Children's Literature in Education (2021) 52:411–429
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10583-020-09420-x

ORIGINAL PAPER

Humanizing the Journey Across the Mexico–U.S. Border: Multimodal Analysis of Children's Picture Books and the Restorying of Latinx (Im)migration

Katie Sciurba[1] · **Sera J. Hernandez**[2] · **Reka C. Barton**[3]

Published online: 18 October 2020
© Springer Nature B.V. 2020

Abstract

In response to current anti-immigration rhetoric and policy coming from national leadership, the authors engage in multimodal analysis of picture books that humanize individuals who make the journey across the Mexico–U.S. border. Findings suggest that picture book narratives restory anti-immigrant sentiments by (1) placing the child at the center of the story, (2) demonstrating the way in which the (im)migration journey is a shared journey, and (3) featuring expressions of tenderness among the characters. The article emphasizes the importance of elevating young people's perspectives on Latinx (im)migration through children's literature.

Keywords Latinx · Immigration · Migration · Children's literature · Picture books · Multimodal content analysis

In the United States, current federal positioning has been marked by a clear anti-immigrant stance, to such an extreme that statements and tweets from the President about "an invasion" of people "marching up" from the south were echoed in the premeditational screed of a White man who opened fire in 2019 at a Walmart in El Paso, killing 22 people and injuring numerous others—most of whom were Mexican or Mexican–American (Baker and Shear, 2019). With a campaign promise to "build a wall" along the southern border of the U.S., alleging that this wall would protect American citizens from "criminals," the President succeeded in spinning a narrative that dehumanized *all* people from Mexico, as well as other South and

✉ Katie Sciurba
katie.sciurba@gmail.com; ksciurba@sdsu.edu

[1] School of Teacher Education, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA, USA

[2] Department of Dual Language and English Learner Education, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA, USA

[3] Joint Doctoral Program, San Diego State University-Claremont Graduate University, San Diego, CA, USA

Central American countries. That the President's most devoted supporters have rallied in support of his xenophobic propaganda should come as little surprise. Not only have they *shouted out* that (White) Americans should "shoot them" when asked how "these people" could be stopped (Rucker, 2019), they have taken actual guns into their own hands and done so.

Media coverage of (im)migrant- or border-related issues, including the El Paso shooting, has provided viewers of all ages with human-interest narratives. Powerful and chilling stories, described textually and/or featured in photos, such as those of brown-skinned people locked in cages and wrapped in foil-like blankets or that of a drowned young father and 2-year-old child face-down in the Rio Grande, have centered on the tragic ends of Latinx (im)migration and/or border stories, told by American journalists. Such narratives, albeit unintentionally, have effectively othered people who come to the United States from Mexico and other Latin American countries, suggesting—even by well-meaning tellers—that the only aspect of the journey worth noting is when it is disrupted by death or despair. Further, the countless images of Latinx (im)migrants in disempowered circumstances, which have become normalized, can potentially fuel their dehumanization—even among the youngest of witnesses.

In light of "The Trump Effect" (Costello, 2016), which has significantly heightened (im)migrant children's worries "about deportation, having their families split, being put in jail,… going into hiding and being sent to detention camps" (p. 7), educators are faced with the challenge of facilitating conversations around such topics as (undocumented) (im)migration—in ways that counter dominant dehumanizing discourses and promote empathy. As White, mixed-race Latina, and Black female teacher educators at a university near the Mexico–U.S. border, the three of us prepare teacher candidates to select children's books that have the potential to alleviate young people's feelings of alienation, linked, or not, to their (im)migration statuses. We acknowledge the ways in which our identities, which do not include immediate (im)migration histories, shape our selections and readings of picture book texts for these purposes—just as young people's complex identities undoubtedly shape theirs (see Sciurba, 2017). We believe that picture books, when examined with intention, can serve as tools to elevate critical consciousness among young readers (Ching, 2005; Leland et al., 2013; Sciurba and Jenkins, 2019; Thomas, 2016) and "windows" into various worlds (Bishop, 1990). Picture books also have the potential to serve as mechanisms for restorying narratives in ways that assert "the importance of one's existence in a world that tries to silence subaltern voices," just as Ebony Elizabeth Thomas and Amy Stornaiuolo (2016, p. 314) argue in relationship to children's writing.

Since school-aged children are exposed to so many stories that ignore the perspectives and silence the voices of Latinx (im)migrants, and because Latinx children are even more rarely heard from within these stories, we turn to an examination of picture books that feature first-person accounts of (im)migrant children to determine how literature written for young readers represents, and possibly restories, the journey across the Mexico–U.S. border. We define "restorying" as the process of retelling, in humanizing ways, problematic discourses related to people who are systemically oppressed due to their racial, ethnic, national, gender, and/or other *othered*

identities. Drawing upon Critical Multicultural Analysis (CMA) (Botelho and Rudman, 2009) and LatCrit theory (Perez-Huber, 2010; Solórzano and Delgado Bernal, 2001), which, when combined, work to humanize Latinx people and restory problematic narratives created by others about their lives, this article engages in Multimodal Content Analysis (Serafini and Reid, 2019) to examine three picture books to determine (1) how Mexico–U.S border-crossing experiences are depicted, and (2) how children's picture books humanize Latinx (im)migrant children. Our intention is to highlight the books' potential for elevating young readers' critical perspectives on (im)migration at the Mexico–U.S. border and the experiences of Latinx (im) migrants. This study relies upon the meaning-making potential of children's literature and its use as a vehicle for criticality and social justice (Ching, 2005; Leland et al., 2013; Sciurba and Jenkins, 2019; Thomas, 2016), as well as the notion that literature can help young people gain insight about their worlds (Freire and Macedo, 1987) and reimagine the experiences of those who cross borders.

Humanization and Critical Analyses of Children's Literature as Theoretical Frames

Paulo Freire regards humanization as both a pedagogical and political imperative and as an "inescapable concern of those committed to a just world" (Darder, 2018, p. 95). That is, humanization is only possible through "persistent critical engagement with dehumanizing conditions" (p. 96). Additionally, Marva Cappello, Angela M. Wiseman, and Jennifer D. Turner (2019), Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2012), Tisha Lewis Ellison and Marva Solomon (2019), and Daniel G. Solórzano and Tara J. Yosso (2002) emphasize the importance of "counternarratives," "counterstorytelling," and/or "restorying," in relationship to Critical Race Theory, as mechanisms for casting "doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 155). We draw upon these ideas about "humanization" and "restorying," while also considering LatCrit theory's specific focus on the "unique forms of oppression" experienced by Latinx people (Perez-Huber, 2010; see also Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), as we discuss the powerful potential of children's picture books.

For this project, we examined how (undocumented) Latinx (im)migrants are—and are not—humanized in children's literature, as well as how the stories of Latinx (im)migrants are restoried (by countering popular rhetoric in the media and elsewhere) within picture books. We utilized the Critical Multicultural Analysis (CMA) framework developed by Maria José Botehlo and Masha Kabakow Rudman (2009) to read "beyond the text" and make "connections between the local and sociopolitical/global and the personal and the political, all grounded by historical analysis," calling "attention to the power imbalance in society as well as its organization" (p. 5). Specifically, we turn to picture books to determine the degree to which border-crossing narratives have the potential to restory dominant discourses related to the so-called "invasion" of Latinx people coming across the Mexico–U.S. border and to serve as counternarratives to the dehumanizing treatment (im)migrants receive in political and popular rhetoric. As such, we address Botehlo and Rudman's questions

related to point of view: "What (or whose) view of the world, or kinds of behaviors are presented as normal by the text?", "Who is silenced/heard here?", and "What moral or political position does a reading support?" (p. 4).

Background: Latinx (Im)migration, Border-Crossing Journeys, and Children's Picture Books

While demographic shifts in the racial and ethnic makeup of the U.S. persist (U.S. Census, 2016), the centuries old story of immigration is often painted with a broad brush and glosses over the complex and dynamic process/reality of migration and immigration, both past and present. First and second-generation immigrants in the U.S. have traditionally resided in Mexican-held territories such as California and Texas, or in gateway states such as New York and Florida (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010). Yet, the documentation of the *Latinx Diaspora* (Wortham et al., 2001) suggests that more Latinx migrant families have made their homes throughout the country since the turn of the century, often due to work needs in the service-sector, housing construction, furniture and carpet manufacturing, and poultry processing (Gándara and Hopkins, 2010).

Currently, the President uses "invasion" discourse to describe Latinx populations at the Mexico–U.S. border, many of whom are asylum seekers from Central America, to instill fear in the national imagination, while Leo R. Chavez (2013) reminds us that a longstanding, pervasive "Latino Threat Narrative" portrays Latinx communities as unwilling or incapable of integrating into the U.S. Understanding a dynamic and complex process such as (im)migration cannot be reduced to narrow or unilateral theories to explain the phenomenon of crossing borders, host-societal integration, nor the fundamental dilemmas faced by families who decide to cross borders. The suffocating and unidimensional narratives at the national level, provide an incomplete and often inaccurate portrayal of Latinx populations crossing the border.

Children's literature, particularly when utilized to promote criticality (Ching, 2005; Leland et al., 2013; Sciurba and Jenkins, 2019; Thomas, 2016) has the potential to broaden the views of teachers and students about Mexico–U.S. border crossing. Although research has focused on children's responses to (im)migration stories, generally (e.g., Katch 2018), as well as representations of the (im)migration experience in children's (mostly young adult) literature (Baghban, 2007; Bersh, 2013; Cummins, 2013; Dudek, 2018; Lamme et al., 2004; Nel, 2018; Socolovsky, 2018), few studies have examined depictions of Latinx people's experiences while in the *act* of crossing the Mexico–U.S. border. As Rodriguez and Braden (2018) further note, few studies on immigration in children's literature have included content analysis. Their work, which focuses on picture books, explicitly discusses young people's "levels of awareness of the immigration journey" and "difficulties with adjustment to life in the United States" as represented in children's texts (p. 55). We build upon this important study by focusing exclusively on depictions of the journey across the Mexico–U.S. border. The picture books in our examination, in other words, all feature (as the main event in the story) Latinx child protagonists who leave their home countries to cross the border of Mexico into the U.S. In addition to filling a

research gap by focusing on children's experiences along the journey itself, our project speaks directly to the potential of picture books in humanizing, thereby restorying, Latinx immigration narratives.

Methods: Examining Mexico–U.S. Border-Crossing Journeys in Children's Picture Books

In order to gain understandings related to Mexico–U.S. border-crossing experiences in children's picture books and to determine the degree to which such picture books humanize Latinx (im)migrants, we first needed to identify a data corpus consisting of literature published in English (or bilingually, in English and Spanish) in the United States, the site of origin for the (im)migration discourse that so often portrays Latinx (im)migrants in limited/negative ways. After selecting a small set of books for our examination, which we describe below, we engaged in Serafini and Reid's (2019) Multimodal Content Analysis (MMCA) to identify patterns related to the ways in which the texts provided counternarratives to dominant (im)migration discourse, thereby amplifying the voices of Latinx (im)migrants who are so often silenced.

Picture Book Selection

We spent 6 months reviewing picture books and ultimately narrowed our data corpus down to texts that met the following criteria:

1) Center on a Mexico–U.S. border-crossing experience (regardless of Latin American country of origin)
2) Feature Latinx characters
3) Highlight the first-person perspective of a child protagonist

Our original list of titles, prior to limiting our examination to the three criteria above, included ten books the three of us came across in our own K-12 and university-level teaching careers, books that appeared on immigration blogs and lists (such as "Colours of Us" and Amazon's "Children's Books on Immigration" list) following internet searches with terms such as "immigration AND children's literature," "Latinx immigration AND children's books," "picture books about immigration," and "picture books AND border crossing AND Mexico." Our searches, in other words, included combinations of the key words "children's literature," "picture books," "children's books," and alternating terms specific to Mexico–U.S. (im)migration. The three of us conducted book searches independently, then shared our results at in-person meetings. Our initial set of ten books also included texts recommended to us by colleagues who work closely with students who have diverse (im)migration experiences. We finally consulted a children's librarian to determine if a search he completed on Latinx (im)migration picture books would align with ours.

All of the books he named for us (e.g., Duncan Tonatiah's *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* (2013)) appeared in our original ten-book compilation.

We independently read and annotated the ten books, using sticky notes as well as "Analytical Templates" (Serafini & Reid, 2019),[1] which helped us narrow down our examination criteria, as well as the list of books upon which we would focus most closely. Yuyi Morales's *Dreamers* (2018), for example, along with Duncan Tonatiah's *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* and Jairo Buitrago's *Two White Rabbits* (2015) were eliminated from our data set either because they did not reflect the perspective of a child protagonist or did not center around a complete border-crossing experience (e.g., the main event in the story does not involve crossing from a Latinx home country all the way into the U.S.) (Table 1).

We ultimately focused our analysis on Deborah Mills, Alfredo Alva, and Claudia Navarro's (2018) *La Frontera: El viaje con papá/My Journey with Papa*, Amada Irma's (2002) *My Diary from Here to There/Mi diario de aquí hasta allá*, and René Colato Laínez's (2010) *My Shoes and I: Crossing Three Borders/Mis Zapatos y Yo: Cruzando Tres Fronteras*.

Across these texts, we identified three themes related to the humanization of Latinx (im)migration experiences: (1) Child at the Center, (2) Shared Journey, (3) Expressions of Tenderness.

Humanization of Mexico–U.S. Border-Crossing Experiences in Children's Picture Books

As noted by Fabienne Doucet (2017), a primary characteristic of humanizing research is its ability to incorporate the histories, experiences, and perspectives of marginalized groups. Similarly, we considered picture book stories related to the journey across the border to be humanizing if they amplified the voices of Latinx (im)migrants—especially those of young children, whose perspectives are most often absent from popular reports related to immigration. Within tellings that place the child at the center, we identified themes of a shared journey and expressions of tenderness. All of these features demonstrate the complexity of Latinx (im)migration and effectively restory dehumanizing misconceptions.

Child at the Center

Each of the stories in our examination places the child at the center, featuring his/her first-person account of the "trip" or "*viaje*," as described by Alfredo in *La Frontera*, from his/her home country to the U.S. The children of these stories—Alfredo, Amada, and René—invite the reader into their innermost thoughts—the hopes, fears, sadness, excitement, and other feelings about their parents' difficult decisions to take them across the border. Each of these children share names with the authors of the

[1] See Appendix A for the Analytical Template we utilized for this project.

Table 1 Full list of Latinx (im)migration-themed picture books examined

Author	Title	*Complete* border-crossing experience depicted?	Latinx character(s)?	Child protagonist?
Argueta, Jorge	*Somos Como Las Nubes ~ We Are Like the Clouds*	No/Uncertain	Yes	Yes/No (In some of the poems, this is clear but not in others)
Buitrago, Jairo	*Two White Rabbits*	No	Yes	Yes
Laínez, René Colato	*From North to South - Del Norte al Sur*	No	Yes	Yes
Laínez, René Colato	*My Shoes and I ~ Mis Zapatos y Yo*	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mateo, José Manuel	*Migrar - Migrant*	Yes	Yes	No
Mills, Deborah; Alva, Alfredo; Navarro, Claudia	*La Frontera: El viaje con papá ~ My Journey with Papa*	Yes	Yes	Yes
Morales, Yuyi	*Dreamers*	Yes	Yes	No
Pérez, Amada Irma	*My Diary from Here to There ~ Mi Diario de Aquí Hasta Allá*	Yes	Yes	Yes
Perkins, Mitali	*Between Us and Abuela: A Family Story from the Border*	No	Yes	Yes
Tonatiah, Duncan	*Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote: A Migrant's Tale*	No (The characters arrive in "El Norte" temporarily but must return home; Pancho only goes to retrieve Papá Rabbit.)	Yes	Yes

books, suggesting (or explicitly indicating in the author's note) an autobiographical link to these border-crossing stories, thus providing a "#ownstories[2]" (https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/ownstories/?hl=en) connection in keeping with CMA's focus on books that enable disenfranchised perspectives to be heard. The young protagonists' perspectives, along with their (limited) awareness about the risks and dangers that accompany their journeys and the ways in which they cope with tremendous loss and trauma, restory dominant narratives about the Mexico–U.S. border and the people who cross it.

In *My Diary*, Amada's story begins as she writes into a spiral-bound notebook. She, like all of the child characters in the books we examined, is featured prominently in the illustrations—in this case, through the soft illumination of her flashlight in an otherwise dark room as she documents the following:

> Dear Diary,….I overheard Mamá and Papá whispering. They were talking about leaving our little house in Mexico where we've lived our whole lives, and moving to Los Angeles in the United States. But why? How can I sleep knowing we might leave Mexico forever? (p. 3).

Amada's perspective on her family's imminent migration to the U.S., which she records alone at night, is fraught with fear of the unknown. In this initial confession to "Diary," which serves as a confidant to the young girl and is shared with the reader but not her family, Amada demonstrates her attachment to her home in Mexico and her inability to understand her parents' decision to leave. The structure of this picture book, consisting primarily of Amada's unspoken thoughts, places her at the center of her family's migration story while also demonstrating how little control she has over her situation, as is the case for most children when they move. Amada's mother explains, "Papá lost his job. There's no work here, no jobs at all. We know moving will be hard, but we want the best for all of you. Try to understand." It seems Mamá's request for understanding, in part, drives Amada to keep her thoughts tucked away in her diary.

In documenting her mother's, five brothers', and her path to obtaining green cards in order to reunite with Papá, an American citizen, in the U.S., Amada shares her struggle with leaving her best friend Michi, her fear of not being able to speak English, and the emotional challenge of being separated from Papá in Mexicali. Rather than voice her feelings out loud, Amada finds strength and solace in her writing, both in her diary and in her letters, across borders, to Papá and her best friend Michi. Amada's telling of her own story, as a child would recount it to someone close to them, humanizes the border-crossing journey and indicates just how complex Latinx (im)migration is for those who experience it. As Amada recounts, "Mexico and the U.S. are two different countries, but they look exactly the same on both sides of the border, with giant saguaros pointing up at the pink-orange sky and enormous clouds." Considering how this border has served as a space, both literally and figuratively, of dehumanization, this simple statement—recorded in Amada's

[2] The #ownstories movement calls for and centers texts written by authors who identify as a member of the racial, ethnic, gender, sexuality, and/or other groups represented in their texts.

diary—illustrates her childish wonder and insight on the arbitrariness of where borders lie. This scene guides a shift in power from dominant (im)migration discourse, as suggested by Botehlo and Rudman (2009), in that the "reader 'sees' the story" from Amada's perspective.

Like Amada, *La Frontera*'s Alfredo must leave Guanajuato because Papá can "no longer provide for [their] growing family." As the "first-born," Alfredo, whose facial expressions are a focal point in each two-page spread of the book, goes with Papá, leaving Mamá, his three siblings, Uncle Tomás, and Abuelo behind. Alfredo states:

> I was sad to think of leaving my home. I would miss my donkey, Fernando. We were born in the same year, and I loved him….I did not even want to think about leaving Mama. I was hungry, yes, but I did not want life to change.

Although Alfredo is aware of his family's financial need, most evident in the pangs of hunger he feels, he is not fully cognizant of the tremendous sacrifice he is about to make as he embarks on an undocumented "viaje" across the border with Papá. As he says good-bye to his mother, her face shows concern and sadness, suggesting that she knows how treacherous the journey will be and, quite possibly, suspects this might be the last time she holds her son in her arms. She tells him, as he looks up with a questioning look, to "think of [himself] as a little bird who does not need much to eat or drink and to keep flying north." He recounts her parting words as well as her silence: "'And Alfredito—don't forget, I love you so, so much.' She did not tell me that I would not see her or my brothers and sister for many years." Although Rodriguez and Braden (2018) assert that Alfredo's "lack of awareness" about the (im)migration process is unrealistic, his level of understanding about what will transpire is believable for a child his age and has the potential to help young readers imagine what it would be like to be in his situation - particularly given that his mother is the one deciding what to say, and not to say, about the journey that lies ahead.

Similar to Amada, Alfredo keeps his misgivings to himself, never telling his father how much he misses home, how difficult it is to attend school without knowing English, or how "lonely" he feels. Instead, he shares his story within the pages of this book, and he confides in a "baby javelina, a wild pig," along the way. Alfredo says:

> I think [the baby javelina] had lost her mother. I felt like I had, too. We were both lonely, and I told her all my thoughts. She reminded me of my donkey Fernando, back home. Was he wondering where I had gone?

Alfredo's attachment to the javelina, as a stand-in for his pet donkey, serves as a child-like coping mechanism and provides him with an emotional outlet when he cannot share "all [his] thoughts" with Papá, who is preoccupied with the adult responsibility of securing his family's future in the United States.

In *My Shoes and I*, René turns the border-crossing experience into a game he plays with the shoes he "love[s]" that were sent to him, from the U.S. by Mamá. René explains how he and his new shoes "always cross the finish line at the same time." In presenting René and Papá's "travel across three countries" as a race, the

story maintains a playful spirit that belies the dangers and tribulations the father and son face as they leave their home in El Salvador. Onomatopoeia such as the "[w]hoooooooshoooh whoooooosh" of wind and the "[c]rash, boom, bam!" of thunder capture the sounds of border-crossing, from a child's perspective. Additionally, René's metaphorical language, in describing his shoes as such things as "submarines" and "volcanoes" and himself as "a horse" with shoes that "ride on [his] shoulder," demonstrates the unstoppable imagination of a child; his inventive play persists, despite the arduousness of this border-crossing experience and seems to create a mechanism for René to cope with the trauma of leaving home and the physical difficulties of the journey—which he and Papá make with little more than the clothes on their backs and the shoes on their feet.

It is only when "[s]omething inside" René's shoes starts "hurting [his] feet" that he becomes visibly upset in the illustration—with tears streaming down his cheek. He cradles one of the shoes against his chest and Papá places a hand on his shoulder to console him. "Holes!" he says. "There are round, horrible holes in the soles of my shoes. There are pebbles between my toes. There are tears in my eyes." Although René's response may be due to his attachment to his prized (and only) shoes, his reaction could also be due to the overall heaviness of his circumstances. Perhaps the game he played with his shoes served as a distraction from a reality from which he can no longer escape. Regardless, like Amada and Alfredo, he does not ever complain to Papá, who reminds him, "'René, my strong boy, we want to be with Mamá. We won't give up.'" The desire to reunite his family, despite his tremendous loss, is humanizing and empathy-building for the reader. Although his shoes are destroyed, they ultimately accompany René across "the finish line," where Mamá is waiting. This and the other two border-crossing stories, unlike so many of those depicted in mainstream media, end on positive notes after portraying a child in an agentive role. Amada, Alfredo, and René, in telling their own stories in their own voices, become empowered, despite circumstances they cannot control as children.

Shared Journey

Across all three books, readers will find evidence of an additional humanizing theme, that of *a shared journey*, depicting how the (im)migration process is never done in isolation and traverses a web of relationships along the process. This is critical to the humanizing spirit of these books, as it depicts the web of social networks and connections inherent in the undertaking of border crossing. The often sensationalized stories in the media that tell part of the story of an individual Latinx (im) migrant or a family (im)migrating into the U.S. (Chavez, 2013) leave out the many individuals, both visible and invisible, who play a role in the journey across the phases of the process. Through the interweaving of text and images, these stories fill this gap by providing the reader insight into these relationships, always with the child protagonist at the center.

In *My Diary*, the shared journey is portrayed through the physical presence and symbolic representations of important people in Amada's life throughout the process. At the beginning of the story, Amada confides in her diary by asking, "Am I

the only one who is scared of leaving our home, our beautiful country, and all the people we might never see again?" Throughout she expresses apprehension about her immigration journey, but shares how family interactions play a pivotal role in providing her with emotional support along the way. The stay with her grandparents in Mexicali, for example, soothes Amada's nerves as they tell "stories late into the night." These images remind the reader that the abject Latinx immigrant portrayed in the media (Chavez, 2013) is rather a multidimensional human being (like us all) with both fears and dreams, as well as a desire for human connections and relationships to help with survival.

Amada also copes with her difficulties in the journey by acknowledging that she can take "home" along with her—as symbolized through a heart-shaped stone given to her by best friend Michi before she leaves Juárez, as well as the new diary she receives as a gift from Nana in Mexicali. Each of these items serves as a symbol of the connection to important people in Amada's life, people who come along the journey in spirit—even though they are not physically with her. A powerful symbol of connection in the story is seen through the image of the butterfly, which appears throughout the text on Amada's clothing and accessories (e.g., on her pajamas and her purse), as well as next to her as she writes in her diary or to her loved ones in Mexico. The butterfly, which has the capacity to fly across borders to make sure she is never alone, flutters throughout the story to illustrate the transformation and hope inherent in Amada's journey. In her diary she shares, "You know, just because I'm far away from Juárez and Michi and my family in Mexicali, it doesn't mean they're not here with me. They're inside my little rock; they're here in your pages and in the language that I speak; and they're in my memories and my heart."

In *My Shoes and I*, the shared journey focuses on René and Papá's connection to Mamá who has already moved across the border and is living in the U.S. They depend on her for emotional and financial support to complete the journey. This is depicted when Papá loses his wallet and father and son wait for Mamá to send more money. Along the journey, René shares, "'I'm so happy. I can't wait to see Mamá!'" and when he feels like giving up, his dad tells him "'René, my strong boy, we want to be with Mamá. We won't give up.'" Crossing three international borders, the strong connection and yearning to reunite with Mamá help the duo to not give up along the way. Even the shoes Mamá sent to René are included in every picture in the book as they are his companion on the trip and illustrate the essential role the mother plays on the journey, even in her absence. When this story is juxtaposed to current media portrayals of the (im)migration journey, we see an oversimplification of the U.S. (im)migration narrative, with missing stories of the family members already in the host society, to a limited focus on men crossing borders (as opposed to children, women, and complete families), and an overall dehumanizing narrative that *My Shoes and I* counters with its attention to the human connections in the process.

In *La Frontera,* the shared journey of Alfredo and his dad begins with the emotional preparation and support offered by the mother and a going away celebration provided by the family and local villagers before the son and his father start the journey to the U.S. Yet the shared journey involves more than just family members and does not necessarily include people who have the family's best interest in mind. *La Frontera* integrates the complexities surrounding the sometimes necessary

partnership between a migrant and a "coyote," the colloquial term for a guide that requires payment to assist (im)migrants in crossing the Mexico–U.S. border. The coyote, who Papá describes as having "many enemies, like the sly coyote he is named after" is represented in the illustrations as a man with a menacing shadow of the animal, invoking fear or angst in the child protagonist and perhaps the readers who may not have an exposure to the complexities of crossing borders. Coyotes are not seen and are rarely spoken about in popular coverages of immigration at the Mexico–U.S. border, yet *La Frontera* lets us into this complex, though not always positive, dependent relationship many migrants experience. As Papá explains to Alfredo, "we need his help to make the journey." Though he meets Alfredo and Papá and assists them in crossing the Rio Grande River, he never shows up on the U.S. side of the border where he says we will meet them again. Alfredo realizes that the coyote has disappeared with Papá's money and also, perhaps, starts to learn about the harsh realities surrounding the border-crossing trip.

Not all human connections in the shared journey are as ominous as the one with the coyote. Similar to the real life *Border Angels,*[3] additional invisible partners or helpers are evident in *La Frontera*, illustrated by the jugs of water left for migrants by the train crews along the train tracks and a broken down shack used by migrants along the journey that Alfredo and Papá encounter. In Spanish a sign reads: "It's open. Take what you need and don't destroy anything. Thank you." Papá and Alfredo also find support along their journey at "the Embassy." In the two-page illustration of the Embassy, images depict what the text describes as "a collection of broken down trailers and furniture that people had dumped in the woods behind a factory" and where Alfredo and Papá, alongside other migrants taking shelter, sleep for a few weeks. Noteworthy, also, in the illustrations are the birds in most scenes of the book, which appear to travel with Alfredo and Papá on their journey. Birds are significant because they show a connection to nature and the outdoor spaces through which Papá and Alfredo are traveling, and their wings enable them—like Amada's butterflies—to cross *over* borders as they migrate.

The text across all three books explicitly tells humanizing stories of shared journeys crossing the Mexico–U.S. border. The illustrations of animals (i.e., birds, butterflies, coyote) are used to symbolize the people sharing the journey with the protagonists, while the objects (i.e., diary, stone, shoes) add an additional layer of the connection to home as part of the collective process. Even the textual description and visual images of the jugs of water and furniture found in the Embassy remind the reader that the individuals who came before them, or perhaps advocates looking out for them, share in their hope for a better life. If examined closely by the reader, the three texts demonstrate clearly that the (im)migrant journey is never done in isolation. Rather, those who complete the journey are connected to others during the journey itself, and their journeys are interwoven with elements of home. Sharing

[3] According to their website https://www.borderangels.org/, "Border Angels promotes a culture of love through advocacy, education, by creating a social consciousness, and engaging in direct action to defend the rights of migrants and refugees" and "prevents unnecessary deaths and harm reduction through desert water drops, border rescue stations and day laborer outreach.".

these perspectives of real life experiences can enable young readers to more fully humanize (Doucet, 2017) the complexities surrounding Latinx (im)migration.

Expressions of Tenderness

Within the illustrations and texts of these stories, we are able to witness expressions of tenderness that exist as a part of the journey, in a way that humanizes the narratives in contrast to what oversimplified media clips can portray. Through warm embraces, private conversations, and heartfelt moments, readers receive counter-narratives to the current dominant rhetoric, which allows readers to relate to common aspects of family and tenderness. Through the child-centered expressions of tenderness found in each of these books, we are able to see and hear the warmth and love within the familial unit. The inclusion of physical touch, affection and embraces, and words of comfort adds to the humanizing aspect of the three picture books.

My Diary is full of bittersweet last moments during the preparation for the journey across the border, as well as familial intimacy before, during, and after the journey. As Amada narrates her story in *My Diary,* the audience gets insight into her fears and concerns about her family's move. As she wonders if she is the only one scared to leave, Amada's five brothers are shown playing, hanging upside down, and demonstrating their excitement. The focal point of the illustration, however, is a warm embrace between Amada and her mother, as Amada's face reads simultaneously concerned and concentrated. The physical touch, the proximity of Amada and her mother, and the stillness of this moment portrays the tenderness between mother and daughter. This embrace is followed on the next page with Amada braiding her best friend Michi's hair at the park, as she explains her family's predicament and discloses her fears of leaving her best friend in Mexico, as she travels to the U.S. The illustration of Michi and Amada's last moment in Mexico is full of tenderness. The physical action of hair braiding is occurring with both girls smiling. Amada appears comfortable, her legs crossed on the bench while being very close to her dear friend. "'I've known Michi since we were little, and I don't think I'll ever find a friend like her in California,'" Amada says. Within these moments we are able to both see and hear Amada's perspective, in a way that is not commonly available in brief media portrayals of the (im)migration story. Through the sentimental moments of Amada's narrative, we are able to gain insight on her and her family's humanity.

Papá notices Amada's apprehension about the journey. A powerful expression of tenderness occurs as he puts his arm around his daughter and offers words of reassurance: "'Amada, m'ija, I can see how worried you've been. Don't be scared. Everything will be alright.'" Papá uses the endearing term m'ija (mi hija—my daughter) and pulls her "aside." Here he shares his own (im)migration journey past and offers encouragement and words to comfort Amada during this affectionate moment. "'It was a big change, but we got through it. I know you can, too. You are stronger than you think.'" In the visual depiction of this conversation, Amada appears to be reassured, as she smiles lovingly back at Papá. Through conversations like this, between Papa and Amada, we can begin to rethink single narratives. The reader is now

provided with another version of the (im)migration story, one that names the members and adds feelings and dialogue so that readers may think more critically about what they might have witnessed or heard elsewhere.

Another trend present in each of the books is the occurrence of a reunion of the immediate family. Each story contains familial intimacy, embracing, and a successfully completed border crossing. We know all too well that this "happily ever after" is not reached for many who begin the journey. Yet, the joy of this reunion provides a glimpse into human emotions that counter the devastation and despair angle of many border-crossing stories. At the conclusion of *My Diary,* Amada and her family reunite with Papá, and she writes, "We all jumped into his arms and laughed, and Mamá even cried a little. Papá's hugs felt so much better than when he left us in Mexicali!" The corresponding visual shows the family embracing. The physical touch is seen and felt in this illustration as Mamá, Papá, Amada, and her brothers, Mario, Víctor, Héctor, Raúl, and Sergio gather together in the two-page illustration. The sentiment of the embrace during the family reunion is evident in both of the other books, as well. In *La Frontera,* Alfredo is "speechless" to see "all the faces [he] had missed for so long." Then, he feels a hand on his shoulder and says:

> I knew it was Mama's. It reached right to the center of my heart. She embraced me, and we held each other for a long time. Finally, I thought. Finally. Our family is together again.

In *My Shoes and I,* the family reunion happens at the very last page of the story, and the final illustration of this book displays this family reunion through an embrace between mother and son. The son, shoes in hand, is smiling while holding his mother closely. Through the numerous expressions of tenderness, readers have the potential to relate to the characters, as the physical embraces and words of comfort mirror practices within their own families. Each of these occurrences creates a space to build empathy, which offers an opportunity for humanizing, ultimately adding to the restorying power of these books.

Concluding the Journey: Implications for Classroom Discussions on Latinx (Im)migration

Like the authors of *La Frontera* state, hearing stories and seeing images such as the ones included in our examination "can help other people understand what it would be like to experience a difficult journey like Alfredo's," as well as Amada's, René's, and those of countless other children who journey across the Mexico–U.S. border. Children's picture books, like *My Diary, La Frontera, and My Shoes and I* have the potential to breathe new life into the narratives about (im)migrants who, for various reasons, leave their homes behind to start lives in an unfamiliar place. The findings of this article, which have included picture books' abilities to place the child at the center and demonstrate the shared journey and expressions of tenderness in border-crossing narratives, point to the power of children's literature to humanize

and restory pervasive dominant views, even when those views are transmitted by individuals with notable authority.

The ability to build empathy for individuals with life experiences different from one's own, as Rudine Sims Bishop (1990) suggests through her "windows" metaphor, should be a goal of discourse in every classroom. Each of the texts in this examination centers Latinx characters and presents the reader with a complex, nuanced perspective related to the Mexico–U.S. border. Having the opportunity to read works by authors such as Laínez, Mills, Alva, and Navarro, and Pérez can demonstrate to children the importance of hearing and learning from others' life stories, particularly if such stories are frequently overshadowed by racism charading as politics.

While not all stories of (im)migration can be told in total detail through a picture book, we believe that children's literature like *My Diary*, *La Frontera*, and *My Shoes and I* should be integrated into classroom libraries to support students, with similar and different experiences, as they dialogue around their thoughts and connections to the characters and to begin to formulate their own informed—and humanizing—perspectives on (im)migration. As Leland et al. (2013) argue, children's literature has powerful potential to engage young people in critical conversations about our most pertinent social justice concerns. Illustrated texts have the unique potential to draw young readers in by allowing them to read *and* see what others have experienced. Learning about Amada's, René's, and Alfredo's lives can help young people turn a critical gaze against the media's treatment of (im)migration—whether documented or not—at the Mexico–U.S. border. Children, especially, need to learn how other people their own ages are experiencing (im)migration so that they can either see reflections of their own similar life experiences and/or imagine how they would feel if they had to face the same circumstances as the characters. Hearing the otherwise silenced voices of young people, telling their own stories, is vital to the un-learning of harmful stereotypes. Accordingly, alternative perspectives about (im)migration can enter into and transform the minds of young audiences. Children's literature about Mexico–U.S. (im)migration, as well as other contemporary topics, has the potential to raise children's level of consciousness *above* that of the people making everyday decisions and enacting policies that dehumanize human beings.

As we, and other teacher educators, continue to respond to the need of preparing teachers to teach for diversity, equity, and global interconnectedness, we will continue to take critical stances on literature in order to raise awareness and imagine what S.R. Toliver (2018) describes as a "hopescape" related to the future of Mexico–U.S. (im)migration.[4] We know, however, that our journeys through this restorying terrain will not always be easy. We know that these journeys will not lead us, automatically, to our desired destinations, either. Nevertheless, they are journeys we cannot avoid.

[4] In drawing upon the work of Virginia Hamilton, Toliver (2018) describes the "hopescape" as "a space for authors to portray the community, culture, and tradition of Black people as parallel rather than beneath the larger American culture" (p. 15). We argue that a similar hopescape is necessary for stories related to Mexico–U.S. (im)migration.

Appendix A: Analytical template: humanizing the journey across the border

Author:

Title:

Latinx Character(s)? ____yes _____no
Evidence/Description:
Notes:

Child Character(s)? _____yes _____no
Evidence/Description:
Notes:

Mexico-U.S. Border? _____yes _____no
Evidence/Description:
Notes:

Immigration Journey/Process Depicted? _____yes ______no
Evidence/Description:
Notes:

Story Theme/Message:
Evidence/Description:
Notes:

Challenge(s) Characters Face:
Evidence/Description:
Notes:

Story Antagonist(s):
Evidence/Description:
Notes:

Power/Agency of Main Characters:
Evidence/Description:
Notes:

Auxiliary Characters (including animals, personified toys/objects, etc.):
Evidence/Description:
Notes:

Visual/Textual Symbols and Possible Meanings:
Evidence/Description:
Notes:

Use of Spanish:
Evidence/Description:
Notes:

Significance of Story Resolution:
Evidence/Description:
Notes:

(De)Humanizing Elements of Story:
Evidence/Description:
Notes:

New Perspective Added to "Immigration" Narrative?:
Evidence/Description:
Notes:

Untold Element of "Immigration" Narrative?:
Evidence/Description:
Notes:

References

Baghban, Marcia. (2007). Immigration in Childhood: Using Picture Books to Cope. *The Social Studies*, *98*(2), 71–76. https://doi.org/10.3200/TSSS.98.2.71-76.

Baker, Peter & Shear, Michael D. (2019). El Paso Shooting Suspect's Manifesto Echoes Trump's Language. *New York Times* (August 4). Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/04/us/politics/trump-mass-shootings.html

Bersh, Luz Carime. (2013). The Curricular Value of Teaching About Immigration Through Picture Book Thematic Text Sets. *The Social Studies*, *104*(2), 47–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2012.720307.

Bishop, Rudine Sims. (1990). Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors. *Perspectives*, *6*(3), 9–11.

Botelho, Maria José, and Rudman, Masha Kabakow. (2009). *Critical Multicultural Analysis of Children's Literature: Mirrors, Windows, and Doors*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Cappello, Marva, Wiseman, Angela M., and Turner, Jennifer D. (2019). Framing Equitable Classroom Practices: Potentials of Critical Multimodal Literacy Research. *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice, XX*, https://doi.org/10.1177/2381336919870274.

Chavez, Leo R. (2013). *The Latino Threat: Constructing Immigrants, Citizens, and the Nation*, 2nd ed. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Ching, Stuart H.D. (2005). Multicultural Children's Literature as an Instrument of Power. *Language Arts*, *83*(2), 128–135.

Colours of Us. 30 Multicultural Books About Immigration. Retrieved from https://coloursofus.com/multicultural-picture-books-immigration/

Costello, Maureen B. (2016). The Trump Effect: The Impact of the Presidential Campaign on Our Nation's Schools. Southern Poverty Law Center. https://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/splc_the_trump_effect.pdf

Cummins, Amy. (2013). Border Crossings: Undocumented Migration Between Mexico and the Unites States in Contemporary Young Adult Literature. *Children's Literature in Education*, *44*(1), 57–73.

Darder, Antonia. (2018). *The Student Guide to Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic.

Delgado, Richard, and Stefancic, Jean. (2012). *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press.

Doucet, Fabienne. (2017). What does a Culturally Sustaining Learning Climate Look Like? *Theory Into Practice*, *56*, 195–204.

Dudek, Debra. (2018). Seeing the Human Face: Refugee and Asylum Seeker Narratives and an Ethics of Care in Recent Australian Picture Books. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, *43*(4), 363–376.

Ellison, Tisha L. & Solomon, Marva. (2019). Counter-Storytelling vs. Deficit Thinking Around African American Children and Families, Digital Literacies, Race, and the Digital Divide. *Research in the Teaching of English 53*(3).

Freire, Paulo, and Macedo, Donaldo. (1987). *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

Gándara, Patricia, and Hopkins, Megan. (2010). *Forbidden Language: English Learners and Restrictive Language Policies*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Katch, Jane. (2018). Seeing Me in You: Teaching Empathy and Learning Courage Through Picture Books. *Schools: Studies in Education, 15(2)*, 216-227.

Laínez, René Colato. (2010). *My shoes and I*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press.

Lamme Leonard, Linda, Fu, Danling, and Lowery, Ruth McKoy. (2004). Immigrants as Portrayed in Children's Books. *The Social Studies*, *95*(3), 123–129.

Leland, Christine, Lewison, Mitzi, and Harste, Jerome. (2013). *Teaching Children's Literature: It's Critical!*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Mills, Deborah. (2018). *La Frontera: My Viaje con papá/My Journey with Papa* (Alva, Alfredo, Illus.). Cambridge, MA: Barefoot Books.

Nel, Phillip. (2018). Introduction: Migration, Refugees, and Diaspora in Children's Literature. *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, *43*(4), 357–362.

Perez, Amada Irma. (2002). *My Diary from Here to There/Mi Diario de aqui hasta alla*. (Gonzalez, Maya Christina, Illus.). San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press.

Perez-Huber, Lindsay. (2010). Using Latina/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Racist Nativism to Explore Intersectionality and the Educational Experiences of Undocumented Chicana College Students. *Educational Foundations*, *24*, 77–96.

Rodriguez, Sanjuana C., and Braden, Eliza Gabrielle. (2018). Representation of Latinx Immigrants in Children's Literature: A Critical Content Analysis. *Journal of Children's Literature*, *44*(2), 46–61.

Rucker, Philip. (2019). "How do You Stop These People?": Trump's Anti-immigrant Rhetoric Looms Over El Paso Massacre. *The Washington Post* (August 4). Retrieved from https://beta.washingtonpost.com/politics/how-do-you-stop-these-people-trumps-anti-immigrant-rhetoric-looms-over-el-paso-massacre/2019/08/04/62d0435a-b6ce-11e9-a091-6a96e67d9cce_story.html.

Sciurba, Katie. (2017). Journeys Toward Textual Relevance: Male Readers of Color and the Significance of Malcolm X and Harry Potter. *Journal of Literacy Research*, *43*(3), 371–392.

Sciurba, Katie & Jenkins, Jerry Rafiki. (2019). *Smoky Night* and the Untelling of the L.A. Riots. *Journal of Children's Literature, 45(1),* 4-13.

Serafini, Frank & Reid, Stephanie F. (2019). Multimodal Content Analysis: Expanding Analytical Approaches to Content Analysis. *Visual Communication*.

Socolovsky, Maya. (2018). Material Literacies: Migration and Border Crossings in Chicano/children's Picture Books. MELUS: Multi-ethnic Literature of the U.S., *43(4),* 148-174.

Solórzano, Daniel G., and Dolores, Delgado Bernal. (2001). Examining Transformational Resistance Through a Critical Race and LatCrit Theory Framework: Chicana and Chicano Students in an Urban Context. *Urban Education*, *36*(3), 308–342.

Solórzano, Daniel G., and Yosso, Tara J. (2002). Critical race methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, *8*(1), 23–44.

Thomas, Ebony Elizabeth. (2016). Stories Still Matter: Rethinking the Role of Diverse Children's Literature Today. *Language Arts, 94*(2).

Thomas, Ebony Elizabeth, and Stornaiuolo, Amy. (2016). Restorying the Self: Bending Toward Textual Justice. *Harvard Educational Review*, *86*(3), 313–338.

Toliver, S.R. (2018). Imagining New Hopescapes: Expanding Black Girls' Windows and Mirrors. *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*, *1*(1), 1–25.

U.S. Census. (2016). United States Census Bureau. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/acs/www/data/data-tables-and-tools/data-profiles/2016/

Wortham, Stanton, Murillo, Enrique O., and Hamann, Edmund T. (2001). *Education in the New Latino Diaspora: Policy and the Politics of Identity*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Katie Sciurba is an assistant professor of Literacy Education at San Diego State University and Director of the SDSU Literacy Center.

Sera J. Hernandez is an assistant professor of Dual Language and English Learner Education at San Diego State University.

Reka C. Barton is a graduate student in the Joint Doctoral Program in the College of Education at San Diego State University and Claremont Graduate University.