it needs connection, acknowledgement and relevant actions. Outside of the noise of materiality, this story asks what brings us together? What binds us? For Cam and Myron, it is truth telling in living, truth telling in navigating the different spheres of influence and always being able to recognize the different stakes of being Black in America.

Onyebuchi also reminds readers of the heterogeneity of the Black experience in positioning the son of Nigerian immigrants, Sobechi, champion debater, as the main character who falls for his new punk-rock neighbor, Desirée. Sobechi forms an instant attraction because, “She’s the first Black girl he has ever known who wasn’t somehow related to him” (p. 153). But he is also attracted to her messiness, her unconventional style, her easy-going upbringing, and personal freedoms he lacks. These are some of the many details that convey how insular a life Sobechi’s parents have curated for him. They also nudge toward a greater reality concerning the degrees of difference and separation African descendants from the Americas experience alongside African descendants of Africa - apart, yet converging at the same time. Sobechi is the best debater on his team, stemming from practiced skill and intense family support. Sobechi knows the power of his voice. Desirée leads a metal band and uses music as an intense form of unmitigated self-expression. Desirée knows the power of her guitar. Together they flourish. Among the songs they practice, one about the Armenian Genocide inspires Sobechi to ask his mother about the Biafran War. The questions Sobechi has for his Igbo mother are similar questions all people could ask to one another: why do we not talk about our collective history as a collective? Why do we maintain so many pockets of silence? What will we say after the silences?

Williams-Garcia introduces her protagonist, an attractive college freshman, Danté to his distant ancestor, John, a survivor of the United States’ inhumane system of human chattel. Danté is also an active professional model, while John is an enduring dispossessed legacy. They are inversions and holders of one another as their bodies serve the same capitalist machine. Danté navigates

through his life with a clear sense of entitlement, while John survives the cruel vicissitudes of slavery using personal humor as a balm. Somehow, no matter how removed, how different the details of living are over space and time in the United States, Black lives, Black bodies are used and arranged into pieces of commodities. The two young men understand who they are by processing the human, familial arrangements in which they perceive their likeness and difference through the white enamel conjure basin passed down from generation to generation. As they interact with each other through the supernatural of water and whiteness, the rootworking is neither a reflection nor a transparent image, but an ancestral survivor vis-a-vis his descendancy. Centering a suspended anachronism speaks to the idea of historical transparency as an on-going transaction that involves the distribution and arrangement of differential geospaces, social positions, and epistemologies relative to a discriminatory and prescribed sense of order (Bhabha, 2004, p. 155). Young Black and Brown stakeholders must decide what to do with the metaphorical, inherited white basin.

Details that contribute to combined definitions can also be arranged among intersecting, yet fractured connections as experienced by Booth's main character Garry. Garry lives with his father and not his mother due to a troubled past. He earns a spot among other technologically savvy highschoolers at a New York University Hackaton computer camp. Inaaya is a Muslim girl who, in addition to being one of the few Black people, does exceptionally well in the program. The two eventually fall for each other. Over the course of three summers, their relationship develops and culminates in kissing and touching, then abruptly ends. Despite the commonalities and affinities that created specific intersectional convergences, Garry and Inaaya are two different people committed to living by very disparate norms. They share values among which a complicated understanding of not abandoning family nor important communal affiliations, such as religion. It is key to note that the young Black characters in this story experience success through the support of their families, but have had and continue to have very different sets of experiences and trajectories. Depicting personal development nuanced by love with forgiveness, aspiration with doubt, failures with successes, individuality within collectives help to shape the tessellated guideposts of multiple Black and Brown young adults' being and becoming.

Geri's story by Zboi ironically focuses on the desire of the daughter of a Black nationalist revolutionary freedom fighter to be White. As details of the Movement (spearheaded by Geri's father), its workings and its members are rolled out, there is an acute and uncomfortable understanding that their actions, mindsets, and personalities are not necessarily exaggerations, rather quite verisimilitudinous. Supported by her secretly gay friend who fronts as her boyfriend, Geri is aided in escaping from her cult-like home in order to visit New York. Entrapped by her own fault and miscalculations, Geri forgets her phone and wallet on the bus she took from Philadelphia and finds herself in a Manhattan café, surrounded by White people, unable to pay for her coffee. Geri, short for Nigeria Jones, leans into the tense and ridiculous awkwardness of her situation, her conflated aspirations of inclusion and her fractured sense of rebellion, as she prepares for the unknown consequences of her actions with little remorse. The short story ridicules non-reflexive consumptions of ideas, media and material goods. Geri and featured characters work as criticisms against narrow views of what brings Black people together and what facilitates inclusion in the United States. Through Geri, problematic contradictions of

collective empowerment, knowledge circulation and participatory behaviors in modern-day consumer culture are interrogated.

Cluster 4: Critical Literacy Invitation as Tools

One book, one anthology or one short story as a mirror, window or sliding glass door obviously cannot represent an entire cultural experience (Bishop. 1990; Naidoo and Dahlen, 2013; Braden & Rodriguez, 2016). This final cluster of nuanced narratives examine the particular commonalities which amplifies the question Ibi Zoboi asks in her introduction,

What are the cultural threads that connect Black people all over the world to Africa? How have we tried to maintain certain traditions as part of our identity? And as teenagers, do we even care? These are the questions I had in mind when inviting sixteen other Black authors to write about teens examining, rebelling against, embracing, or simply existing within their own idea of Blackness (2019, p. xii).

There is diversity within and among young adult collectives who are Black, Brown and otherwise. It also must be noted that just because this anthology of short stories centers Blackness, it does not mean all the stories will resonate with all readers (Fox and Short 2000). Bishop's metaphor of mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors coupled with a resistance to single stories has the potential of offering "a more nuanced picture of people, issues, or ideas" (Botelho, 2021 cross-referenced with Tschida et al., 2014, p. 31). However, what might be relevant and meaningful for students in the past or present might not be so in the future (Botelho, 2021, cross-referenced with Scieurba, 2014;). However, Carmen Martínez-Roldán elegantly lays out the argument that with each lecture of a story, young adult readers can "reinvent themselves through narratives in response to the literature" (2021, p. 21).

Teachers should invite and encourage student-generated, multimodal (including multimedia) responses. Students should have the opportunity to express complex and complicated commonalities of race, class, and language through personal creations and perspectives. Teachers should remind students to consider the role of hybridized or heterotopic spaces in relation to the cultural threads that connect Black people all over the world to Africa.

Cluster 4: Theory to Practice

Critical adolescent literacy instruction supports students' interrogations of how social, cultural, historical, political, and economic contexts shape the creation and interpretation of texts. These interrogations bring to the forefront issues race, identity, religion, gender, class, and other diverse forms of being and becoming. Short stories about the diversity of people of African descent unfold a variety of perspectives, experiences, and ways of knowing that enrich the pedagogical landscape of YA literature. "Black Enough," "Samson and the Delilahs," "Whoa!," "Hackathon Summers" and "The (R)Evolution of Nigeria Jones" are layered, complex, intellectual and aesthetic tools that entangle, resist, challenge and disrupt. Varian Johnson, Tochi Onyebuchi, Rita Williams-Garcia, Coe Booth and Ibi Zoboi are authentic voices that open spaces to meaningful discussions, debates, and collaborative activities. Critical adolescent literacy

instruction must invite students to reflect on their own beliefs, biases, and assumptions as they interact with texts. Cam, Sobechi, Danté, Garry and Geri are true-to-life, fictional characters who bring us back to the motif of “mosaic of existence” where fractures of similarities and differences are assembled, carefully arranged and embedded into individual and collective consciousness.

Instructional Implications

Black Enough: Stories of Being Young and Black in America (2019), edited by Ibi Zoboi is a powerful compilation of some of today's best YA authors. There are several opportunities for personal reflection, group discussion and critical instruction. These intricately woven fictional short stories delve into the multifaceted and nuanced aspects of authenticity, empowerment, expression, selfhood, and authorship in shaping the Black experience and Black identity for young individuals in the twenty-first century United States. Zoboi's anthology resists and disrupts prevailing literary conventions that tend to oversimplify and stereotype Blackness. Educators and preservice teachers must understand the importance of critical adolescent literacy instruction.

Tiffany Flowers (2003) points to the fact that African American twelfth-graders' scores on the NAEP Reading Assessment fall below those of other ethnic groups. Since reading comprehension and related skills impact success on standardized tests and academic achievement, these test results call for practical solutions to improve African American students' reading skills. Toward this end, Flowers' study analyzed the impact of African American students' leisure reading experiences on their reading achievement. The results indicated that “44% of African American seniors who read for pleasure outside of school scored at Level 2 or Level 3 on the NELS: 88 Reading Comprehension assessment” (p. 60). In contrast, only 32% of the African American seniors who did not read for pleasure outside of school scored at those same levels. These findings suggest that literacy development outcomes are associated with experiences outside of school and that reading for pleasure may be an important factor. Critical adolescent literacy instruction bridges the gap among standardized skills contexts, relatable sociocultural experiences and reading for pleasure to foster more equitable and inclusive education.

The instructional implications of providing diverse narratives that intersect with multiple realities and imaginings scaffold readers' recognition of cultural values and navigation of the journey towards an authentic self. In Gholdy Muhammad's (2023) instructional book about teaching and learning, *Unearthing Joy: A Guide to Culturally and Historically Responsive Curriculum and Instruction*, Muhammad centers joy among the pursuits of identity, skills, intellect and criticality. It is clear that joy must be at the heart of critical adolescent literacy instruction. Students learn from characters how to confront the challenges of finding a sense of belonging while becoming a young adult of the African Diaspora. *Black Enough: Stories of Being Young and Black in America* has an array of genres and topics which increase the likelihood of peaking the reading interests of students. The short stories also vary slightly in length which may help build confidence and cognitive muscle recruitment to sustain and amplify reading habits. The writings explore diverse paths taken by adolescents, emphasizing personal agency, and presenting life narratives that reflect real-life situations. The authors of the anthology skillfully depict the

intricate nuances of the genuine needs, interests, emotions, and voices of the young people their fictional characters represent.

Through each story, readers can discern strategies for conflict resolution, elements that foster positive outcomes, and the establishment of personal boundaries. Given the scarcity of Black and Brown authors in YA literature, it is crucial to acknowledge the significance of the authors featured in this anthology and the various ways in which they provide aesthetically relevant guidance for youth readers. The aims of this endeavor are to underscore the significance of nuanced narratives specifically tailored for adolescents, authored by individuals from the African Diaspora and centered around their experiences. This aligns with Rudine Sims Bishop's concept of windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors, which emphasizes the need for literature that both reflects and expands readers' perspectives (Bishop, 1990). Just as it is possible for this anthology to have been selected and these seventeen stories to have been grouped into organizational themes, other texts may also be used similarly. Table 1 provides a list of recommended books to consider. Pulling from additional resources, educators can fully engage the implications of critical adolescent literacy instruction. Critical adolescent literacy instruction involves extracting practical strategies and skills to improve outcomes for standardized academic purposes and connecting relevant and authentic life experiences to empower learners for more competitive futures.

Conclusion

Ideological underpinnings of the stories collected in *Black Enough: Stories of Being Young and Black in America* (2019) contend that Black and Brown young adults are unique, highly varied and have their own temperaments and are to be supported and cherished. Parents, friends and community are a source of identification and validation that may safeguard them through the struggles and challenges of becoming. Among the many diverse authorships and voices of characters featured in Zobi's anthology, the use of silence to mitigate the intertextualities of many situations is also used with care. Black and Brown YA Literature is an important and integral feature of the literary landscape that needs more presence in the canon, less resistance from publishers and greater support in consumer markets. Lee A. Talley (Nel and Paul 2011) questions the way in which "young adult" literature is defined, cautioning scholars to not forget its

"Occluded Romantic inheritance of narrower reading practices and antirevolutionary sentiment. The rich field of YA literature is indebted to a number of revolutions, including but not limited to the social movement of the 1960s and the backlash that followed them;..." (p. 232)

Notwithstanding, Ebony Elizabeth Thomas observes that "Today's teens and young adults are increasingly using new forms of communication to read and tell stories. They engage in textual and visual productions that are collaborative, shared in what has been characterized as environments of *digital intimacy*" (2019, p. x). Literary works represent, engage and function in the material world and capitalistic networks. Capitalism insists on the materiality of symbols. Materiality and profit seeking take advantage of communal networks that sustain these symbols of Black and Brown affinity groups.

While every good faith effort has been made to provide cogent and dynamic arguments, the methodology of story clusters could have been regrouped by different questions such as, “Which stories deal directly or indirectly with colorism and how do these practices rely on historical and contemporary intertextualities to enrich authentic narratives?” Gidwani and Kumar (2019) say, “One common sleight of hand is to ‘explain’ the specifics of the subaltern’s world by inserting her into a spatiotemporal metanarrative of progress, staging her in a time and place that is upstream of the ‘present’.” I have not done this, rather I made my selection of themes and allowed for prevailing tensions among epistemologies while describing some, although not other, negotiations among Black young adult identities and the process of becoming. I have purposely avoided quantitative language used in the very title of the collection. We are not to be measured - not in humanity, Blackness or being. We are.

To believe wholly in the value of being among the mosaics of these United States of America is to embrace the “ever-recurring inclination to move simply as an American citizen in a democratic society” (Parker, 1955). Guide posts are provided for young constituents through each story of the anthology. The action plan should be clear for adult stakeholders: Support and amplify the confidence of our Black and Brown children, adolescents, and young adults - and their literature! Give them the space to be who they are, mistakes, achievements, and all. Actively attend to their voices, views, and concerns as part of larger conversations, not accessories. Allow them space to be wrong, right, or somewhere in between. Center their feelings and experiences in stories for, by and about them as in their lives. Let them be the mosaics they are in the larger American experiment.

Table 1. List of Recommended Texts

- Alsaid, A., & Bajaj, V. (2019). *Come on in: 15 Stories about immigration and finding home*. Inkyard.
- Anderson, C., & Bolden, T. (2019). *One person, no vote (YA edition): How not all voters are treated equally*. Bloomsbury.
- Clayton, D., Jackson, T.D., Stone, N., Thomas, A., Woodfolk, A., & Yoon, N. (2021). *Blackout: a novel*. Quill Tree Books.
- Fennell, S J., & Roque, A.(2021). *Wild tongues can't be tamed: 15 voices from the Latinx diaspora*. Flatiron Books.
- Harjo, J., & Howe, L. (2020). *When the light of the world was subdued, our songs came through: A Norton anthology of Native Nations poetry*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Johnson, M. (2018). *How I resist: Activism and hope for a new generation*. Wednesday Books.
- Montague, L. (2022). *Maybe an artist: A graphic memoir*. Random House Studio.
- Oh, E., & Chapman, E. (2018). *A thousand beginnings and endings*. Greenwillow Books.

Strong, K. (2023). *Cool. Awkward. Black.* Viking Books for Young Readers.

Wong, A., & Ospina, A (2020). *Disability visibility (adapted for young adults) and first-person stories from the Twenty-First Century: Unabridged selections.* Ember.

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