

The Latinx Family: Learning y La Literatura at the Library**Denise Dávila****University of Nevada, Las Vegas****Silvia Noguerón****University of Colorado, Boulder****Max Vasquez-Dominguez****University of North Georgia**

ABSTRACT: In this paper, three Latinx university faculty who facilitated *Cuentos para la Familia*, a bilingual family literacy program at a public library in the U.S. Southeast, discuss the significance of la literatura in Latinx communities. They contribute to the body of research about library-based programs for multilingual families by examining the ways that within a familial community context for learning, la literatura provides a catalyst for a heterogeneous group of immigrant Latinx families to (a) embrace and enact a sense of transnational identity and belonging within the public space of the library, and (b) mobilize their linguistic and sociocultural repertoires of practice. Data sources for the study include audio and video recordings of 25 family literacy sessions (approximately 90-minutes each) and artifacts created by children and parents, including oral and written responses to works of culturally relevant Latinx children's literature and transcripts from focus group interviews with participating parents and caregivers.

Key Words: Children's Literature; Diversity; Family Literacies; Bilingualism; Libraries

We begin our story with an excerpt from a conversation between a group Latinx parents who marveled about the presence of culturally relevant literatura in a public library of the U.S. Southeast. (All names in this paper are pseudonyms.) Antonio, a dad at the library with his children, was pleased to see that some of the children's books included: "... lecturas que uno ya conoce de la infancia / ...*stories you know from your childhood.*" He suggested that, "...para que siga la tradición, uno se las va contando a ellos [a los niños], para que no se vaya a perder. / ... *you keep the tradition when you read these to them [the children] so they won't be lost.*" A mom, Josefina, expanded upon Antonio's comments, adding: "Pero nunca se nos había ocurrido que íbamos a leer un cuento de La Llorona o que había un libro acá en los Estados Unidos. /*But I never thought about reading a story about La Llorona or finding a book about it here in the U.S.*" For these parents, participating in a family literacy program with Spanish, dual-language, and bilingual picturebooks about Latinos and primarily by Latinx authors and illustrators was multifaceted. It renewed their connections to the stories, culture, and life of their home countries, which they could share with their children. At the same time, it offered new connections to the library branch and Latinx life experiences in the U.S. town that is home to their children.

In this article, we, three Latinx university faculty (Denise, Silvia, and Max) reflect on our years of facilitating the *Cuentos para la Familia* library series, discuss the significance of la literatura in Latinx communities, and contribute to the body of research about library-based programs for multilingual families (e.g. Alvarez & Alvarez, 2016; Naidoo, 2011; Ortiz & Ordonez-Jasis, 2005; Riojas-Cortez, Flores, Smith, & Riojas Clark, 2003). We examine the ways that within a familial community context for learning (Delgado-Gaitan 2005; Villenas 2005), la literatura provided a catalyst for a heterogeneous group of immigrant Latinx families to (a) embrace and enact a sense of transnational identity and belonging within the public space of the library, and (b) mobilize their linguistic repertoires (Blommaert & Backus, 2013) and sociocultural repertoires of practice (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez, 1992).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Our work is grounded in the premise that in many cultures, stories and narratives are the vehicles through which families make sense of their everyday worlds (Bruner, 2004). Within some Latinx families, parents often share with their children cuentos and narrativas from their personal lifelong, everyday experiences that are intended to help the children foster a sense of cultural identity while navigating the world (Villenas et al., 2006). We adopt the lens that some Latinx literature serves as an extension of the cuentos and narrativas parents retell (Ada, 2002) by reflecting like mirrors recognizable perspectives, beliefs, experiences, and/or repertoires of

practices (Bishop, 1994). Correspondingly, we apply the hypothesis that when acknowledged and valued by libraries, schools, and other institutions, Latinx sociocultural repertoires of practices can enhance and expand families' learning experiences and actions (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez, 1992). We situate the children's and parents' repertoires in the transnational and superdiverse contexts of the New Latino Diaspora, which has rapidly expanded over the past 20 years and has illuminated the challenges, adjustments, and responses of institutions serving the growing population of Latinx families in the U.S. Southeast (Hamann, Wortham, & Murillo 2002, 2015; Villenas 2002; Wortham, et al 2014).

BACKGROUND & METHODS

Participants and Program Overview

Set in a bright, new, spacious children's story room in the middle of the public library, we launched our reading program, *Cuentos para la Familia* in 2013. Our objectives were to introduce local families to Spanish, dual-language, and bilingual books about Latinos and, whenever possible, by Latinx authors and illustrators. Over the course of three years, our research team implemented six program series (one per semester) in partnership with the English-dominant local library branch. At first, Denise and Max trained to become the library branch's first bilingual facilitators of the national Prime Time Family Reading Time® (PTFRT) program, a six-session weekly series that promotes reading for low income families with children ages 6 – 10. The PTFRT model provides families free transportation to and from the library, a healthy dinner, and childcare for younger siblings. Families receive a weekly set of two books to read at home prior to each 90-minute session. Then, at the library the families participate in Socratic discussions intended to prompt open-ended, philosophical conversations about the stories in each book. Ideally, participants develop the habit of engaging in the same kinds of questions and exchanges with each other as they continue to read together at home.

Locally, library staff initially recruited immigrant families to participate in the PTFRT program. The children's librarians contacted specific elementary schools to identify "at risk," emergent bilingual struggling readers in need of additional support. In turn, they described the program to parents as an extension to the children's school-based reading instruction in which the entire family was required to attend. It is relevant to note that at the time of the implementation of the programs, the children were not receiving any type of bilingual instruction in their local school district. Several children received English Language Development services (ELD) in a push-in model, but first-language support was not part of their official curriculum at the time. Approximately 9 – 14 families with children ages 4 – 10 participated in each of the six-week series. Living on the outskirts of town across three different low-income mobile home / rental areas, free transportation was provided to and from a specific neighborhood region on a rotating basis for each of the six semesters. Nevertheless, Latinx families who had their own transportation from different neighborhoods were always welcomed to enroll in the free program, fostering a broader sense of community across the town.

The families' attendance and participation in what started as a PTFRT program and then shifted to the *Cuentos para la Familia* program was consistent and occasionally included extended members of their families. In total, the programs served nearly 60 families and more than 130 children, ages 3 and above. Most parents were first-generation immigrants from rural regions in southern Mexico, and the states of Michoacán, Guerrero, and Estado de México. A few families were also from Honduras, El Salvador, and Peru. The majority of the younger children (under age 8) were born in the United States, although some of their older siblings were not.

Books

In the beginning, at least half of the books provided for the bilingual PTFRT program were neither about nor created by Latinos. Rather, they were Spanish translations from the contemporary children's literature cannon often found in elementary schools (e.g. *Where the Wild Things Are*, Sendak, 1963; *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears*, Aardema, 1975; *Wilfred Gordon McDonald Partridge*, Fox, 1984; *Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters*, Steptoe, 1987; *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, Scieszka, 1989; *The Widow's Broom*, Van Allsburg, 1992). Although these modern "classics" offer springboards to provocative conversations, we firmly believed that local Latinx families, who were prompted to visit public library for the first time in order to advance their children's reading skills, had the right to see themselves and their culture reflected in the books they encountered. Therefore, Denise secured funds to purchase a range of culturally relevant Latinx books, to develop the alternate *Cuentos para la Familia* program, and to finance the availability of the free series every semester, including weekly transportation and dinner for all of the participants. Silvia joined the team and together with Max took the lead on delivering each of the *Cuentos* sessions in Spanish.

Below, Table 1 shows the list of Latinx literatura that we employed during the *Cuentos* program. While many of the book titles on our list may be well-known in libraries and areas of the U.S. with larger and more established Latinx communities, most of these texts were unknown to the children and families in the program. Moreover, with the exception of one bilingual title, *Niño Wrestles the World* (Morales, 2013), which Silvia and Max translated for families, the list reflects books that publishers have released in Spanish or in a dual-language format. The latter format is more utilitarian as each book includes the full text in both Spanish and English. The former requires the additional funds and storage space for the purchase of both a Spanish version and an English version of the same book. Thus, our selection of books was also informed by financial considerations, too.

Table 1. Sample Books selections for Cuentos para la Familia

Author	Year	Title * Also included in the PTFRT program; / Dual Language format with both languages	Illustrator	Publisher
Ancona, G.	1993	<i>Pablo recuerda: La fiesta del día de los muertos</i>	G. Ancona	New York, NY: Harper Collins
Deedy, C.	2007	<i>Martina una cucarachita muy linda: Un cuento cubano</i>	M. Austin	Atlanta, GA: Peachtree
Garza, C.L.	1990	<i>Family Pictures / Cuadros de familia</i>	C.L. Garza	New York, NY: Lee & Low
Garza, C.L.	1996	<i>In My Family / En mi familia</i>	C.L. Garza	New York, NY: Lee & Low
Garza, X.	2005	<i>Lucha Libre / The Man in the Silver Mask</i>	X. Garza	El Paso, TX: Cinto Punto
Hayes, J.	2006	<i>La Llorona / The Weeping Woman</i>	V. Hill & M. Pennypacker	El Paso, TX: Cinto Punto
Herrera, J.	2000	<i>The Upside Down Boy / El niño de cabeza*</i>	E. Gómez	San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press
Lainez, R.	2005	<i>Playing Loteria / El juego de la lotería</i>	J. Arena	Landham, MD: Cooper Square
Mora, P.	1997	<i>Tomás y la Señora de la Biblioteca*</i>	R. Colón	New York, NY: Dragon Fly
Mora, P.	2005	<i>Doña Flor: Un cuento de una mujer gigante con un gran corazón*</i>	R. Colón	New York, NY: Dragon Fly
Mora, P.	2012	<i>La hermosa Señora: Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe</i>	S. Johnson	New York, NY: Random House
Morales, Y.	2013	<i>Niño Wrestles the World</i>	Y. Morales	New York, NY: Roaring Book
Pérez, E.	2008	<i>My Very Own Room / Mi propio cuartito•</i>	M. Gonzalez	New York, NY: Lee & Low
Soto, G.	1993	<i>¡Qué montón de tamales!*</i>	E. Martinez	New York, NY: Putnam
Soto, G.	1997	<i>Chato y su cena</i>	S. Guevera	New York, NY: Putnam
Tafolla, C.	2009	<i>What Can You Do With a Paleta? / ¿Qué puedes hacer con una paleta?</i>	M. Morales	Berkeley, CA Tricycle Press

Tafolla, C.	2009	<i>What Can You Do With a Rebozo? / ¿Qué puedes hacer con un rebozo?</i>	A. Cordova	Berkeley, CA Tricycle Press
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Data Sources

Across the years of our program, we collected audio and video recordings of 25 sessions (approximately 90-minutes each) and artifacts created by children and parents. We also collected oral literature responses, written responses, and data from focus group interviews with participating parents and caregivers. In the interest of space, we examine the data from one parent focus group implemented in fall of 2014 and from sessions employing the books: *Cuadros de familia* (Garza); *En mi familia* (Garza); *Lucha Libre: The Man in the Silver Mask* (Garza); *Niño Wrestles the World* (Morales); *¿Qué montón de tamales!* (Soto); *El juego de la lotería* (Lainez); and *El niño de cabeza* (Herrera). We focus on the ways participation in the program made visible instances of the families' linguistic, biliterate, and cultural knowledge that were displayed in the focal sessions.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Providing Context: *El juego de la lotería* and *El niño de cabeza*

To establish a broader context for our discussion, we begin this segment of the paper by describing a session that we typically facilitated near the end of the Cuentos program, after families felt comfortable in talking with each in the library setting. For the session, we paired Lainez' *El juego de la lotería* with Herrera's biography, *El niño de cabeza*. In his book, Herrera remembers his childhood experience of feeling marginalized as a linguistic/cultural outsider in a monolingual, English-speaking U.S. classroom. By contrast, Laínez depicts an English-dominant boy's travel to Mexico to visit his grandmother, who also happens to be the announcer for a weekly game of Lotería. In the story, the un-named protagonist must mediate his feelings of segregation from his heritage language and culture when his visits his grandmother.

The pairing of the two books provided a platform for the children to make visible their linguistic knowledge and resources, and for the adults to discuss with their families and each other the significance of their language heritage. To help facilitate the conversation, we asked the children and parents to write a note to each of the boys in the stories and to offer some advice based on personal experience. While the attributes of the children's advice to the boys are described elsewhere (Dávila, Noguérón, & Vazquez, 2015), in Figure A (below) we highlight two common responses. Some children identified with Juanito Herrera, writing down that they "also couldnt speak english [sic]." Others identified with the boy in Laínez' story because they "dont know spanish, to [sic]."

(INSERT FIGURE A)



These divergent associations point to the differences among the children's linguistic repertoires. At the same time, many of the adults shared a more homogeneous perspective. In the words of one of the parents, Mayté:

"...me gustó [el programa] porque está en español y, bueno, yo no puedo leer en inglés y yo le puedo leer a mi hijo en español y este... le lee uno el libro y ... él empieza a preguntar que por qué paso esto y por qué paso esto otro y ya yo le puedo decir. Porque en inglés no se leer." /... *I liked [the program] because it is in Spanish and, well, I cannot read English and I can read to my child in Spanish and... you read the book and... he starts asking about why that happened this and that and I can answer him.*

Although we facilitated the Cuentos program in Spanish, the families' dominant home language, la literatura helped to reveal the actual heterogeneity of the children's varying linguistic identities within the local Latinx community. As a single narrative, neither Herrera's nor Laínez' story resonated with all of the participants, but together the pair provided insights to the diversity of the group.


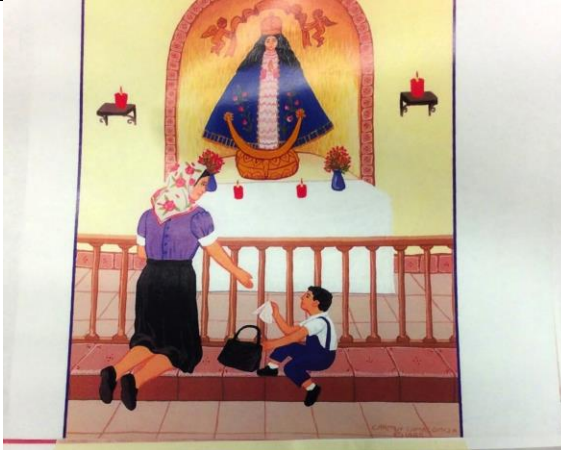
Reflecting the Familiar: *Cuadros de familia* and *En mi familia*

In another session, we employed Carmen Lomas Garza's first picturebook memoir *Cuadros de familia*, which features a collection of rich narrative paintings and vignettes about Garza's childhood in Kingsville, Texas. Recognized for its engaging illustrations, this book received a Pura Belpré honor award. Following suit, Garza's second memoir *En mi familia* won the Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award and the Américas Book Award for Children and Young Adult Literature, both of which share similarities with the Pura Belpré Award in honoring children's book creators who adeptly portray the lives and cultural experiences of Latinx children and families. Thus, it is perhaps no surprise that the warm and

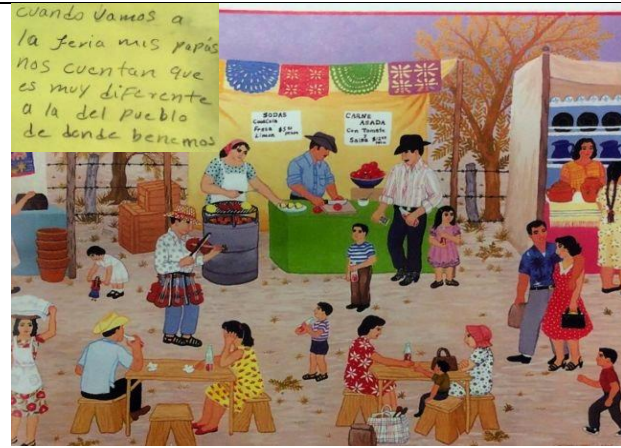
inviting scenes from Garza's life became touchstones for the families in the *Cuentos* program. As described by Josefina, the mother we introduced at the beginning of this article: [E]se libro de la familia, nosotros tenemos mucha familia y... [mi hijo] dice "esta familia es como la de nosotros." /*The book about family, we have lots of family and [my son] says, "That family is just like ours."*

Aligning with Josefina and her son, other families made direct connections with Garza's paintings, too. Consequently, the examination and discussion of the scenes in Garza's book were not only a resource for families to identify and describe their sociocultural repertoires of practice, but also a resource for adults to talk their childhood traditions and customs in other countries. In order to curate and make visible the rich conversations happening around these texts during the opening sessions of the *Cuentos* program, we adopted a pedagogical process in which we first prepared two photocopies of each of the paintings in Garza's memoirs and displayed the photocopies around the story room. Then, we invited all of the children and adults to visit the different paintings in our simulated art exhibition and to put words (in Spanish or English) or pictures on sticky notes to describe any personal connections they felt with the art. After, they affixed their sticky notes to the corresponding paintings. Through this process, each person had the opportunity to respond to the books in a way that was personally meaningful and to see how other people related or didn't relate to the paintings based on the content and/or quantity of the stick notes attached to the images in the exhibition. Below, Figure B shows the results of this engagement with la literatura from a group of families who participated in the same session.

(INSERT Figure B)

 <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> 1 2 3 </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="background-color: #90EE90; padding: 5px; width: 30%;"> <p>ellos ascan tamales una familia felis</p> </div> <div style="background-color: #90EE90; padding: 5px; width: 30%;"> <p>nosotros asemos tamales en nabida un dia bonito.</p> </div> <div style="background-color: #90EE90; padding: 5px; width: 30%;"> <p>mi mom mix bras</p> </div> </div> <p>1. Ellos asen tamales una familia felis [sic].</p> <p>2. Nosotros aseamos tamales en nabida un dia bonito [sic].</p>	 <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> 4 5 6 </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; margin-top: 10px;"> <div style="background-color: #90EE90; padding: 5px; width: 30%;"> <p>nosotros tambien resamos todos los domingos cuando vamos a misa.</p> </div> <div style="background-color: #90EE90; padding: 5px; width: 30%;"> <p>Era mi mama y yo orando todos los dia y todos los domingos ibamos a la iglesia</p> </div> <div style="background-color: #90EE90; padding: 5px; width: 30%;"> <p>Resara todos los domingos con su mama</p> </div> </div> <p>1. Nosotros tambien resamos todos los domingos cuando vamos a misa [sic].</p>
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3. Mi mom mix amas [sic].



Cuando vamos a la feria, mis papas nos cuentan que es muy diferente a la del pueblo del donde benemos [sic]. /

When we go to the fair, my parents tell us that it is very different from the one in the village where we come from.

2. Era mi mama y you orando todos los dia y todos los domingos ibamos a la iglecia [sic].

3. Resaro todos los domingos con su mama [sic].



The drawings and written comments in Figure B, which also illustrate the children's emergent biliteracy resources, demonstrate a level of familiarity with the visual content of Garza's memoirs. Several children responded to the birthday party celebration, especially la piñata. (There were more sticky notes associated with the birthday scene. In the interest of space, Figure B shows just one image from each pair of paintings that we displayed in the exhibition.) At least three children wrote their own stories of making tamales with family members and/or during Navidad. At least three others connected with the mother and child at church. (Of note, this painting is from the first edition of *Family Pictures / Cuadros de familia*; it does not appear in later editions.) Their comments reflect a repertoire of cultural practices that include attending mass on Sundays. Last, Figure B includes a short narrative by eight-year-old Nando, who recounted how his parents tell the story about the ways la feria in their pueblo in Mexico differs from the fairs they attend in the U.S.

While posting their notes on the photocopied images, the children and adults talked about their own familial experiences, prompting both moments of levity and camaraderie in the *Cuentos* program that many suggested "was not like school." As noted earlier, in school, first-language support was not part of the children's literacy instruction. Parents like Josefina explained that with regard to reading, "En la escuela en las reuniones nos dicen que les tenemos

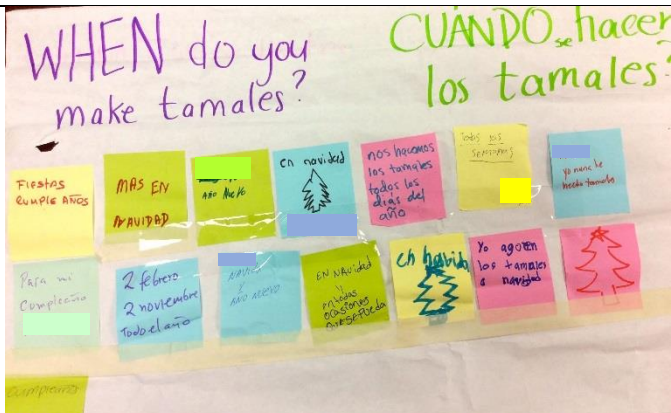
que hablar el idioma que nosotros hablamos. Porque en la escuela ellos les enseñan el inglés. / *In the school, at the meetings they tell us to read to them in the language we speak because at school they teach them in English.*” In short, discussing the content of culturally relevant books in Spanish did not occur at school and was expected to occur at other times in the day.

Valuing Repertoires: *¡Qué montón de tamales!*

Another book that promoted conversation about familia traditions was Gary Soto’s award-winning work of realistic fiction, *¡Qué montón de tamales!* It always elicited exchanges about Latinx families’ different regional approaches to preparing tamales. While regarded as a traditional Mexican cuisine, the “tamal” (singular, from the nahuatl language) originated with the native tribes of Mesoamerica like the Olmec, Aztec, and Maya in a geographic region where corn was part of the gastronomic, political, religious, and economic milieu. The geography and history of Mesoamerica, Mexico, Central and South America have resulted in significant differences. Geographically, in coastal areas tamales are often filled with seafood while in the tropical jungle areas they are filled with fruit and wrapped in plantain leaves as cornhusks are less accessible in these areas. Historically, the dynamics between tamales production and consumption have changed. For example, the Spaniards’ introduction of pork and its derivatives influenced the evolution of tamales in some regions. While people used to prepare and carry tamales for long journeys, industrialization has yielded a market for frozen tamales that are ready to microwave and eat in less than four minutes, complete with labels and cooking instructions in English.

Below, Figure C provides examples of tamale questions that have provided springboards into the discussion of differences and similarities within the Latinx community. The children’s and adults’ responses to the questions stemmed from their families’ repertoires of practice. In this case, they regarded not only the ingredients and procedures for making tamales, but also the cultural importance of tamales on specific days year as food in Mexico and other Latin countries is often linked certain traditions and festivities.

(INSERT FIGURE C)

<p>¿Cuándo se hacen los tamales?</p> <p><i>When do you make tamales?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> fiestas / parties • cumpleaños / birthdays • Navidad / Christmas • Año Nuevo / New Years • todos el año / year-round • todas las semanas / every week • todas ocasiones / all occasions • 2 febrero; 2 noviembre • 	
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they do not recover the jewelry, which leaves them with the same problem but without tamales for the celebration. Fortunately, María's family finds a solution to the situation.

Highly responsive, many of the children and parents in the Cuentos program appreciated the warm, expressive illustrations of the picturebook and were amused, if not charmed, by the narrative. During this particular session, we wanted to ensure that the children had the opportunity to talk with their family groups prior to engaging in a large group discussion. As a result, we distributed paper microphones and invited the children to interview the adults about times when the adults did something along the lines of the young characters in the story.

Several children delighted in the role-reversal activity because their adult interviewees began to share stories about mishaps in their families. For example, as recorded in our field notes,

Roxanna told her two daughters, "Cuando era una niña, he mentido a mi mamá. Ella estaba tan enojado! / *When I was a girl, I lied to my mom. She was so mad.*" The girls gasped at their mother and then giggled. At a later date, Roxanna shared "A mis hijas les gustó eso [libro] de los tamales. / *My daughters liked the book about the tamales.*" In fact, her daughters so enjoyed the story they, "insistieron en que vinieramos aquí [la biblioteca] los jueves; tuvieron que leer el libro / *they insisted that they return here [the library] on Thursdays; they had to read the book.* Perhaps it is no surprise that most of the children asked to take home the paper microphones for future use. In this instance, la literatura was as much a catalyst for returning to the library as it was for validating families' life experiences and building community among Latinx children and adults.

Honoring Transnational Identities: *Niño* and *Lucha Libre*

Finally, one of the most popular sessions of our *Cuentos* program revolved around Xavier Garza's acclaimed *Lucha Libre: The Man in the Silver Mask* and Yuyi Morales' 2014 Pura Belpre winner *Niño Wrestles the World*. Both involve family relationships and invite readers into the dramatic athletics of free-style wrestling with scimmages between los técnicos / *the good guys* and los rudos / *the bad guys*. Unlike the nonfiction and realistic fiction that we highlighted earlier, these texts call on readers to enter the theatrical realm of lucha libre and to agree to the norms of the territory in order to appreciate the stories. Unsurprisingly, both Garza's and Morales' books include author's notes to help readers who do not have relevant cultural insights to comprehend lucha libre as a transnational diversions and performance art.

We often introduced this session by welcoming families to share their thoughts about various photographs of popular luchadores and displays of lucha libre masks. Invariably, at least one parent would describe a trip to a match while others mentioned seeing luchadores on television. Then, before starting the stories we usually asked everyone to imagine what it would be like to have a luchador, professional or amateur, in the family. After reading together, we talked about the concept of knowing one's true identity. In *Niño Wrestles the World* it is clear that las rudas are the protagonist's hermanitas. For some of the younger children in our Cuentos program, however, it is less obvious in Garza's *Lucha Libre* that el técnico the Man in the Silver Mask, is actually the protagonist's uncle. Once the younger children began to inquire about the

luchadores' identities, it often became evident to the older siblings and adults that knowing something about the lucha libre culture and rules of conduct is helpful to understanding the nuances of the stories.

Such a revelation illuminated the fact that there are works of children's literature intended for audiences who have insights into certain elements of Latinx popular culture as implied by the open exchange between Saul, one of the fathers in the program and his son, Nando. Following the read aloud of *Lucha Libre*, Saul suggested that the picturebook's Man in the Silver Mask must have been based on El Santo/ *The Saint*, el enmascarado de plata. This famous silver-masked Mexican luchador, folk hero, and film star (Rodolfo Guzmán Huerta, 1917 - 1984) is an icon of Mexican popular culture. In the movies, Saul explained, El Santo was both a superhero and a regular man just like another legendary masked luchador, the Blue Demon. He fought super villains like las momias de Guanajuato, los vampiros, and los marcianos to re-establish social order in the world. When Saul concluded his comments, Nando and the other children returned to their copies of the picturebook to reconsider the illustrations and text about the Man in the Silver Mask. Moreover, the information Saul shared with his son and fellow program participants also helps to contextualize Morales' *Niño Wrestles the World* in which the young protagonists imagines that he enters the ring with the very same villains El Santo fought on screen (e.g., mummies, vampires, and Martians), further reinforcing that the ideal audience for these books are Latinx families.

(INSERT FIGURE D)



We concluded each of our lucha libre Cuentos sessions by challenging families to create their own luchador characters and masks. Figure D shows artifacts from two different sessions, one in which we provided pre-fabricate paper masks in various patterns and another in which we asked the parents and children to work together in teams to design their own. Pictured are two families' masks for their villainous rudos, El Fuego Caliente and El Penurias—drawn and named by two of the dads, Daniel and Saul. The families' presentation of their luchadores humored everyone at the library.

As described by Antonio, the father we introduced at the beginning of this paper, reading and responding to culturally relevant literatura like the picturebook, *Lucha Libre*, offered a

healthy distraction for the children: “Se distraen un poco también aquí. Ya cuando vienen aquí como que su mente se despeja. Más bien para ellos / *It helps them to relax a bit. When they are here their minds get clear. It is good for them.*” Correspondingly, a mom named Clara, suggested that her children, “No dicen nada en la escuela, pero están contentos cuando leen cuentos aquí / *Don’t say anything at school, but they are happy when we read the stories here.*” In sum, communally engaging with positive and/or playful works of culturally relevant and/or familiar literature permitted families to escape, if even temporarily, from day-to-day realities, including school.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have endeavored to demonstrate how la literatura has served as a catalyst for building Latinx families’ sense of community and identity in a primarily monolingual town of the New Latino Diaspora of the Southeast. Despite the provision of free transportation and dinner service, families were understandably reticent about going to the public library since they initially expected a school-based tutorial in an institutional space where they did not know anyone. Nevertheless, in responding to the updated *Cuentos para la Familia* program, parents like Antonio affirmed the emphasis on Latinx literature, suggesting, “...está bien porque los niños, al menos los míos, ya faltando dos o tres días están preguntando que cuando vamos a ir a la biblioteca / ... *it is right because children, at least my kids, are asking me about going to the library two or three days in advance.*” At the same time, parents like Roxanna were relieved to learn that the series was, “totalmente diferente y tampoco sabía como leer un libro con ellas... tienen que ver los dibujos y tienen que poner atención... / *totally different and I didn’t know how to read books to my daughters... they have to see the pictures so they put more attention.*” For them, the presence of Latinx literature, facilitators, and fellow immigrant families contributed to a linguistically- and culturally- welcoming experience that validated transnational knowledge and biliteracy in concert with the public resources available in the local community.

Over the course of our program, Latinx families from different parts of town cultivated new relationships with each other and the public library. After the first couple of series of the Cuentos program, it was no longer necessary for the library to recruit participants. Since participants often talked with their friends and neighbors, information about the program spread via word-of-mouth. As a result, we limited a couple of our series to new families who had never before attended the program and extended another to ten weeks. Our aim was to accommodate a group of families who so appreciated the program that they did not want to stop joining together to read and discuss culturally relevant books. All told, this paper reinforces the concepts that many families make sense of the world through stories (Bruner, 2004) and value familial and community contexts for learning (Delgado-Gaitan 2005; Villenas 2005). It implies that la literatura is an essential resource to cultivating transnational communities of Latinx families in regions that have only recently started to diversify. It also indicates that certain elements of

traditional library programs can inform the development of new series intended to acknowledge and families' linguistic and sociocultural repertoires of practice (Blommaert & Backus, 2013; Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003; Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez, 1992).

Our study likewise illustrates the need for a range of resources to facilitate public programs that support reading and family literacies. While we volunteered our time, donated food and materials, and secured funding to subsidize our service-based project (with families' consent under IRB), many public libraries do not have such resources. Thus, it is important to consider how public partnerships, policies, and funding priorities will impact the availability of such programs particularly in library systems that are in the early stages of accessing and responding to the changing needs of their region. Last, while more works of Latinx literatura are available on the market than in previous years, families, schools, libraries, and community groups interested in multilingualism could greatly benefit from the increased availability of high quality, culturally relevant books in dual-language formats.

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