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Their words, their worlds: Critical literacy in bilingual spaces

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ABSTRACT

Historically, the teaching of literacy in American classrooms has been “restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural and ruled-governed forms of language” (The New London Group, 1996, p. 60–61) which disproportionately negatively affects bilingual children of color. In this case study we aimed to understand how bilingual second graders collaborated 1:1 with pre-service teachers to enact social change through critical literacy tutorials using a LatCrit framework. Findings show how bilingual students took up social action through critical literacy tutorials and the stories they authored about themselves, their learning and their families.

Introduction

Historically, the teaching of literacy in American classrooms has “... been a carefully restricted project – restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural and ruled-governed forms of language” for all children (The New London Group, 1996, p. 60–61). In particular, bilingual and bicultural children of color face inequities within the schooling system often struggling to access high quality and home language instruction (Darder, 2012). Framed as English Language Learners in the literature, bilingual and bicultural children have been continuously deprived of transformational literacy practices such as the use of reading and writing as a tool for social change (Bacon, 2017; Daniel, 2008; Park, 2011). Restrictive language policies prevalent in schools and society, coupled with Functional Literacy education focused on “basic skills instruction [such as] phonemic awareness, spelling and specific reading skills” (Cadiero-Kaplan, 2002) have limited the literacy experiences available for this population (Fredricks & Warriner, 2016; Moll & González, 1994). Furthermore, the rise of “drill and kill” practices taken up by teachers to prepare English Language Learners for high stakes testing (Menken, 2006) makes the situation more complex. These ways of approaching the teaching of literacy confine bilingual and bicultural children of color to a banking model of education (Freire, 1970/2018) that responds to the labor needs of the nation’s workforce under the marketplace ideologies schools reproduce (Apple, 2012; Giroux, 1983), erasing possibilities for students, young and old, to engage in liberatory, critical literacy practices that disrupt these patterns.

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Samuel DeJulio is a former bilingual elementary school teacher. He is currently an assistant professor of literacy at the University of Texas at San Antonio. His work is focused on literacy teacher preparation, particularly on experiences within field-based courses and collaborations between universities, schools, and local communities.

Even the most progressive ways of teaching literacy come up short when they do not examine issues of culture, politics and power (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

In this study we look at critical literacy through a LatCrit framework (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2013) to highlight the need to center issues of race, language, culture, immigration, accent, among other complexities in spaces that foster critical literacy for Latinx bilingual/bicultural children. Access to critical literacy instruction allows children whose literacies have been historically marginalized to read beneath the surface. Additionally, this access opens the door for possibilities of “renaming, reshaping ... and redesigning” (Luke, 2012, p.9) their worlds as they strive for action and social justice (Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002). We present findings from a nested case study (Thomas, 2011) in which three Latinx bilingual/bicultural second graders collaborated with bilingual pre-service teachers (PTs) during critical literacy tutorials to enact social action in their classrooms, schools, families, or communities. This learning experience took place in the context of ten 45-minute-long sessions that occurred during a semester-long bilingual, reading methods course. Our findings focus on how the Latinx bilingual/bicultural students took up social action through the critical literacy tutorials and the stories that arose around bilingual students and their families. We conclude with implications for elementary teachers, particularly those who work with students of diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

Theoretical framework and review of the literature

Theoretical foundations

Critical literacy (Lewison et al., 2002; Luke, 2012; Vasquez, Janks, & Comber, 2019) offers a framework for educators to provide students with a transformative literacy experience that addresses issues of culture, politics, and power. Critical literacy rests on the assumption that the teaching and learning of literacy is not a neutral act; it’s an overtly political one. Luke (2012) defines the term critical literacy as using print and other media of communication “to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rule systems and practices governing the social fields of everyday life” (p. 5). With roots in Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970/2018), critical literacy seeks for children to become readers of their worlds who interrogate power relations and inequities within literacy and society at large. In addition, critical literacy can be used as a tool for social activism within and outside the classroom as children use words to take action (e.g. Comber & Simpson, 2001; Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2006; Rogers, 2014). By shifting the content of what is taught in the literacy classroom and its purposes, critical literacy opens the door for social justice in these spaces.

In a review of 30 years of professional literature on this framework, Lewison et al. (2002) identified four common possibilities for the role/functions of critical literacy (p. 382): “(a) disrupting the commonplace, (b) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (c) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (d) taking action and promoting social justice.” In order to enact critical literacy, students do not have to take up all four of these functions (Norris, Lucas, & Prudhoe, 2012). Rather, this framework is meant to be used to understand the complexities of critical literacy and help guide teachers’ pedagogy. In this study, we focused on the Latinx bilingual/bicultural children’s engagement with the final dimension of critical literacy, taking action and promoting social justice.

We build upon the critical literacy (Lewison et al., 2002; Luke, 2012) framework by taking up LatCrit (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2013) to understand how Latinx children in particular apply the taking action and promoting social justice dimension of the critical literacy framework. LatCrit builds upon the foundation of Critical Race Theory (CRT). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) explain how CRT can be used to understand the relationship between race, class, and the education of children of color in the United States. LatCrit adds complexity to the conception of CRT by challenging us to consider the racialized aspects of oppression due to “immigration status, sexuality, culture, language, phenotype, accent, and surname” (Yosso, 2013, p.7). Solórzano & Delgado Bernal (2001) outlined five understandings that are critical to recognizing how LatCrit

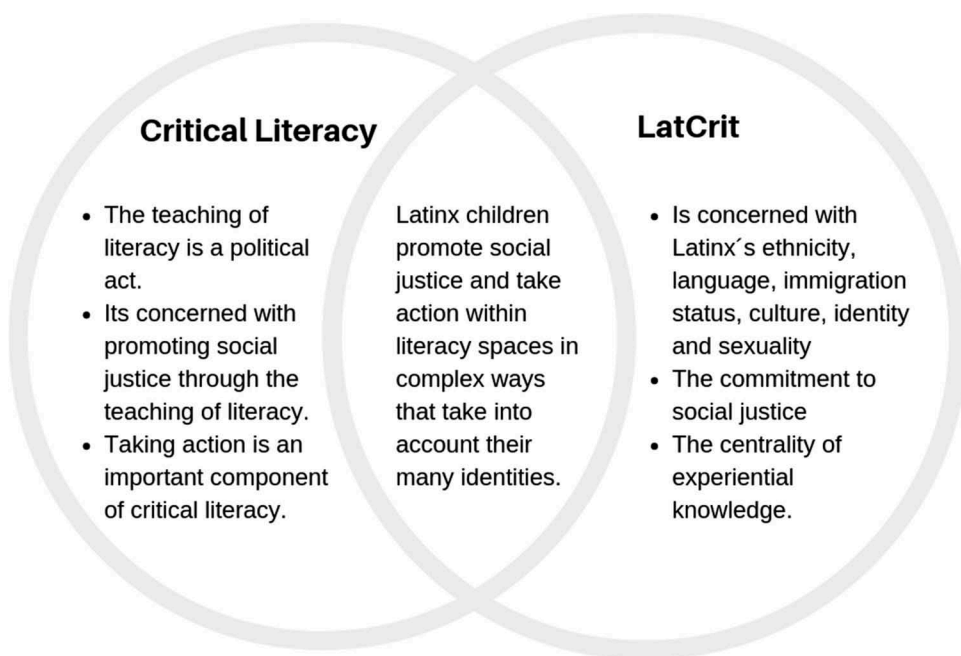


Figure 1. Conceptualization of the theoretical frameworks.

and CRT operate in education, (a) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the interdisciplinary perspective (p. 6). In this study, we focus on the third and fourth tenets, commitment to social justice and the centrality of experiential knowledge, to highlight literacy's possibility to empower underrepresented students by drawing on students' lived realities. In our work, we draw on LatCrit to understand the ways that linguistic identities and immigration status play a role in the choices the children made in the course of engaging in social action within a literacy tutoring context. By centering students' experiential knowledge (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), our work is committed to social justice and the belief that young children have the power to impact their worlds (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Together, aspects of the critical literacy and LatCrit frameworks allow us to analyze how bilingual/bicultural Latinx draw on their experiential knowledge to promote social justice and take action. This work occurred within literacy spaces in which their complex Latinx identities were acknowledged, their experiential knowledge was centered and a commitment to social justice was at the foreground of the literacy classroom (Figure 1).

Critical literacy in practice

Research on critical literacy has often focused on helping students unpack power relations in society, (e.g. Jones, 2013; Kim, 2014; Labadie, Pole, & Rogers, 2013; Spector & Jones, 2007) however this work has less frequently examined ways teachers can develop a space for students to take steps to address such inequities (Behrman, 2006). In classrooms, critical literacy practices often focus on understanding multiple perspectives within a text or a topic, and how to make sense of perspectives that are at odds with each other (Behrman, 2006). An example of this is Spector and Jones' work (2007) around how 8th graders make sense of the Holocaust through deconstructing *The Diary of Anne Frank*. In their study, the students deconstructed their preconceived ideas about Anne Frank by reading three different editions of her diary. In another example with younger children, the pre-

schoolers in Kim's (2014) class engaged in critical analysis of children's books, explored diverse perspectives, and challenged traditional Korean gender roles through their writing. In both of these examples, the multiple text analysis complicated the students' initial understandings of the text themselves, interrogated multiple viewpoints and disrupted the commonplace.

Another dimension of critical literacy is becoming text critics (Luke & Freebody, 1999) and understanding how one's ideas relate to those of the author of the text (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). Through critical literacy, students "do more than just enjoy books; they also question what books have to say by digging deeply and thinking broadly" (Leland, Lewison, & Harste, 2013, p. 12). Wood and Jocius (2014) explore this idea in their study of how second and third graders can use iPads as a tool for critical response, however they argue they are not "magic wands" for critical literacy (p.133). They emphasize the importance of teachers' and students' role in enacting critical literacy. The following studies explore how students can bring critical literacy to life through action.

A growing body of work has focused on the ways in which students engage in the taking action and promoting social justice tenet of critical literacy according to Lewison et al. (2002). In her dissertation work, Lee (2017) utilized children's literature and the children's everyday experiences as points of departure for fifth graders to engage in action, such as writing a petition for gender fairness in their school. In another study, Norton (2005), shared how Pam, a first grade student, read the inequitable actions of her teachers and engaged in critical literacy to "affirm her classed, aged, and student identities and intervene against inequitable teaching pedagogies" (p.125). Finally, Rogers & Labadie's (2015) work in a kindergarten classroom highlighted Sophie, a kindergarten student, as she accumulated the "ways of interacting," "ways of representing," and "ways of being" (p. 37) the authors found necessary for her to transform her ideas into action as she fought bullying in her classroom.

For this study, we drew primarily on a study conducted by Comber, Thomson, and Wells (2001) that focused on a second/third grade classroom that engaged in critical literacy practices through an urban renewal project. Although it occurred close to twenty years ago and took place outside the US context, it provides a clear roadmap for the enactment of literacy units around children's experiences that resulted in them engaging in social action. To begin the critical literacy unit, the Australian teacher designed a list of questions that allowed opportunities for students to discuss, write, and draw around personal, local, and global issues that were important to them (see p.455 for the protocol). Then, moving into what Lewison et al. (2002) described as taking action, the teacher designed a curriculum that centered the students' concerns. The students engaged in teacher-facilitated inquiry around an urban renewal project that would affect the entire community and would displace some of the students. Additionally, students conducted polls about how these changes would affect their families and neighbors, designed alternative plans for the project, faxed local authorities, and mailed their products to project officers and council members. Not only did students engage in action and change, but they did it while developing grade-level language and literacy skills through complex collaboration, research, and the production of maps, diagrams, and letters.

Critical literacies in bilingual and bicultural spaces

Some in the field of critical literacies have implemented critical literacy pedagogies in bilingual classrooms (e.g. Flores-Dueñas, 2005; Los Ríos, 2017; Peterson & Chamberlain, 2015), with Spanish speaking Latin American children (e.g. Medina & Del Rocío Costa, 2010, 2013) and with Latinx children in the United States (e.g. Torres & Tayne, 2017).

For example, Cati de los Ríos' (2017) explored how Joaquín, a U.S.-Mexican transnational, high school student, enacted critical literacy through corridos, a genre of Mexican music that gives a voice to injustice and border tensions. Joaquín was an avid composer of corridos outside of school and this practice was supported in his Chicana/Latinx studies course. In this way, the teacher encouraged Joaquín to move beyond what traditionally "counted" as literacy and use his full linguistic repertoire. In an example with younger students, in the 1st grade bilingual classroom in Flores-Dueñas' (2005) study the children were exposed to culturally and socially relevant texts and critical discussions after the reading in both English and Spanish. The children in the study improved their reading levels in

both languages while participating in critical questioning of the texts. Finally, Torres and Tayne (2017) used the superhero genre to allow Latinx, elementary students to author counternarratives through stories set in their communities. The authors of the piece found that the children were able to engage with, and speak back to xenophobic and racist discourse fueled by the 2016 presidential campaign and “allowed youth to engage in critical hope” (p.376). In this work, the authors created spaces for young Latinx children to develop literacy around sociopolitical issues and engage in social justice through the creation of their narratives.

We build on this scarce body of work, continuing to look closely at Latinx bilingual/bicultural children specific experiences when they gain access to transformative literacy spaces and as they work with bilingual pre-service teachers collaboratively. In 2012, the editors of the Bilingual Research Journal, invited readers to think about what critical literacy meant in the bilingual classrooms. Their vision was characterized by opportunities for bilingual students and their families to develop a critical awareness of issues of privilege, power and social justice in classrooms, curriculum, texts and program models (Fránquiz & Ortiz, 2012). In this piece, we respond to this vision by centering taking action and promoting social justice (Lewison et al., 2002) in literacy tutorials for Latinx bilingual/bicultural students.

Methods

Research design

We used a nested case study design (Thomas, 2011) to understand the ways in which young, bilingual second graders collaborated with pre-service teachers to enact social change through literacy tutorials that centered on the child’s experiential knowledge (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Case study methodology was appropriate for this research study because it allowed us to take an in-depth look at the ways children took up social action through the directed literacy tutorials and the new stories that emerged from this process. For Thomas (2011), case study methodology allows the researcher to focus “on one thing, looked at in-depth and from many angles” (p.9).

Nested case studies use individual cases as units of analysis to understand the larger whole. They are similar to multiple case studies in that they both compare and contrast between cases. However, nested case studies are embedded in, and gain their significance by, the larger unit of analysis (Thomas, 2011). Bounded by both the course, which was taught by Nathaly and Sam and where the critical literacy tutorials occurred, and by the pre-service teacher-student groups, the nested case study design allowed us to take multifaceted looks at how this process unfolded. Within this “wider case” (Thomas, 2011, p.152), we have purposefully decided to focus on two units of analysis; one composed of one female preservice teacher and one male elementary student, and the other composed of one female preservice teacher, a female elementary student, and a male elementary student. We decided to focus on these particular students and teachers because they offered diverse examples of how the students and preservice teachers took up the project. These units are integral to the wider case; however, they represent two different interesting takes on the child-led process to enact change as a part of the critical literacy tutorials. As we take an in-depth look at these two units of analysis within our case study we ask:

- How do three young, bilingual/bicultural students and their partner teachers take up social action through directed critical literacy tutorials?
- When centering critical literacy in a bilingual context, what stories arise around children’s agency, teaching, and the role of family?

Context and participants

The context of this study was a Bilingual Reading Methods course at a large, public university in the southwestern United States. The course was taught in a local elementary school serving children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. A component of the course included 1:1 tutoring between the preservice teachers and elementary students. Tutoring sessions were forty-five minutes

each week across the semester. Traditionally, this tutoring space has been designed to include a read aloud, a poem, a joke, individualized word work, and final product such as a student-authored book or an inquiry project guided by the child’s interest (Hoffman & Roser, 2012). This semester, instructors decided to integrate aspects of critical literacy, specifically the 4th tenet (Lewison et al., 2002) by providing the elementary school students with the experience of finding opportunities in their classroom, school, and communities to take action and create change while using reading and writing as tools of power.

To make this work possible, the course instructors made a variety of adjustments to the course and tutoring structure. First, the aspiring teachers were provided with their tutees’ general address (i. e., an intersection near their home). Individually, they visited the children’s neighborhoods as a way to immerse themselves in the context and identify rich literacy spaces in the children’s communities. The preservice teachers took pictures as they explored the community to share with the elementary students in tutoring. During the first tutoring session, the teachers presented the pictures as conversation starters around community and action. For one tutoring pair, the pictures became pivotal in their work. For other groups, the pictures did not play a defining role in the final project. Here we provide an overview (Figure 2) of the steps teachers took as they guided their students’



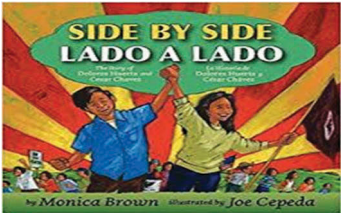
Description	Example
The pre-service teachers were encouraged to go to the child’s community and take pictures of literacy-rich spaces and the community in general.	 Photograph 1. Community walk
During the first session, the teachers presented the pictures to the children to open up conversations around the children’s community and opportunities for change.	 Photograph 2. Tutoring
Based on each pair’s conversations, the teachers selected children’s literature that supported their work. Books such as “Side by Side” were key as teachers explained the advocacy projects to the students.	 Photograph 3. Sample text used in tutoring

Figure 2. Overview of the steps teachers took as they guided their student’s advocacy projects.

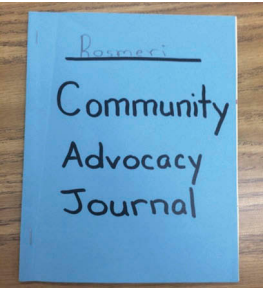


<p>Each week, the children would note their ideas for school, family or community change in their advocacy journals. These ideas came from conversations, pictures and the children’s literature shared each week.</p>	 <p>Photograph 4. Tutoring artifact</p>
<p>“Espacios de convivencia” The space that teacher educators had called “tutoring,” became a shared space of learning and enacting change. Far from remedial, this space brought together the children’s wishes for change, with literacy instruction that was transformative.</p>	 <p>Photograph 5. Tutoring</p>
<p>Parents, siblings, teachers and other second graders became authentic audiences of the advocacy project presentations at the end of the semester.</p>	 <p>Photograph 6. Presentation</p>

Figure 2. (Continued.)

advocacy projects for other researchers and teacher educators who might want to expand on this work.

The school

Rafael Elementary (pseudonym), sits in a gentrifying neighborhood where new coffee shops and bike repair stores sit next to a historical mural of a critical Mexican-American activist and the daily construction worker pick-up site. A visit to the school would reveal its respect for and inclusion of the Latinx culture. Mothers, fathers, and caregivers often sit outside on two cement benches chatting in Spanish throughout the day. Spanish speaking personnel welcome you into a building bursting with children’s artwork, Latinx children’s literature covers and, if you go at the right time of the year, the annual *altar del día de los muertos*. Within these contrasting worlds, sits a decreasing enrollment of 353 students, 90% Latinx, 4% African American, 4% Asian, and 2% White. While new families without children are moving into the neighborhoods surrounding the school and families of color being pushed out of this highly coveted real estate, Rafael Elementary continues to fight to stay open. Even though the school has held close ties to the nearby public university for many years, the two institutions have strengthened their

collaboration in the last year through university-led teacher professional development and by opening new spaces for pre-service teachers to work alongside the school's teachers and students. The Aguila's Tutoring (pseudonym) program is part of this shared space.

The children

Cristian, Rocío and Jorge are highlighted in this nested case study. They form part of the ten, Latinx, second graders that participated in the critical literacy tutorials at Rafael Elementary. Their classroom teacher is a bilingual male who supports his students' bilingualism even in a mixed classroom (English and Spanish speakers). Cristian was a Mexican-American bilingual second grade male student who collaborated with Daniela. He had a positive attitude toward school, which was reflected in his enthusiastic attitude toward tutoring. Cristian knew his community well and was ready to enact change since week one. Jorge and Rocío, who worked with Heather, were the only pair of students in a tutoring group across the semester. Jorge was a Mexican-American bilingual second grade male student and Rocío was a Mexican-American bilingual second grade female student. Jorge seemed to enjoy drawing and talking to Rocío during tutoring activities, yet he sometimes tended to be a bit shy, particularly when it came to reading in front of her or his other peers. Rocío was outgoing and talkative; she often told jokes during their time together. Unlike Jorge, she seemed eager to read aloud the poems and books Heather brought each week. As revealed in their case, Jorge and Rocío's shared Mexican-American cultural backgrounds had implications for their shared family and community experiences around immigration.

The pre-service teachers

Daniela and Heather form part of the eight-student cohort that took part in this study. Nathaly met them a semester before the study as their classmates in a university multi-leveled course and began developing a relationship with them then. Their role in the study is contingent on the children who were selected as the two units of analysis. Daniela is originally from Mexico, but she has been a resident in the US for many years. She is a sequential bilingual, acquiring English as a second language when she moved to the US. During e-mail communication, Daniela shared that she desires to "empower her students and encourage them to take action as active members who create the kind of world they want to live in" (04/18). Heather, who self-identifies as a White female, is a second language Spanish speaker from a large urban city in the state in which the university is located. She holds a background in government legislative work both in Texas and in Washington and is politically active. Heather considers herself a native to the state and is a strong ally of the Latinx community in the US.

Positionality

We, as a team, believe in the transformative power of critical approaches to education (Freire, 1970/2018). We share a common commitment to the principles of humanizing pedagogy, including the idea that, "critical reflection and action can transform structures that impede our own and others' humanness, thus facilitating liberation for all" (Del Carmen Salazar, 2013). This impacted both how we engaged in the teaching and data analysis process.

It's important to state that Nathaly was the course instructor, gaining access to the school, pre-service teachers, and children from her privileged position. However, the possible implications of this work for young, bilingual children of color to participate in social action from a young age, while engaging in transformative literacy practices, was well worth it. Growing up in Puerto Rico as a colonized subject of the United States, she has come to understand the crucial role of Critical Pedagogy and literacy instruction in order to not only read beneath the surface, but to speak back, challenge and recreate new realities.

Cori was a researcher and collaborator on this project. She was simultaneously teaching a literacy methods course to a group of preservice teachers in an ESL cohort and engaging in a similar project. This impacted the ways that she analyzed the data because she was familiar with project from the position of enacting the project in her course. She identifies as being bicultural, Chicana and White.

Drawing on her personal experience learning her “lost heritage” language, as a teacher and researcher, she seeks to honor and sustain the culturally and linguistic resources of her students.

Sam, who identifies as a White male, was an assistant in the course. He grew up speaking English and began learning Spanish after he entered college. He worked for ten years as a bilingual elementary teacher before leaving the elementary classroom to attend graduate school, where his work focused primarily on literacy teacher preparation. He and his wife, a native Spanish speaker, are raising a six-year-old bilingual child. These professional and personal experiences have shaped his understanding of the way language, culture, and ethnicity shape and are shaped by schools.

Data collection

We gathered data for this study in the Fall 2017 semester. Nathaly and Sam, as the class instructor and teaching assistant, were the instruments of data collection (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Data sources for this study include tutoring lesson plans and reflections, observations of weekly tutoring work, pictures of work done in the literacy tutoring, group interviews with the preservice teachers and the elementary students at the end of the semester. During the semester-long critical literacy tutorials, we gathered the preservice teachers’ weekly lessons plans. In these documents, the preservice teachers explicitly shared the steps taken every week, the children’s literature used, and how they connected literacy instruction with the social action component. Additionally, we collected weekly reflections where the teachers shared the children’s choices around the project, the steps they were taking collaboratively, and the challenges both they and the children were encountering along the process. We also collected observations during the 45 minutes of tutoring work every week. Taking these field notes was a challenge as we enacted a dual role as teachers and researchers. Although this is a clear limitation of utilizing this data source in this context, those field notes yielded insights not captured in the lesson plans or reflections. Throughout the semester and during the final celebration we took photographs of the artifacts the children produced during tutoring and for the final social action project presentations. We conducted group interviews with the children and the pre-service teachers separately.

In order to avoid conflicts between the research and coursework, Cori obtained consent from the preservice teachers in the class taught by Nathaly and Sam. The course instructors were not informed of who had agreed to participate in the research until the end of the semester. The researchers sent parental consent and student assent forms home with each of the children. When a child’s parents signed and returned the parental consent form, one of the researchers spoke with the child to confirm their interest in participating in the research.

Data analysis

Guided by our theoretical approach to the study, we focused on how the elementary students and their partner teachers took up the social action project and the stories that arose around the children’s agency, teaching, and family. In accordance with a LatCrit framework, we considered how issues of race, language, and immigration status might influence, or be influenced by, the work done between the elementary and preservice teachers. In the study, we used constant comparative methods, as described by Thomas (2011, p.171) to analyze multiple data sources collected across the academic semester. We began our analysis by focusing on the lesson plans and written reflections. As we read the data source, we highlighted sentences and phrases and open-coded them. In our initial round of open coding, we generated over 50 initial codes, which we discussed, revised, and collapsed into larger categories during our weekly research meetings. For example, we initially coded an example of Heather’s students as “Knowledge about immigration” and an example with Daniela’s student as “Knowledge of physical aspects of the community” (see Figure 3). As we moved into the next stage of coding, guided by Solorzano and Bernal’s (2001) LatCrit tenets, we collapsed these codes into “children’s centrality of experiential knowledge.”

Next, we revisited the lesson plans and reflections in order to apply our new set of categories in a second round of analysis. As we analyzed the data sources a second time, the initial themes that were present in the data sources of both units of analysis became themes from our cross-case analysis. We continued this process of analyzing, discussing, and refining our categories through weekly meetings for the remaining

Data	Initial Code	Collapsed Code	Theoretical Framework
“Today I noticed [Heather’s] students had a lot of funds of knowledge on what Latinx people must do to stay safe from ICE. The kids talked about cars and keeping them looking new to stay safe” (Field notes memo, 10/17/17).	Knowledge about immigration	Children’s experiential knowledge	LatCrit (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001)
“[Christian] me facilito encontrar el topic, la semana pasada ya tenia decidió que le gustaría hacer en su comunidad. El quiere mantener las calles limpias y concientizar a sus vecinos de lo importante que es el reciclado” (Daniela’s Lesson plan, Week 3).	Knowledge of physical aspects of the community		

Figure 3. Example of the coding process.

data sources. For each data source, we wrote individual memos, which we shared at our meetings to initiate our discussions of the data. Our initial rounds of analysis involved looking across the cohort (horizontally) by data source. Next, we focused on the particular tutoring groups (i.e. nested cases) to consider (vertically) how the findings from initial analyzes were manifested in each of the particular groups. This recursive process of analysis across and within cases allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of how the elementary students and preservice teachers took up the project and the stories that emerged from their work. To ensure trustworthiness with our adult participants and quality in the account (Thomas, 2011, p.66), we provided them a manuscript for their approval. In the next section, we report findings from our analysis.

Findings

Bilingual/bicultural students taking up social action through critical literacy tutorials

We begin by providing narratives that describe how Cristian, Rocío, and Jorge took up their social action projects within the critical literacy tutorials in collaboration with their teachers. In the two contrasting units of analysis described, we see the differences in experiences, outcomes, and choices made throughout the process both by the children and their teachers. While Cristian’s case disguises itself as an anticlimactic, traditional way of taking up social action, his role, and his mother’s intimate participation made this case compelling. On the other hand, Rocío and Jorge came in ready to share their experiential knowledge (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) around immigration and Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency (ICE) in the first week, yet the project took a turn. These contrasting experiences mark only two ways in which bilingual/bicultural children and their teachers can engage in social action within the critical literacy framework (Lewison et al., 2002; Luke, 2012).

Cristian: Cleaning up a community

Cristian immediately identified the focus of his project when presented with the project guidelines and the community pictures Daniela had taken. In the second week of tutoring, he decided to “mantener las calles limpias y concientizar a sus vecinos de lo importante que es el reciclado,” [keep the streets clean and make neighbors aware of how important recycling is] (LP, Week 3). Both Daniela and Nathaly were critical of this idea for different reasons. In personal communication, Daniela shared how she had to go back and drive through the community again because she had overlooked the trash in the streets during

her first visit; for Cristian this was an important reality he wanted to address in his world. Nathaly felt the idea of picking up trash was predictable and what teachers often focus on when integrating the idea of social action as part of their curriculum. Additionally, the authors worried about focusing on deficits in the community, rather than on building on the community's strengths. Both the teacher and the teacher educator, had to step back to allow Cristian to take charge of his project, recognizing his experiential knowledge about his community as legitimate in the literacy curriculum (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). In this example, he not only became empowered, but also empowered others in his under-represented minority community (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

During week 4, Cristian read articles provided by Daniela about recycling and cleaning the streets. Following up on this, in week 5 Cristian learned more about recycling through an activity in which he labeled photos of different pieces of trash with the appropriate recycling designation. In week 5, Cristian also began planning his action item for the advocacy project, which Daniela described in her weekly plan: “También hablamos de los planes que tenemos [d]e ir a limpiar toda la basura de su comunidad o cerca de su casa. Tenemos pensado hacer algunos posters de tamaño apropiado para localizarlos en algunos negocios cerca del vecindario de [Cristian]” [Also, we talked about our plans to go clean trash in his community or close to his house. We are thinking of making some posters about the right size to put in some businesses around [Cristian's] neighborhood] (LP, Week 5). This is an example of using a more traditional literacy practice within this less traditional literacy space. After this discussion, Cristian made a plan of going on a walk to pick up trash in his community. He made a list of everything they would need for that day and started planning what they would write on the community recycling posters. At this time, Daniela realized she and Cristian would not be able to make their plans a reality without the participation of Cristian's family. During week 7, Cristian took home a letter to his family that described the project and invited them to participate in the community clean-up walk. This invitation to his family was an important example of the taking action component of the critical literacy experience (Lewison et al., 2002; Luke, 2012). Once he confirmed that his mother would be going on the walk, Cristian and his teacher designed a t-shirt to be worn during the trash pick-up and made plans to visit a pupusa truck in his community for lunch; the same food truck had been captured in Daniela's pictures of his community.

In late November, Cristian, his mother, and Daniela, brought their plans to life by picking up the trash in his community and sharing the bilingual flyers they had created. At the end of the semester, during the class-wide celebration, Cristian shared photos from their community clean-up walk and explained their process to his peers in Spanish. Through this process, Cristian identified an opportunity and devised an action plan that included his family. In this way, Cristian engaged in a collaborative biliteracy development practice that bridged the gap between his home and school, while engaging in a commitment to social justice (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) and taking action in his community (Lewison et al., 2002; Luke, 2012).



Photograph 7. Cristian and Daniela, celebration day.

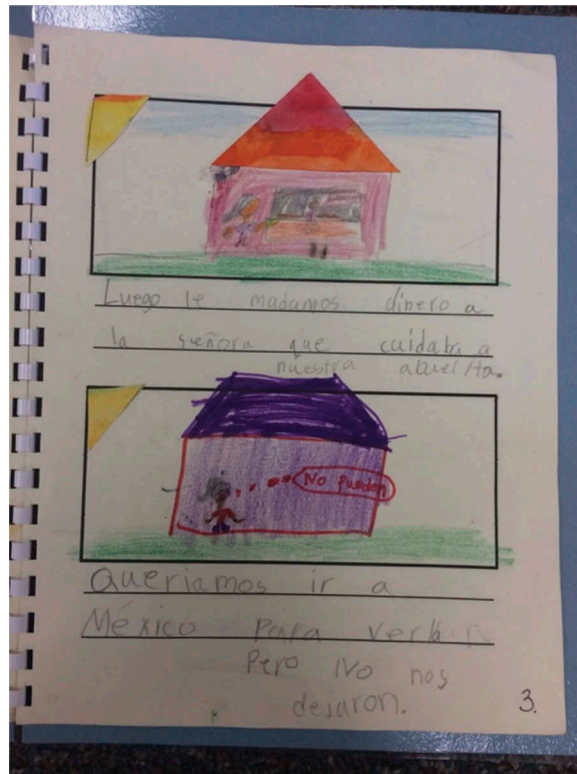
Rocío and Jorge: From immigration activists to bilingual book authors

Jorge and Rocío ultimately created bilingual books for their classroom libraries to help other students learn about and manage their emotions, but their project did not begin like this. In just the second week of tutoring it appeared that the group's focus would be the experiences of undocumented immigrants. Jorge and Rocío spoke passionately about the issue and recognized it as something that negatively affected their community. Heather brought books and resources about immigration. Both students were able to point out immigration officials in the illustrations and draw connections to characters in the story who were faced with fears of being deported. Rocío shared that she did not know her grandparents who lived in Mexico and Honduras because she was unable to visit them. From the children's discussion and the teacher's response, we see that their experiential knowledge of what it means to be part of immigrant communities where some members are undocumented was recognized as a legitimate and critical aspect of their literacy development (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

In spite of the students' clear excitement about the topic, Heather struggled to find a clear focus for the group's work. On multiple occasions she mentioned the need for a "una manera realista" [a realistic way] of helping the community (LP, weeks 3–4). The students had suggested "poner un vestido en Donald Trump," [putting a dress on Donald Trump] and "destruir la frontera," [destroying the border], which she concluded were not feasible options. Instead, she pointed to the students' idea of "ayudar a la gente que tienen miedo de regresar a México por Donald Trump" [helping people that are scared of being sent back to Mexico by Donald Trump] (LP, Week 2). In the fifth week of tutoring, Heather shifted the focus of the tutoring to "feelings." She said, "pienso que en vez de hablar sobre la inmigración como algo que debemos cambiar (aunque sí podemos), podemos hablar de los sentimientos de la comunidad." [I think instead of talking about immigration as something we should change (though we should), we can talk about feelings in the community] (LP, Week 5). Here we see a shift from a centering of the students' experiential knowledge about their immigrant communities and the impact of documented/undocumented status to a project with which the teacher felt more comfortable. Heather's varied responses to the children's project idea, is an example of what Solórzano & Delgado Bernal (2001) describe as the contradictory ways in which educational institutions work to both emancipate, empower, and potentially marginalize students' experiences.

When Heather told the students about her idea, the students decided they wanted to put the books in the classroom and outside of the office to help other students who only spoke Spanish deal with their own emotions. This is an example of how the students centered their linguistic identities within (Yosso, 2013) the critical literacy experience. Rocío wrote about happiness and sadness and used a time when her family was unable to reach Rocío's grandmother in Mexico who had fallen ill. Jorge chose to write about anger by explaining the way his sister sometimes made him feel at home. This perhaps a missed opportunity for Heather to scaffold Jorge by asking guising questions such as "what else makes you angry in your school or community?" which could have led to the recentering of the student's initial ideas on immigration. During the final presentation of their projects, the students read aloud from their texts for peers, teachers, and parents. Writing a book for a classroom library might seem like a common occurrence in literacy classrooms around us, yet, this project met two uncommon goals. First, it centered the students' experiential knowledge (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) through conversations and books that reflected their community's collective Experience of immigrants facing hegemonic institutions such as ICE.

Secondly, the act of authoring a book where the children's experiences is clearly reflected is in itself a challenge to traditional literacy practices. The telling of stories that include family histories and center the lived experiences of students of color is a critical part of LatCrit in education. Moreover, Rocío's story narrating her and her family's grief at not being able to cross the border to see her sick grandmother, seen here in photograph 8, opens a window for children like her to rewrite their lived realities not present in books around them.



Photograph 8. Page from Rocíos book.

Authoring new stories in bilingual critical literacy spaces

In this section we examine the development of three stories that arose from the children's social action work in collaboration with their teachers. First, we discuss how the implementation of critical literacy tutorials in this bilingual/biliterate space allowed children to show their agentic and bilingual capabilities. Second, we show how teachers' expansion of valued literacy practices opens a new space for new stories that challenge deficit conceptions of children of color. This allows the children to show and be credited for their reading and re-writing of their complex socio, cultural and political worlds. Last, we share the beautiful story of how Cristian and Daniela opened up new possibilities for family engagement in bilingual literacy spaces.

Ya leemos nuestro mundo

The three children portrayed in the previous cases taught us valuable lessons of what they already brought to the table. The project began with the teachers setting out to guide the children in finding opportunities for change in their homes, schools, and communities. It was the pre-service teachers who decided which pictures of the community to take, which children's literature to include in the lessons, and how to frame conversations around the advocacy project. Yet, we were able to find evidence throughout the semester of how the children had already framed themselves as critical readers of their worlds, skills that did not need to be taught, but rather experiential knowledge that just needed space in the literacy classroom (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

In the case of Jorge and Rocío, by week 2 and with little guidance from the teacher, the children were discussing the fear their communities were experiencing around deportation and ICE over recent raids (Heather, wk 2 LP). They also discussed their feelings around the current president and

the plans to build a wall along the US-Mexico border. The children's Politicized Funds of Knowledge (Gallo & Link, 2015; Torres & Tayne, 2017) bubbled to the surface as soon as the teacher opened up the door for these conversations to occur and prior to any instruction around the advocacy projects that would take place within the literacy tutorial. A few weeks later, the children explained to the tutor how maintaining blinker lights and keeping cars "like new" could help keep ICE away, among other practices they engaged in as a community (Field Notes, 10/17). The experiential knowledge of issues facing their community were central to the tutoring process for the first four weeks, after which the teacher shifted the focus of the project to writing about the feelings of sadness and anger the children had expressed around these topics (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

For Cristian, his decision of what opportunity for action to pursue was clear from the beginning and remained consistent throughout the semester. By week two, he expressed that he wanted to clean the streets and teach people in his community about recycling because there was too much trash. What is interesting here is how Daniela expressed concern to Nathaly about the viability of this project since the community had appeared clean during her initial visit to take pictures (personal communication, 10/17). After our conversation, Daniela decided to revisit the community that week to make sure there was enough trash and then proceeded with the project. Before we stepped into Cristian's life as teachers and researchers, he had already read his world and made choices about what things he would make better in his community if given the opportunity. For his teacher, it was necessary to corroborate the information herself before proceeding.

Ya somos bilingües

The tutoring sessions were scheduled to be in Spanish one week and English the next, as part of giving the pre-service teachers the opportunity to engage in literacy instruction in both languages. Despite these monolingual designations, students and teachers drew on their full linguistic repertoires within the advocacy project (García & Wei, 2014). For example, while teachers planned read alouds and word work around the language of the week, the advocacy project topics required resources such as books, pamphlets, and videos around the topic of interest that did not always align with the designated language of instruction. Additionally, the students' final projects included text in both languages, sometimes on the same page.

While interviewing the children during a focus group, one of the researchers asked "¿Les digo en inglés, en español, ó las dos cosas?" [Do I [ask] in English, Spanish or in both?], children responded, "Si hablamos las dos cosas nosotros. Él no, él habla nada más en español ... (another child) sí, sé un poquito" [Yes, we speak both. Not him, he only speaks Spanish ... Yes, I do know a little bit"]. Even though the children had different linguistic repertoires they were proud to say they could handle both English and Spanish. When a peer pushed against one of the children's ability to engage in the interview in English, the child quickly responded, reclaiming his bilingualism. In the second focus group, with Rocío, Jorge, and Cristian, the researcher asked, "¿Cómo se sienten sobre los idiomas que pudieron usar aquí?" [How do you feel about the languages you were able to use here?]. The children responded they felt "orgullosa" [proud], "contenta" [content], and "feliz" [happy], "porque algunos me pueden hablar en inglés y otros en español" [because some can speak to me in English and others in Spanish], thus restating that they themselves are bilinguals who have the ability to communicate with everyone in the room whether they speak English only, Spanish only, or both. In this way the students claim bilingualism as part of their identity (Cashman, 2005; Gort, 2015). While all students expressed being proud of being bilingual and having linguistic repertoires that included both languages, one of the students took it further. "Podemos hacer (sic) bilingües *mientras* aprendemos a leer en inglés y en español" [We can be bilingual *while* we learn to read in English and Spanish] (Rocío, Focus Group Interview, emphasis added). Here, Rocío pushes against the idea that bilingual children in our classrooms are "emergent" (Martínez, 2018) or "semilingual" (Flores, 2005, p.88) and thus are incomplete beings in both worlds as they acquire both languages. Both students reinstate their bilingual identities, while acknowledging that learning to read in both English and Spanish is an ongoing process in which they continue to engage. When centering

Latinx bilingual/bicultural students' multiple identities (Yosso, 2013) within the critical literacy framework (Lewison et al., 2002; Luke, 2012), researchers and educators learn not only how children take up complex social justice topics, but how their linguistic resources come into play during this process.

Expandiendo lo que cuenta

As these traditional tutoring spaces transformed into *espacios de convivencia*, broader conceptions of what counts as literacy emerged. A new space was created that allowed the “formal” or the traditional literacy lesson (read aloud, poem, word work, comprehension) to intersect with “informal” literacies, such as children’s knowledge about their communities. This is an example of Solórzano and Delgado Bernal’s (2001) centrality of experiential knowledge tenet. In this clash of what is often considered the official and unofficial literacy curriculum, the roles in the learning event often shifted as students portrayed knowledge that teachers did not have. In the case of Rocío, Jorge, and their tutor Heather, the children became teachers in this new space sharing how keeping cars “like new” could help keep ICE agents away, knowledge that was foreign to Heather, a middle-class White woman. In these spaces that centered the distribution of expertise, children’s teachers, and even parents engaged in the development of these action projects together.

In these new spaces, we often witness shifts in teacher language. When the preservice teachers talked about the students in the more traditional parts of tutoring at least two participants used limiting language such as “struggling reader” and “below grade level” when they were describing their students. For example, in Heather’s reflection on her second week of teaching, she noted that Jorge and Rocío “estaban pensando en muchas palabras, pero a veces las escriben mal” [they were thinking about a lot of words, but sometimes they misspelled them]. Daniela expressed a similar sentiment about Cristian in her fourth weekly teaching reflection on the importance of focusing on “easy” words. “I think it is important to start with easy words according to the grade level of Cristian.” These two examples show the ways that traditional, performance-based views of the students were apparent when the preservice teachers were talking about their students in the context of the traditional, teacher-led components in tutoring. It seemed that during this more teacher-led time, pre-service teachers made instructional choices based on what they believed the students could handle or where they needed to improve.

In contrast, the advocacy project space opened up possibilities for the students’ funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992), political funds of knowledge (Gallo, 2015), and family literacies to be included as “what counts” as valued knowledge and literacy. When talking about the students during time dedicated to the project, the preservice teachers’ language around the students and what counted in the literacy space changed. For example, in Heather’s weekly reflection on her teaching in the third week, she reflected that, “Los estudiantes pensaron mucho de lo que quieren hacer para la comunidad. Todas las sugerencias fueron sus propias ideas y parece como la inmigración es algo prominente en sus vidas” [The students thought a lot about what they wanted to do for the community. All the suggestions were their own ideas and it seems like immigration is something prominent in their lives]. This example shows how in the context of the advocacy project Heather valued the out of school knowledge of the students’ of color and recognized it as “legitimate and appropriate” (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p.314), even though this knowledge was foreign to her own. The structure of the advocacy project component of tutoring was student-led by nature and it appears that this structure fostered the preservice teachers’ focus on their students’ strengths and knowledges as a part of what counts as knowledge.

Another example of expanding what counts is the multilingual, multimodal format (The New London Group, 1996) of the advocacy project presentations. In sharing their advocacy project work, the students were not limited by traditional notions of literacy as a formal written product. Some students expressed literacy in traditional formats, for example, Jorge and Rocío shared texts they wrote about learning about and managing your emotions. Meanwhile, other students’ presentations

embodied a more expansive view of literacy, such as Cristian's project, which took the form of a traditional written product along with posters and a visual presentation of photos from his community clean-up walk.

El rol de familia

Working-class families often do not exhibit parental involvement in ways that are valued by schools (Lareau, 1987). One reason for this is the fact that schools traditionally value parental involvement that is dependent upon one of the parents having an open schedule that is not a possibility in families where both parents work full time (Lareau, 1987). This is especially true for working-class Latino families because of racist and monolingual schooling practices, such as "Americanization programs that focus on changing the students' language, dress, recreational activities, family tradition, and homestyle," (Delgado-Gaitan, 2012, p. 306; Gonzalez, 1990/2013; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). As a result, working-class Latino families are often cast as disinterested in their children's education (Valencia, 2002). Contrary to deficit notions of Latino working class parents, our findings demonstrate how parents from all the children in the case studies were deeply involved in their children's education.

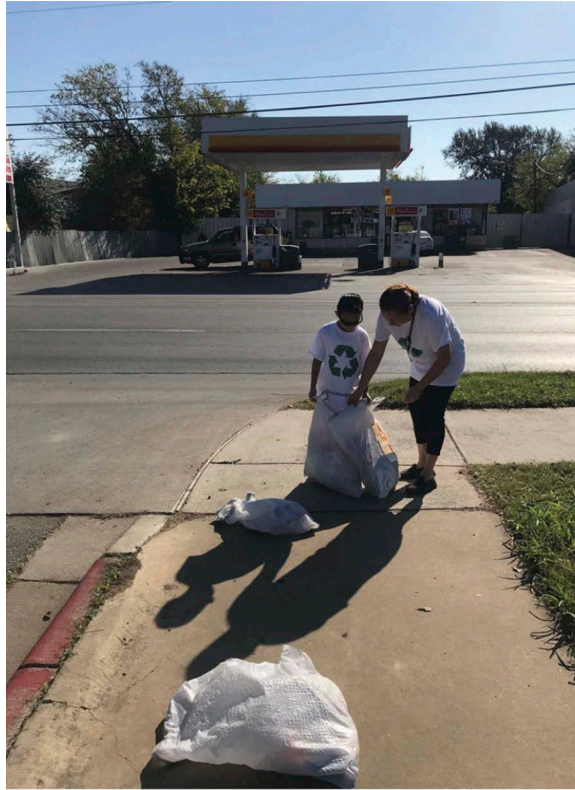
In the case of Rocío, her mother and father were not able to make it to the final celebration, yet, when asked when she had engaged in this type of advocacy project before in a focus group interview she responded "En mi casa, con mi mami, yo hice un proyecto así" [In my house, with my mom, I did a project like this]. This response mirrors the experience of another child who was not portrayed in this multiple case study. In the focus group, the child explained, "No es mi primera vez, hago proyectos así en mi casa" [It's not my first time, I do projects like this at home]. Although the information gathered from the children during the interviews is limited, these responses hint at the fact that some parents and children are involved in projects like the ones described in this study in other settings and might have familiarity and expertise in topics like these to share if literacy classrooms make spaces for them. This critical literacy space opened the door for not only children, but also their parents to share experiential knowledge as "legitimate and appropriate" (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p.314) within this literacy experience. This is clear in Cristian's case where the teacher, mother, and child all engaged in a community clean-up and awareness campaign (see Photograph 9). Daniela, Cristian's teacher, worked hard to include his mother by staying in communication with her throughout the semester, planning the clean-up, and making matching t-shirts for Cristian's mother, Cristian, and herself. In personal e-mail communication Daniela shared,

Puede notar el orgullo que la mamá de Cristian sentía ese día, ya que su hijo era quien deseaba ver su comunidad limpia. Entre lo que hablamos ella me contó algunas otras inquietudes que tiene alrededor de su comunidad como por ejemplo lo difícil que es cruzar la calle principal por falta de semáforo ... Al final me llevaron a comer unos taquitos cerca de su comunidad y los tres reímos y hablamos durante esos momentos. [You can see the pride that Cristian's mother felt that day, since her son was the one who wanted to see his community clean. When we talked she told me some other concerns she has around her community such as how difficult it is to cross the main street because there isn't a traffic light ... At the end they took me to eat some taquitos near their neighborhood and the three of us laughed and we talked.]

In this example, the Reading Methods course, as well as Daniela's effort to be highly inclusive resulted in new spaces that allowed for the child and mother to enact possibilities around literacy that were valued not only by Cristian's teacher, but by his school as an institution.

Although we don't know how this experience might expand this mother's notion of "what counts" in Cristian's schooling and the role she might want to take in the future, we do know this project impacted her, her son, and his teacher. This past April, Daniela looked at Nathaly excitedly after she noticed a missed call from Cristian's mom.

A few days later she shared how Cristian's mother had just called to say hello and remind Daniela of the impact this project had on Cristian in the long term. What possibilities can we re-imagine around Latinx parent involvement when we change what makes it into the literacy curriculum?



Photograph 9. Cristian and his mother.

Concluding thoughts: Reflections and implications

Reflections

Drawing on Solorzano & Delgado Benal's (2001) LatCrit framework, we endeavored to engage Latinx bilingual/bicultural students in critical literacy practices that resulted in social action. Before we started this project, we did not have a conception of the critical literacy practices the students were already enacting. As we got to know the students we realized that they went into tutoring already reading their worlds and naming spaces where they wanted to effect change. Looking back on the project, we can identify ways that the advocacy project provided structure for the students to draw from their funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) and take action on an issue that was important to them. In this way, we enacted two of the four common possibilities presented by Lewison et al. (2002) for the role/functions of critical literacy, "focusing on sociopolitical issues and taking action and promoting social justice" (p.382). Even though we fell short at providing children with the language to name and deconstruct the structural inequalities that drove their advocacy projects, an important aspect of critical literacies, the teacher educators and pre-service teachers were successful in centering the children's experiential knowledge in this process. While one could argue the children engaged in all four common possibilities for critical literacy (Lewison et al., 2002) in this project, future work could pay closer attention to other aspects of critical literacy. This could include disrupting the commonplace and interrogating multiple viewpoints, particularly through the use of children's literature and other written projects.

Furthermore, we acknowledge challenges for using this project as a model for enacting this type of pedagogy in a whole-class setting. This type of work will not look the same in every classroom.

Understanding your classroom, families and communities, and your positionality is critical and will impact how this work is enacted. In our space there was a linguistic match with all tutoring pairs and a cultural match with almost all of the pairs. The Latinx bilingual/bicultural children were matched with bilingual tutors, most of whom were Latinx. It is important to note that the White teacher in the study has lived in Mexico, worked extensively with Latinx immigrant communities, and thinks deeply about her positionality in Latinx communities. Drawing on their linguistic repertoires and personal experiences, the teachers worked hard to build relationships with their students. In addition, as a community we created a privileged bilingual space for bilingual children whose dominant language was Spanish. This is important to understanding this work because the students were empowered to participate in this project through having the opportunity to use their full linguistic repertoires and work with a teacher who understood their context. It is unclear how the student participation would have been impacted if they were in an English-only setting or in two-way dual language models where issues of power and linguistic hierarchies often arise (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Henderson & Palmer, 2015; Valdés, 1997).

When thinking about using this study as a guide for how this type of student-led, advocacy work could be implemented in a whole class setting, another challenge of the context is the fact that it occurred in the tutoring setting. The amount of time that the teachers spent engaging with the students in an individualized way would be difficult to reproduce in the whole-class. In spite of this challenge, this study has important implications for work with students in elementary classrooms.

Implications

This work has implications for educators, both in the generalist and bilingual fields. When children engage in literacy work that places their experiences at the center and where they are able to enact social change they become active and powerful entities in their worlds. When bilingual and bicultural children in particular are provided with these spaces, they are able to draw on their full resources: their linguistic repertoires, funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), politicized funds of knowledge (Gallo, 2015), community literacies, and multiliteracies. Through these resources they are able to show what they know, who they are, and demonstrate their agency as they fight a system not made for them. Furthermore, projects like the one described in this study have the potential to involve families in their children's literacy development in ways that extend beyond the traditional classroom, as in the case of Cristian and his mother. Perhaps by blurring the lines between the classroom and the community, teachers can create spaces in which families feel not only more invited to participate in the work being done in their children's classrooms, but where the entire family's experiential knowledge can be central to the student's learning. Future research in this area might address the family's role in guiding and scaffolding students' engagement with social action projects.

Back in the classroom, this project reminded us that in some cases the roles of teacher and student can be inverted and students can take on the role of experts in the classroom. Although such a role reversal might sometimes feel uncomfortable for teachers who are used to being the experts, the benefits of these opportunities for young learners to be the experts is incredibly valuable. This is especially true of those students who are members of historically marginalized groups, whose expertise is too often unnoticed or ignored. These opportunities for students to take control of their learning, position themselves as knowledgeable, and reach back into their worlds outside of the classroom to take action should be regular occurrences in elementary classrooms. Perhaps, rather than attempting to *teach* our students, educators should focus on paying attention to the students, their words, and their worlds.

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