

# EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF LATINX CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ON BILINGUAL TEACHER PREPARATION:

A STUDY OF BEAUTY WOKE AND LE DICEN FREGONA

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## *Abstract:*

In an era of anti-truth, book bans, and curricular scrutiny, teacher preparation programs must prioritize supporting pre-service educators and students, underscoring the critical need to nurture social justice pedagogies. In this bicoastal qualitative case study, we explored the impact of Latinx children's literature on Latinx preservice teachers enrolled in courses at a Bilingual Teacher Residency Program and in a collaboration between a School of Education and a School of Humanities and Social Sciences Ethnic Studies Department. Focusing on two particular children's texts, the picture book *Beauty Woke* by NoNieqa Ramos, illustrated by Paola Escobar, and the poem "Le dicen Fregona" from David Bowles' *Le dicen Fregona* middle-grade novel-in-verse, we found that Latinx children's literature raised participants' critical consciousness on Latinidad, expanded their language ideologies, and inspired classroom applications to examine issues of language, identity, and culture. Our findings have implications for children's literature, teacher preparation, and curriculum development.

## INTRODUCTION

Preparing Latinx teachers to advocate with and for bilingual and multilingual children often involves coursework with readings on foundations of education, bilingual theory, and pedagogy. In some programs, teacher candidates take courses in bilingual instruction in Spanish, confronting complex trajectories of language ideologies (Collins et al., 2019; Flores & Rosa, 2015). Local university and K-12 school partnerships are also cultivated to prepare teachers to teach emergent bilingual children through teacher residencies where residents spend the academic year in a dual language bilingual education classroom with a mentor teacher. Residents get more student teaching hours in a bilingual setting than in a typical teacher preparation program, creating opportunities to build stronger relationships with the students. The appeal of teacher residencies lies in their commitment to localized, contextually tailored teacher preparation, aligning with the Grow Your Own (GYO) model, as residents typically aim to teach in the communities where they grew up and live (Gist et al., 2018; Valenzuela, 2016).

In pathways for teacher preparation, such as undergraduate majors in education, students take courses in education theory, methods, and ethnic studies. The ethnic studies component partnered with bilingual education equips future educators with an understanding of colonization, systemic oppression, traditions of resistance, and the role of the arts (including media, music, and literature) in shaping the lives of students, especially those of the global majority (Nadal & Morales Nadal, 2021).

No matter the type of pathway, preservice and in-service Latinx teachers must be supported with preparation that assists them in unpacking dominant narratives about their identity and languages and utilizing translingual literature in instruction (Herrera & España, 2021). This article features a case study on how two universities' commitment to nurturing critically conscious bilingual teachers incorporated the use of Latinx children's literature. The university on the West Coast offered a teacher residency program. In contrast, the university on the East Coast featured an Ethnic Studies Department with a concentration

for Childhood Education (Grades 1-6) majors. We were particularly interested in exploring how the use of translingual Latinx children and youth literature informs Latinx preservice teachers' identities and teaching.

Participants engaged with two texts in focus group sessions: *Beauty Woke* by NoNieqa Ramos, illustrated by Paola Escobar (2022), and the poem "Le dicen Fregona" from David Bowles' *Le dicen Fregona* (2023) middle-grade novel-in-verse. We found that the use of Latinx children's literature played a crucial role in raising students' critical consciousness on issues of Latinidad, expanded language ideologies, and inspired classroom applications. *Beauty Woke* tells the story of Beauty, a Puerto Rican child who is welcomed into the world with love and pride in her culture and ancestry until she internalizes negative messages about people like her and the family gathers for an intervention. Although HarperCollins Publisher lists *Beauty Woke* for ages four to seven, we advocate for its use (and picture books in general) across all grades. Bowles' *Le dicen Fregona* is the sequel to *Me dicen Güero*, focusing on the trajectories of Joanna Padilla or "Fregona" and Güero as they navigate eighth grade. Bowles' authentic experiences growing up on the border of Mexico and the United States inform this novel that tackles themes of friendship, love, immigration, and justice. Both texts resonate with children who must contend with harmful sociopolitical policies and narratives while remaining rooted in the love and history that validate their existence.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Raciolinguistic perspectives, critical bilingual literacies, and critical translanguaging literacies guided our study, with translanguaging as the thread connecting all three. Translanguaging (García, 2009) posits that we have one linguistic repertoire with features from named languages that we draw from to make meaning. In this study, we drew from translanguaging as we sought to understand how participants interacted with translingual children's literature, the participants' communicative practices, and the dynamic language in the texts. Language, our literacy practices, and texts do not exist in isolation. To understand the pattern of interpretation of racialized bilinguals' language

practices (and their texts) as deficient by the “white listening subject” or those who have internalized the white gaze, we turn to Rosa and Flores’ (2017) raciolinguistic perspectives, defined as “an orientation to research that seeks to shift attention from the speaker to the listener in order to better understand the role of race in dominant perceptions of one’s language practices” (Flores & Del Rosario Barrientos, 2024).

A critical bilingual literacies approach (CBL) (España and Herrera, 2020) urges educators to reflect on their language ideologies, unlearn harmful notions of language hierarchies, analyze language, literacies, and power, and celebrate the dynamic language practices of children. CBL was crucial to understanding the evolution of the participants’ language ideologies and instances of injustice in texts. Furthermore, *critical translinguaging literacies* (CTL) (Herrera and España, 2021) also inform this research. CTL calls for culturally and linguistically sustaining children’s literature that reflects the dynamic language practices of the community whose stories it tells. Specifically, Herrera and España (2021) argue that critical translinguaging literacies invite us to (1) investigate and establish connections between the narratives that students engage with and the journeys of their families; (2) affirm the linguistic and literacy practices of children and their communities; (3) nurture the intricate and dynamic language practices, identities, and cultures of children; and (4) examine and confront unjust societal structures that undermine the dignity of language-minoritized communities.

## RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY AND RELATIONALITY

### CARLA

Carla is a New York-based educator from Chile and a product of a teacher preparation program from the university that the East Coast participants attended. Like the participants, she is bilingual and teaches in an Ethnic Studies Department. She is a former middle-grade bilingual teacher and English teacher.

## **LUZ**

Luz is a bilingual Mexicana, born in Mexico and raised in a Los Angeles immigrant and Black community. As an undergraduate student, Luz taught English as a second language (ESL) to immigrant day laborers in Los Angeles, where she learned and practiced Paulo Freire's (1970) critical pedagogy and popular education. She carried that to New York City, where she taught immigrant children in an ESL setting at a K-6 public school in Harlem. Now, as a bilingual teacher educator, her teaching approach is rooted not only in her background growing up in a working-class immigrant community but also in her experiences as a teacher of immigrant children and as a researcher of bilingual education.

## **MARICRUZ**

Born in Mexico and raised in New York, Maricruz is a product of the public education system. She pursued an undergraduate degree in a Spanish-English bilingual teacher preparation program at the same university the East Coast participants attended. As an undergraduate student, she tutored emergent bilingual and monolingual students in reading and designed and implemented a research study on family partnerships with a local school.

## **A NOTE ON OUR RELATIONALITY**

Carla and Luz serve on the board of a Latinx children's literature organization. As a faculty in an Ethnic Studies department at a large public university on the East Coast, Carla was one of the instructors for the East Coast participants. Luz was a faculty member in a bilingual teacher residency program at a large public university on the West Coast. Maricruz was a student in the Ethnic Studies Department taking the same courses as the East Coast participants.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This article zooms in on one aspect of a more extensive qualitative case study examining the role of Latinx children's and youth literature in preservice teachers processing their language journeys, definitions of Latinidad, and fostering their advocacy. We explore how our differ-

ent students' experiences shape their connections to Latinx children's literature. We conducted interviews and focus groups and analyzed preservice teacher artifacts. For this article, however, we focus on the data from the focus groups' interactions with the book *Beauty Woke* (Ramos, 2022) and the poem "Le dicen Fregona" (Bowles, 2023).

## SELECTING YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

In selecting books for our focus groups, we reviewed lists of works by Latinx authors. Our goal was to curate texts based on the following critical criteria: a) Latinx characters to ensure authentic connections; b) characters undertook transformative journeys; c) translingual books using features of Spanish and English; d) representation of Spanish varieties; and e) counter-narratives of Latinx culture. We sought to create spaces for meaningful discussions on language, culture, and identity. Additionally, we considered the bicoastal nature of the study and the participants' student populations. Therefore, we wanted to highlight a Caribbean author and a Mexican or Mexican American author, representing most of the populations our participants will teach in their respective contexts.

## BEAUTY WOKE

In *Beauty Woke*, a love of ancestry, self, and Puerto Rican culture surrounds Beauty. Nevertheless, as the family prepares for the Puerto Rican Day Parade, Beauty starts to internalize the negative messages heard and seen around her about "people that looked like family" (Ramos, 2022, pp. 19-20). After the family and community come together to remind Beauty of where she comes from and that she is a gift, Ramos (2022) writes:

With each whisper,  
each palabra sagrada,  
grew a seed.  
Beauty opened her eyes wide.  
Thought,  
I CAN FINALLY SEE  
(p. 26)

To center a child's journey from pride to internalized shame, resulting in raised consciousness, is a radical move. For Beauty to "finally see" (Ramos, 2022, p. 26) means everything for critically conscious educators as they collaborate with families and their communities to support children in their intellectual and spiritual growth (hooks, 1994, p. 13). It is imperative to select texts that nourish critically conscious readers as they examine current social issues and what it means to create a more just society.

### **"LE DICEN FREGONA" POEM IN LE DICEN FREGONA**

In "Le dicen Fregona," the poem on the protagonist of the novel-in-verse with the same title by David Bowles (2023), we learn about Joanna Padilla Benavides' name story, the rise of the "Fregona" nickname, gender expectations, queermisia at school, pressures from her father to be tough, and the support Joanna gets from her boyfriend, Güero to be her true and whole self regardless of those expectations. As Joanna expresses the difficulty of living up to her father's expectations and shares her appreciation for Güero's perspective and ability to "see" her softness, we read:

‘Apá keeps pushing me to be tough—  
he’s seen what the world does to girls.’  
She takes a deep breath. ‘He doesn’t want me  
to end up like his mother or sisters. Mistreated.  
Ignored. And my mom’s a fregona, too.  
I have big shoes to fill. Can’t let them down.’

(Bowles, 2021, p. 20-21)

Fregona navigates messages from the kids at school and her family about how she is "allowed" to exist. Yes, Güero sees all of Fregona, "all the soft / and sweet parts" (p. 21), and this is all Fregona is asking of the world. To see her whole self without repressing some aspects to fit in. Güero also tells Fregona, "And there's no reason light skin / should mean beauty. That's wrong" (p. 20). This poem helps the preservice teacher consider how identity, gender roles, cultural norms, and discrimination impact our lives and ways to determine our resistance.

In an era of ongoing threats to women’s rights, educators and children must access texts that aid their understanding. This poem addresses essential aspects of self and community for today’s classrooms. It raises awareness about global issues like beauty standards and anti-Blackness, which shape relationships in settler colonial societies.

**PARTICIPANTS**

The study had nine participants: five from the New York-based college and four from the California-based university. Those on the West Coast pursued their post-baccalaureate teaching credential with bilingual authorization, and those on the East Coast pursued a bachelor’s degree in Childhood Education with a Bilingual Extension and a Puerto Rican and Latinx Studies concentration (Table 1). The nine participants in the study reflected the population of the programs at the colleges, with the California participants all identifying as Mexican and Mexican American and those from the New York college representing the Caribbean, Central, and South America.

**TABLE 1: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS**

<b>East Coast: New York Public University Undergraduate Childhood Education with a Bilingual Extension and a Puerto Rican and Latinx Studies Concentration, Bachelor of Arts</b>	
Jenifer	Born in the Dominican Republic. Immigrated to the United States at age 9
Ameerah	Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. The parents are from the Dominican Republic.
Paola	Born in the Dominican Republic. Immigrated to New York at age 19
Melanie	Born and raised in Long Island, New York. The parents are from Guatemala.
Sarah	Born and raised in the Bronx, New York. The parents are from Ecuador.



<b>West Coast: California Public University Bilingual Teacher Residency Credential Program</b>	
Kamilo	Born in Guanajuato, Mexico. Grew up in Oxnard, California.
Estrella	Born and raised in Oxnard, California. Family from Guerrero, Mexico.
Alejandra	Born and raised in Mexico City, Mexico. Immigrated to Oxnard, California, at age 18.
Marcela	Born and raised in Guadalajara, Mexico. Immigrated to Oxnard, California, at age 19.

## DATA COLLECTION: FOCUS GROUP

Focus groups offered participants time to delve into each text, with the first focus group one on *Beauty Woke* and the second on the poem “Le dicen Fregona.” We held the focus groups across two weeks after participants met with the researchers for an interview towards the end of their spring semester. Meeting virtually allowed us to screen-share the texts and capture participants’ reactions. During the first part of the focus group session, we delved into the participants’ interaction with Latinx Children’s Literature. In the latter part of the focus group, our questions shifted toward language ideologies and bilingual teacher identity. Additionally, we explored how they have addressed or observed others addressing the themes from the texts in school contexts.

## Data Analysis

We coded the focus groups with “organizational,” “substantive,” and “theoretical” categories (Maxwell, 2013). This analysis addressed our research questions concerning developing participants’ bilingual identities and how a Bilingual Teacher Residency Program and an Ethnic Studies Department influenced this process. Raciolinguistic perspectives, critical bilingual literacies, and critical translanguing literacies lenses informed our coding for the following themes: Latinidad, Translanguaging, Latinx Children’s Literature, and Critical Consciousness/Advocacy, namely, the path to self-awareness and its manifestation in their teaching. We first coded participant data from our respective

sites and followed this with two rounds of coding together. Our findings include an exploration of the role of Latinx children's literature in enacting the following: (1) Raising critical consciousness on issues of Latinidad, (2) Expanding ideas of language practices, and (3) Inspiring classroom applications.

## FINDINGS



Our analysis revealed tension along the participants' language journey, the role of Latinx youth literature, expansive definitions of Latinidad, and the growth of their bilingualism advocacy. Participants' experiences in Spanish classes that failed to recognize the validity of different Spanish language varieties, dominant narratives of language separation, and family and instructors' perceptions of their Spanish not being "good enough" shaped their language ideologies. Raciolinguistic perspectives (Rosa & Flores, 2017) emerged as part of participants' schooling and engagement with texts, especially considering how participants described perceptions of their Caribbean, Mexican, and Central American Spanish. Participants recognized the importance of Latinx children's literature, highlighting the counternarratives set forth with a Critical Translingual Literacies (Herrera and España, 2021) framework. They also described how their coursework helped them shift from feeling shame around their language and cultural expressions to growing as advocates.

## LATINX CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND LATINIDAD

Using Latinx children's literature helped raise critical consciousness on issues of Latinidad (considering different identities and the representation of the experiences of marginalized groups). Latinx children's literature can serve as an entry point. Too often, Latinx children's literature representation can be one-dimensional and limited to specific categories in classroom libraries, such as immigration, family, and identity. In contrast, *Beauty Woke* and "Le dicen Fregona" sparked deep discussions about cultural practices, challenges, and resistance.

BEAUTY WOKE

TABLE 2: EXPANDING OUR DEFINITION OF LATINIDAD WITH BEAUTY WOKE

<i>Beauty Woke</i> by NoNieqa Ramos, illustrated by Paola Escobar	
Writing or Illustration	Themes
So, los padres safety-proofed; had la espiritista bless every room (p. 4)	Spirituality Cultural Reference/Nuance
Say Taíno Indian. Say African. Lay your hand on your heart. Say Boricua. (p. 12)	Ancestry Puerto Rican Identity African Diaspora Black Identity Indigeneity
 (pp.19-20)	Solidarity Immigration Migration Discrimination Indigeneity
After the laying on of hands, Beauty said “I think I under- stand..” (p. 26)	Awareness Critical Consciousness Community Family
 (pp. 29-30)	Puerto Rican Identity Puerto Rican Pride Resistance Culture Queer Pride Joy Resistance

The presence of an espiritista in the opening scene of *Beauty Woke* (Ramos, 2022) resonated deeply with numerous participants. Participants reflected on the portrayal of spirituality within Latinx families and how children's literature can expose readers to various practices. This was something new for Sarah (Ecuadorian, undergraduate junior), saying, "yo creo que eso es tradición. I've never seen that. It was really nice. I can learn something from that." While, Marcela (Mexican, bilingual teacher resident), interpreted a spiritualist bless a home as familiar, "creo que una de las conexiones que hay es con nuestra familia."

In the book, when Beauty's Abuela shares the trajectory of the family's ancestry, naming "Taíno Indian," "African," and "Boricua" (Ramos, 2022, p. 12), we see the context for the family's formation of their Puerto Rican identity, one that includes Blackness and Indigeneity. For Kamilo (Mexican, bilingual teacher resident), this scene reminded him of when, at age 12, his parents' absence puzzled him, unaware of their involvement and activism in the farmworkers' union:

It was not until I got older that I realized they were part of their worker's union and were fighting for better wages. And I found out this as an adult because I saw pictures of them with the flag, and like the hats, and getting ready to go on strike. I was like, "Man, how come you didn't tell me this before?" and they were like, "Oh, you were too young to understand."

That last line, "you were too young to understand," was a recurring theme in the focus groups as participants recalled the many instances when children and youth at their schools craved support to process their identity formation, current events, and matters of injustice. Participants recognized that they could use Latinx children's literature to engage students in difficult and important conversations. Although participants explicitly referred to their contexts in California and New York, they often named challenges with national policies and human rights.

*Beauty Woke* was the first picture book participants read by a Latine author and illustrator about a nurtured Latine child who still internalizes negative messaging. Beauty returns to a positive sense of

self with the support of the family and community. Alejandra (Mexican, Bilingual Teacher Residency) explained her reactions to Paola Escobar's illustration of a mural with the words "illegal," "ban," "4645," "cage," "border," and "hate" surrounded by images of fists up in the air rising out of an ocean, Taino symbols, and a child with butterfly wings. (Ramos, 2022).

Nosotros muchas veces podemos ver palabras en las calles. Son solamente escritas. Pero cuando alguien, hasta con una mirada nos está reflejándonos que sienten o qué percepción ven hacia nosotros. También las noticias es una alarma cuando la familia estaba allí. Eso hace sentir un poco de inseguridad, pero a la vez hace como reunir. La bisabuela y la abuela es como la mata, la raíz de la familia que hace que como familia nos reunamos y podamos luchar.

Alejandra connected with this illustration in the text, noticing that sometimes it is not just the harmful rhetoric about her people but also the looks, the news, and how all of this instills a sense of insecurity. In the book, the grandmother and great-grandmother are like the "roots of the family that make it so the family can come together and fight back" (our translation).

The rallying together in support for Beauty in the text was a crucial point of connection for Estrella (Mexican, bilingual teacher resident), who shared that as a child, she knew that "racism existed towards the Latino community," leaving her "very confused" when it came to her identity. Estrella wondered, "Should I try to adapt more to American culture or still be proud of my own culture?" These are urgent questions for Latinx teachers, especially when preparing to teach children who may be asking these questions.

*Beauty Woke* ends with Beauty coming to a sense of awareness about who she is and who she comes from, solidifying her Puerto Rican identity, resistance, and joy in celebrating with the community. Like Estrella (bilingual teacher resident) expressed, participants acknowledged the need for this sense of pride that includes standing up to the "discrimination if you're Afro-Mexican or you're indigenous," being in solidarity with the LGBTQIA+ community, as Paola (Dominican, undergraduate senior) noted with the queer representation

across the book, and making sure you “never forget” how you identify, even if, as Jenifer (Dominican, undergraduate junior) said, “people already assume because of the stereotypes” in a society that seeps with anti-Blackness. Reading *Beauty Woke* enabled participants to consider how these themes permeated their childhood experiences, something teacher preparation programs often miss when they focus on decontextualized theory and pedagogy.

From the book’s start with an espiritista to the abuela figure instilling ancestral connections, the ways the participants connected with and interpreted *Beauty Woke* reveal how preservice educators can grapple with critical translingual literacies theory (Herrera & España, 2021). First, they noticed the connections between the text, their families, and their students’ experiences. Second, they appreciated the dynamic language practices where Ramos writes using features of different types of Spanish and English. Third, they thought of ways this book can nurture classroom discussions (see the section on school applications below) and they made connections between the injustices the protagonist faced and those that exist in their lives.

“LE DICEN FREGONA”

The poem “Le dicen Fregona” by David Bowles (2023) expanded definitions of Latinidad by delving into childhood and adult experiences. Participants’ observations mostly fell under name stories, gender-based violence, pressures from immigrant families on their children to be tough, and empowerment. There were a lot of deep sighs as we read the poem, and some lines hit very close to home with participants.

TABLE 3: EXPANDING OUR DEFINITION OF LATINIDAD WITH “LE DICEN FREGONA” POEM IN LE DICEN FREGONA

“Le Dicen Fregona” poem in <i>Le Dicen Fregona</i> by David Bowles	
Writing	Themes
no encajan del todo por las normas de género y la queermisia (p. 18)	Gender expectations Queermisia

<p>“No eres fea” le digo contundente.          “Y no tiene sentido que la tez clara signifique belleza. Esa idea está mal. (p. 19)</p>	<p>Concepts of Beauty</p>
<p>“Apá sigue empujándome a ser dura.          Ha visto lo que el mundo les hace a las niñas”. (p. 19)</p>	<p>Patriarchy</p>
<p>“No quiere que termine como su madre o sus hermanas. Maltratada. Ignorada.” (p. 19)</p>	<p>Misogyny</p>

There was a familiar sense of the popular name story activities. The line “es Jo para los cuates” (Bowles, 2023, p. 18) caused Estrella (Mexican, bilingual teacher resident) to problematize the everyday use of name stories, “making sure we respect what they [students] want to be addressed as, or we have any students who maybe want to go by a different name that is different to the name that they have” and asking students about pronunciation. The lines in the poem where Joanna reminisces about her Apá not wanting her to “end up like his mother or sisters – mistreated, ignored” strongly impacted Alejandra (Bowles, 2023, p. 21). Alejandra (Mexican, bilingual teacher resident) stated, “creo que eso lo hemos visto mucho en nuestra cultura. Y simplemente el hecho de decir la palabra, ‘le dicen fregona,’ quiere decir que no se deja de nadie.” One by one, participants agreed with Alejandra and shared their experiences of witnessing gender-based violence and having someone call attention to this injustice. Describing gender-based violence back-to-back with an interpretation of the nickname “fregona” meant that for Alejandra, Joanna’s character exemplified strength.

However, the narrative does not end at this point. Like Alejandra, other participants took note of the nickname “fregona” in the context of discrimination and violence. Kamilo (Mexican, bilingual teacher resident), called attention to how empowering that term can be and how it reminded him of the community rallying behind a student who was not allowed to participate in a sport at his school. Melanie (Gua-

temalan, undergraduate junior) thought it was essential to support children's emotional intelligence "to let them know that it's okay to cry sometimes." Although Kamilo recalled his high school student and Melanie's early childhood work, like the rest of the participants, they interpreted the poem as speaking to their experience and how it could support students at different ages to process complex topics while also feeling empowered to take up their voice and strength in being their whole selves like Joanna.

This interpretation of empowerment with the reclaiming of the word "fregona" shows how participants embodied one of the principles of the critical bilingual literacies framework (España & Herrera, 2020): celebration. Although the poem underscores challenges in Joanna's life (and those present in several Latinx families), this is not the end of her story. In other words, our students may encounter challenges related to immigration, schooling, bilingual support, mental health, and several others that remind us of the injustices in systems that do not acknowledge the humanity of all children. Yet, we must make space for the moments and movements of resistance and liberation. Participants showed how this is possible with their interpretation of this poem, reclaiming names/terms, and how all of us (teachers and students) need those pockets of hope with celebratory examples.

## **LATINX CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES**

The participants were familiar with translanguaging pedagogy and translingual children's literature based on their participation in teacher residency and ethnic studies classes. In the focus groups, Alejandra (Mexican, bilingual teacher resident), for instance, reflected on the opportunities that translingual literature like *Beauty Woke* can offer for authentic expression. She stated, "este libro hace que nos relacionemos con muchas de las cosas, y para mi el translenguaje es un aspecto muy importante. Y me da mucho gusto que lo podamos utilizar hoy en día." Alejandra noted how *Beauty Woke* helped readers connect with many things and that, for her, the translanguaging was important. For Alejandra, this type of Latinx literature not only mirrors authentic ways the Latinx communities express themselves but also provides the space to convey the intended meaning into words or phrases that otherwise



might be lost in translation. explained how she would face this obstacle as an emergent bilingual when translating everything from Spanish to English. Having Latinx children’s literature that features dynamic language practices is one way students like Alejandra can feel validated, providing examples of how bilingual and multilingual people communicate without conforming to monolingual English norms.

**TABLE 4 - EXAMPLES OF TRANSLINGUAL WRITING IN BEAUTY WOKE AND “LE DICEN FREGONA” POEM**

<i>Beauty Woke</i> by NoNieqa Ramos, illustrated by Paola Escobar	“Le dicen Fregona” poem in <i>Le dicen Fregona</i> by David Bowles
So, los padres safety-proofed; had la espiritista bless every room (p. 4)	Es “Jo” para los cuates (p.18)
Un día, Beauty spoke palabras like song notes: ¡Mamá! ¡Papá! ¡Abuela! ¡Tía! ¡Madrina! ¡Familia! Beauty! (p. 7)	Muchos chavos le tienen miedo (p. 19)
Dance bomba y plena ¡Qué Verguenza! (p.21)	“Güero es positivo. Implica belleza.” (p.19)
“¡Escuchen! Listen to me. Ain’t nobody gonna school us on beauty.” (p.23)	“Apá sigue empujándome a ser dura” (p.19)
“Cumple tu destino. Fulfill your destiny.” (p.27)	“Y mi mamá también es fregona.” (p.19)

Estrella (bilingual teacher resident) noted that for her, seeing translanguaging in the texts “makes it feel more personal.” Considering the importance of books as mirrors (Bishop, 1990), we can consider the vital role of language in text representation. Furthermore, Estrella added, “I really enjoyed that [translanguaging]. I think as a teacher reading this to children, they’ll probably enjoy that as well, seeing both languages represented.”

Melanie (Guatemalan, undergraduate junior) asserted that she regularly uses translanguaging in her teaching. She added to Estrella's comment: "I like the part where she [Estrella] said, not knowing if you should mask being your culture, especially for me because I grew up in Long Island. You're surrounded by a different culture here [in Long Island, NY], and I didn't know if I should mask it [her language practices]." For Melanie, the texts and the focus group discussions revealed the tensions that existed for her growing up in a predominantly white community, where she felt pressured to fit in and hide a crucial aspect of her identity.

The impact of Latinx literature goes beyond reflecting authentic expressions of Latinx communities; it offers a space to convey meanings that translations might otherwise lose. Estrella's appreciation of translanguaging's personal touch emphasizes its potential as a pedagogical tool. Melanie echoed a similar sentiment and found resonance in the texts, shedding light on her own experience growing up having to make decisions about repressing her identity. Together, these insights highlight the power of Latinx children's literature to navigate the intricate layers of cultural identity and language practices.

## **LATINX CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND SCHOOL APPLICATIONS**

We are thrilled to receive requests for Latinx children's book lists during our workshops, to learn about schools organizing annual Latinx Kid Lit Book Festival watch parties, and to see the numbers of Latinx representation in children's literature rise, albeit slowly (See Kirsch, 2023). During the focus groups, participants identified how to use *Beauty Woke* and "Le dicen Fregona" to discuss themes such as identity formation, resistance to injustice in the community, and representation. For some participants, this involved establishing personal connections with students seeking a trustworthy adult. For others, these texts inspired whole-class lessons and activities. For all participants, their school-based applications showed what pedagogy that addresses raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015) looks like and how students can be supported in using their full linguistic repertoire.

## IDENTITY FORMATION AND REPRESENTATION

Both texts spoke to the journey of children at different places in their lives. As a young child, Beauty processed the messages she received about her people and heritage. Joanna navigated the tensions of middle-grade life from her peers to her parents' expectations while trying to figure out her identity concerning communities and people she cared about deeply. Alejandra (Mexican, bilingual teacher resident) discussed how simply translating a word to a student's language can help a child feel valued and seen in the classroom. She recalled an instance in the school when she told a student whose family speaks Mixteco that they would try to find the translation for "I love you," "Vamos a tratar de buscar como se dice 'te amo' en mixteco... Entonces él se sintió orgulloso." Alejandra recalled how proud the student felt undergoing that translation exercise. Marcela (Mexican, bilingual teacher resident) also recalled helping a child compose a message in Mixteco and shared how she teaches the importance of valuing who we are as multilingual speakers and to be proud of where they come from, "siempre incorporamos que nos tenemos que valorar tal y como somos... Y que pueden hablar, como ellos son trilingües, español, inglés, mixteco, que se sientan orgullosos de donde vienen." Using this book in classroom spaces nurtures a healthier cultural identity as students consider their ways of knowing, their cultural history, and present connections.

Name stories are common ways teachers create community at the start of the school year. Participants identified "Le dicen Fregona" as an additional text for these name story text sets and its impact on expanding conversations related to tensions with names, nicknames, and expectations. Ameerah (Dominican, undergraduate senior) noted, "The poem definitely made me think about identity and how important the name is." Estrella (Mexican, bilingual teacher resident) recalled a moment in her teaching when she asked a student about their preference for pronouncing their name, "they told me 'Miranda' [pronounced in Spanish]." Estrella sets an example of a behavior that any educator can adopt, demonstrating respect for the students and their language, ultimately fostering a welcoming learning environment.

For several participants, the readings and discussions motivated them to advocate for meaningful stories that could help validate their own identities and those of their students. For Melanie (Guatemalan, undergraduate junior), *Beauty Woke* felt “very personal,” stating “everything feels at home” when she saw the illustrations and heard the read-aloud. Estrella (Mexican, bilingual teacher resident) recalled her childhood interactions with books, “I don’t remember a single time that I had books like these read to me. And if we had Spanish books read to us, it wasn’t connected to our culture. It was like the standard books they would always read but translated.” Kamilo (Mexican, bilingual teacher resident) added, “I feel like I can make many connections to this book and every page, every day in the classroom.”

## COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO INJUSTICE

During the *Beauty Woke* focus groups, participants felt empowered through Beauty’s journey of self and community awareness. Marcela (Mexican, bilingual teacher resident) said, “siento que lo puedo conectar conmigo, cuando mi mamá me dijo cuando yo vine aquí...que no me cortaba las alas, que yo podía volar.” Marcela connected to the scene where the family and community lay hands over Beauty, remembering her mother’s advice upon immigrating to the United States: that she would not clip Marcela’s wings, that she could soar. Scenes of solidarity and community also impacted Alejandra (Mexican, bilingual teacher resident):

Todos unidos podemos cambiar las cosas. Ya sea tanto en un salón de clase ...

o nosotros como compañeros podemos ayudarnos unos a otros si unimos nuestras fuerzas. Y siempre encontrar la mejor manera de encontrar una solución...la unión hace la fuerza.

Referring to the illustrations showing LGBTQIA+ and Puerto Rican solidarity with pride flags and Puerto Rican flags, Alejandra noted the importance of teachers being in solidarity, whether addressing systemic injustices or daily classroom life issues, that “there is strength in unity.” Alejandra discusses how the theme of community in *Beauty Woke* propels educators and students to a greater version of themselves. Moreover, for Sarah, this entailed transcending what she

perceives as the constraints imposed by ethnic categories that could potentially create divisions within student groups and embracing the idea of solidarity. Sarah said, “So they call you from different countries where you’re from, and they [students] have discrimination between them...this will be good to say ‘No, every culture, every background, every tradition, is accepted in the classroom’.”

Kamilo’s (Mexican, bilingual teacher resident) interpretation of *Beauty Woke* was more of a reflection on dreaming of a better school experience for his Latine students:

They [students] still feel like they’re not heard. They still feel like they’re not being represented. And it’s sad because, I mean, it’s their community. And this [*Beauty Woke* book] is perfect. Another one of my students. He came out, and he said, “I think I’m exploring who I am and who I want to become. But I can’t because of the people that I hang out with.”

With a limited representation of Latinx students (who are the majority) within the curriculum, Kamilo wanted to use the text *Beauty Woke* to demonstrate the importance of representation. Kamilo also considered the need to support queer Latinx students.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Latinx children’s literature that is thoughtful and raises critical consciousness, like *Beauty Woke* and *Le dicen Fregona*, helps expand our understanding of the Latinx diaspora. Considering that Latinxs are a complex and varied group and that curriculum in K-12 schools rarely addresses the intricacies of this community, it is no surprise that Estrella (Mexican, bilingual teacher resident) asked, “is there a specific meaning to the 4645 [in *Beauty Woke*]?” For the Puerto Ricans on the island and those in the diaspora, especially those impacted by Hurricane María in 2017, the news coverage and mishandling of emergency preparedness and response remain in recent memory, including the often-contested quoted number of 4,645 fatalities. For several West Coast students with Mexican ancestry, “fregona” was understood to mean “badass,” specifically a badass girl or woman who is strong and unapologetically confident. Part of critical bilingual literacies (España & Herrera, 2020) and critical translanguaging literacies (Herrera &

España, 2021) is reflected in the language analysis of these texts, the celebration and critical analysis of resilience, and the pedagogical implications of using Latinx children's literature written by authors from the communities represented in the books.

This study highlights the importance of being explicit with the narratives we include in teacher preparation. We need intentional course planning to address these texts and themes. For example, participants at the East Coast site were all Childhood Education (Grades 1-6) majors with a Puerto Rican and Latinx Studies (PRLS) Concentration. These ethnic studies courses include "The Puerto Rican, Latinx, and Caribbean Child in New York City," and "Spanish Language Arts for the Bilingual Child" (amongst several others). This type of preparation for K-6 classrooms considers the unique experiences of the Latinx diaspora, including the course texts (children's literature) and the spaces we create for translanguageing (in text analysis and our teaching). Given the brevity of this particular data set, we call upon researchers to take this type of inquiry. If our study with two focus groups on two texts and two interviews had a meaningful impact on participants, imagine the extensive impact across teacher preparation programs.

We also need Latinx children's literature that exemplifies dynamic language practices and helps readers unpack complex issues experienced by the Latinx diaspora, resisting raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015). No one should have to wait until they are in teacher residencies or ethnic studies programs at the college level to learn about languages and stories from their Latine culture (Bowles, 2018).

Kamilo shared a reality from his teacher residency site that reflects the socio-political climate these future educators are coming up in, namely the censorship and threats to marginalized communities thriving across different sectors. Speaking of the topics in curricula and books at his school, Kamilo (Mexican, bilingual teacher resident) noted, "I've seen [topics] that some teachers don't want to even touch: the LGBT community, the gender, the sexuality, the immigration." Participants revealed how Latinx children's literature can help teachers expand their ability to teach issues they otherwise would shy away from or feel less supported by their curriculum and administration.

We hope that preservice and in-service teachers will get that support in preparing to learn how to address complex topics with children's literature. We include publishers and curriculum developers in this plea to integrate Latinx children's literature that represents the experiences of people whose existence continues to be threatened. Additionally, our plea is necessary and urgent for the other groups Kamilo mentions, as well as Indigenous students and emergent bilinguals labeled as disabled (Cioé-Peña, 2021).

Furthermore, this study has implications for shaping our perspective on Latinx teachers. It emphasizes the need for teacher preparation programs to cultivate a pathway for upcoming Latinx educators actively. In her book *Side by Side: US Empire, Puerto Rico, and the Roots of American Youth Literature and Culture*, scholar Marilisa Jiménez García (2021) writes, "studying Ethnic Studies movements in higher education without taking into account foundations and connections in K-12 fails to account for how such movements might grow sustainable futures" (p. 5). This study calls for researchers in bilingual teacher residency programs, Ethnic Studies, and children's literature to collaborate with K-12 schools to support educators further and amplify the work of Latinx authors writing authentic children's literature that impacts not only a future teacher's trajectory but also nourishes the lives of bilingual and multilingual Latinx students.

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