Critical Multicultural Analysis of Award-winning Texts Representing Latina/o/e Experiences

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ABSTRACT: The Pura Belpré Award honors Latina/o/e writers and illustrators whose works are acknowledged as best portraying, affirming, and celebrating Latina/o/e cultural experiences for children and youth. Using a critical content analysis of 14 chapter books that received the award, we share findings that reveal the texts consistently portrayed Latina/o/e central characters through asset-based frameworks. The critical content analysis indicates that the central characters demonstrated the asset-based strengths of interdependence and resourcefulness. Interdependence was demonstrated with families and communities, and remarkable resourcefulness was evidenced by pooling physical, internal, and social resources to creatively solve challenges. Implications for practice, especially in relation to supporting culturally sustaining pedagogy in classrooms, are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Multicultural literacy, critical multicultural analysis, bilingual education, culturally sustaining pedagogy

Latina/o/e[1] students continue to encounter persisting systemic threats both within and outside of school, fostering a significant divide between equitable opportunities (Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Pérez, 2004) for different racialized groups. The opportunity gap in the United States has perpetuated inequitable educational outcomes for students who identify as Latina/o/e in relation to their racialized white counterparts on reading and math assessments (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2016). In part, this is because a multitude of educators and policy makers view the bilingualism of anyone who is non-white as something to be overcome (Gitlin et al., 2003; Marx & Larson, 2012; Reeves, 2006; Ruiz, 1984). As such, policies and systems provide English language learners (ELLs), 71 percent of whom speak Spanish as their first language (Ruiz-Soto et al., 2015), with low quality instruction (Callahan et al., 2009; Gibson et al., 2004; Marx, 2017; Watt & Roessingh, 2001). Policy makers are presently lobbying for an unprecedented number of dual language programs for heritage English-speaking students, which risks the gentrification of these programs (Valdez et al., 2016). The gentrification of these programs reifies inequitable valuing of the bilingualism of some while privileging the bilingualism of others, which is perpetually reinforced through discourses of appropriateness (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Valdez et al., 2016). Discourses of appropriateness refer to an interlocutor's language variety choice and use and the relative proximity to dominant variety English. These discourses are embedded within our everyday experiences reflected in the texts, tasks, and talk found in classrooms. These discourses of appropriateness perpetuate deficit orientations surrounding linguistically and culturally diverse students and are reified throughout the curriculum within which students are tasked to engage on a daily basis. A typical student reads countless narratives that over-idealize racialized white students and those who are middle class while devaluing the identities, cultures, and histories of diverse students (Gonzalez & Montaño, 2008; Johnson et al., 2016; Kelley et al., 2005; Pratt et al., 2018;). In contrast to this common practice, all students, including linguistically and culturally diverse students, have a right to see their own cultural and linguistic histories celebrated in schools' curricular choices (Glazier & Seo, 2011).

Using a critical multicultural content analysis (Botelho & Rudman, 2009) of 14 chapter books, as part of a larger study which also explored picture books (Pratt et al., 2018), this study aims to understand the literature awarded for writing culturally and linguistically affirming texts and how this literature might serve as both a window and a mirror for Latina/o/e students in schools. The research presented below aimed to analyze how the characters' cultural experiences were portrayed across these award-winning texts and if the common themes positioned asset-based realities within the books.

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[1] The term Latino has received critique to be more gender inclusive. However, the term Latinx is imperialist in nature in that it is imposed by the academy in the U.S. Latinx has been critically rejected by the majority of Latin folks with preference for Latino/a. In contrast, the term Latine has been used by activists and academics in Latin America to honor non-binary gender folks. Thus, in an effort to acknowledge the ongoing tension and yet to aim at inclusivity, the term Latina/o/e will be used in this paper.

Although literature often supports dominant ideologies, literature has the capacity to question, resist, and disrupt oppressive systems. In particular, the authors acknowledge literature as a potential tool to reimagine a better and more just future for historically underserved students and families, particularly through the discussion and representation of race, social class, gender, and power relations (Leung & Adams-Whittaker, 2022). How educators incorporate positive, affirming, and culturally sustaining literature (Au, 2011; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Paris, 2012) influences how students understand race, diversity, and difference. Positive representations of linguistically and culturally diverse students in texts encourage self-efficacy, ethnic identity (Holland et al., 1998), and bicultural mindfulness (Naidoo, 2007) for all students.

A question often asked by educators is how to find and know that the literature they are bringing into their classrooms offers positive representations that support and affirm linguistically and culturally diverse student capital as assets in the classroom. In response to this query, libraries, publishers, and independent groups have developed a series of awards to identify, celebrate, and honor texts written by and about racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse experiences. The American Library Association (ALA) has a specific award titled the *Pura Belpré Award*, which is selected annually by an ALA committee to identify Latina/o/e writers and illustrators whose work the committee recognizes as best portraying, affirming, and celebrating the Latina/o/e cultural experience for children and youth. Below, we explain the history and stated intent of the award.

Background

The Pura Belpré award and honors were established by the American Library Association in 1996 in honor of Pura Teresa Belpré, the first Puerto Rican-Latina librarian at the New York Public Library. Ms. Belpré became an advocate for culturally sustaining programming for children and families of Latina/o/e heritage. She worked the majority of her life to bring about equity for Latina/o/e students and families. The award and honors are selected annually to recognize Latina/o/e authors' and illustrators' texts that affirm and celebrate the Latina/o/e cultural experience (Treviño, 2006). One award is given each year for the best Latina/o/e author and illustrator. The numbers of books receiving Pura Belpré honors changes from year to year. This prestigious award comes with a monetary prize and the book jackets are embossed with the award medal.

The authors acknowledge that the term Latina/o/e is laden with controversy and oversimplifies the unique, rich, and incredibly diverse subcultures combined into this group (Naidoo, 2007). The term is used to describe people tracing their descent to Latin American countries (Mexico, Central and South America) and the Caribbean (Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico) who have a history of speaking rich and varying varieties of Spanish (Durand, 2010). Without question, each community has a unique sociocultural and sociopolitical history.

The Pura Belpré award is particularly important because Latin Americans are the fastest growing sector of the U.S. population (Bedolla & Fraga, 2012). In K-12 schools in the U.S., students who identify as Latina/o/e comprise 22.7 percent of all students (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2022). Literature earning the Pura Belpré award has the potential to be, and we are recommending should be, used by educators who aspire to enact a more culturally sustaining pedagogy in their classroom contexts.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

We purposefully connect Paris's (2012) concept of culturally sustaining pedagogy to include and extend upon the work of Ladson-Billings (1992) and Au (2011) in regard to the notion of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1992) first introduced the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy as teaching that helps students from diverse backgrounds to experience academic success; develop and maintain cultural competence; and foster a critical consciousness with which to challenge inequities in their lives and within their communities. Like Ladson-Billings (1992), Au (2011) described culturally responsive teaching as teaching which increases the school success of culturally and linguistically diverse students, builds bridges between students' home and school experiences, and seeks to promote social justice. Paris (2012) extends these ideas by suggesting that such relevant and responsive instruction intentionally and actively resists monoglossic frames by explicitly enacting practices that construct pluralistic, just, and democratic spaces for all students.

Educators can enact culturally sustaining pedagogy by meaningfully creating spaces and opportunities that provide windows and mirrors and what Botelho and Rudman (2009) call doors for all students in their classrooms. Botelho and Rudman (2009) propose the idea of a critical multicultural analysis as a way to open the door for students to learn to read power within the embedded discourses of the texts, tasks, and talk that create perceptions of normality. Considering recent public debates and tensions around U.S. immigration (Capps, et al., 2016; Muzaffar & Hipsman, 2014) and the continued marginalization of linguistically and culturally diverse peoples, the value and importance of culturally sustaining pedagogy is perhaps more important than ever. The neglected rights for equal educational access and the lack of equality of resources and equality of capital, combined with the push for English-only legislation have ignited a growing concern for linguistically and culturally diverse students in schools and made the need for students to learn to read power in the discourses that surround them an essential literacy practice. Enacting culturally sustaining pedagogy, then, is actualized as students engage in critically reading literature that serves as a window, a mirror, and a door. Critically reading power in this way pushes back and challenges normalized assumptions about race, language, ability, gender, and all matters of difference. A more critical intentionality to employ a culturally sustaining

pedagogy is mandated and one way to do this is through the use of critical multicultural analyses of literature.

Critical Multicultural Analysis of Literature

Supported by Rosenblatt's (1978) scholarship that conceptualized reading as a transaction between the reader and the text, scholars who employ critical multicultural analysis (e.g., Pratt et al., 2018; Rodriguez & Braden, 2018; Lo, 2019; Sun, 2020) recognize that textual representations matter. Textual representations co-construct perceptions, values, and identities as we read within, through, and beyond the text (Beach et al., 2009; Sun, 2020). Texts inscribe and shape how individuals conceptualize race, gender, culture, and—more broadly—social difference (Acevedo, 2017; Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Qin, 2020). Thus, accurate and authentic texts representing families as they appear in our communities in ways that represent lived experiences support asset-based frames in classrooms (Lo, 2019; Rodriguez & Braden, 2018). Botelho and Rudman (2009) define critical multicultural analysis as a framework for challenging "fixed and bounded notions of culture, identity, class, race, gender, and power, [in order to make] visible the social construction of culture, power, genre, focalization, and story closure" (p. 260). As a means to expose covert and overt hegemonic ideologies, Botelho and Rudman (2009) argue that the power dynamics proliferating in schools today need to be analyzed and criticized: particularly language and images used in texts, tasks, and talk as they reflect and disseminate ideologies and power structures supported by sociopolitical and sociocultural processes (Freire & Macedo, 2001; Tollefson, 2007). The discourse used by those in power, which permeates classroom curriculum through texts, tasks, and talk, becomes a form of authorized language (Bartolomé, 2012; Bourdieu, 1991; Riasati et al., 2011; Tarone, 2014; Zwiers, 2004). This authorized language cultivates a set of common-sense assumptions (Fairclough, 1989, 2001). These common-sense assumptions must be critically explored, ideally through critical multicultural content analyses, regarding how individuals are shaped and come to understand the roles assigned to them within their community and within society at large based in these assumptions.

The dominant language proliferating in educational spaces downplays social inequities and risks supporting students from historically underserved communities to reject their own linguistic and cultural histories (Gonzalez & Montaño, 2008). There is a need for criticality regarding how discourse can be authorized differently to change these deficit discourses of appropriateness shaping linguistically and culturally diverse students' identities in classrooms through biliterate eyes (Rodríguez-Valls, 2011). School discourses embedded across the materials and classroom curricula subjugate certain groups and elevate others. The curricular materials we choose to use in our classrooms shape the ways students are able to see themselves and to see others.

As students experience literature that serves as windows, mirrors, and doors to reading the world and word (Bishop, 1990; 1992; Freire & Macedo, 1987), they should also be developing a sense of efficacy through critically reading power as an everyday way of interacting in one's world. As such, we must ensure that the materials and curricula we choose present asset-based frames of diverse ways of being in culturally sustaining ways.

In an effort to support educators in choosing literature that offers opportunities for culturally sustaining pedagogies in the classroom, we conducted a critical analysis of 14 chapter books that were awarded the Pura Belpré award or honor and conducted a critical multicultural analysis of the text set to identify how power was situated within the texts and to identify the present thematic constructs as they related to "bounded notions of culture, identity, class, race, gender, and power" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 260). Below we explain our methods for data collection and analysis to answer the following questions: (1) what themes were present in the 2011-2015 Pura Belpré award chapter texts? and (2) how do the most consistent themes celebrate and affirm Latina/o/e culture and identity?

Research Methods

This investigation utilized a sequential explanatory design (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Clark, 2007), which is characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative data and the collection and analysis of qualitative data. The purpose of this research strategy was: (a) to avoid the bias of a single method; (b) to produce a more complete understanding by employing multiple analytic approaches; and (c) to explain the quantitative findings with qualitative findings (Denscombe, 2008). First, a critical multicultural content analysis was conducted to analyze thematic pattern frequency of occurrence; second, a qualitative analysis was conducted to explore and describe the most consistent themes and the impact factor of the sociocultural implications found in the proliferation of said themes.

Researcher Positionality

The researchers would like to acknowledge our internal biases, which shape our perspectives and interpretations. We also want to acknowledge that our particular positionalities may have afforded us to see particular thematic constructs in ways that are unique to our lenses. The researchers included three scholars and two practicing teachers. All researchers have different middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds, and four identify as racialized white and were born and raised in the United States. One researcher is Taiwanese and was born and raised in Taiwan. The researchers have a variety of linguistic repertoires including Spanish, Mandarin, Taiwanese, and English. Our connection to this study centers on our work with linguistically and culturally diverse students in our classrooms, the

majority of whom identify at Latina/o/e, and our desire to find more culturally sustaining practices to better support students, families, and communities as we work to read power more critically while simultaneously serving to develop efficacy and actualized self-empowerment to make change. Along with our internal biases, we acknowledge "there is nothing inherent in a text; the meanings of a text are always brought to it by someone" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 422; Rosenblatt, 1978). Recognizing the inherent biases was a primary factor in the research design of having a large team of researchers and perspectives to corroborate our findings.

Data

The corpus for this analysis included the chapter books that received the Pura Belpré award or honor from 2011-2015. This bounded text set was selected to analyze multiple texts across time to see if there were persisting themes over multiple award cycles. The selection committee chose authors whose texts were purported to affirm and celebrate Latina/o/e culture. Our analysis explored the validity of this claim using a critical multicultural analysis. The object of this selected data set was to see if these books might be used to support culturally sustaining pedagogies in classrooms. The text set presented in this paper included 14 chapter books. An analysis of the picture books in the same text set was also conducted, see, Pratt et al., 2018. The complete list of texts analyzed in this paper are identified in their own section of the references.

Content Analysis

The analysis conducted in this study builds upon previous critical multicultural research that followed a similar protocol in conducting a content analysis of themes and constructs (e.g., Acevedo, 2017; Naidoo, 2007; Rodriguez & Braden, 2018; Sun, 2020). In this study, the research team read the corpus and inductively identified the following themes: identity development, resiliency, luck, resourcefulness, interdependence, collective power, economic hardship, marginalization, and travel. Five of these themes were themes that were also identified in previous critical multicultural analyses of specific text sets. The five crosscutting themes identified in our study that were also identified in previous studies (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Kelley et al., 2005) include identity development, resiliency, luck, resourcefulness, and interdependence. For a definition of each category, please see Appendix.

Each text was independently read and inductively coded by a minimum of two coders. As Rosenblatt (1978) articulated, there are two primary purposes for reading: (1) reading for the experience and interpersonal connection, an aesthetic stance; and (2) reading focusing on the content or information found in the text, an efferent stance. During the independent coding, authors' first reading built an aesthetic understanding of our initial reactions with the text and the second reading

offered an efferent orientation of criticality, enabling us to read the ways power was positioned and how the characters were situated relative to said power. In so doing, the identified codes and themes revealed both the covert and overt discourses surrounding what these texts were communicating regarding Latina/o/e ways of being.

Each team member kept an individual record of the number of times a single code was identified in a given text and then those individual codes were brought to the team discussions for each text. Following our individual reading and coding of each book, the research team met to corroborate our findings. In cases of disagreement, the coders discussed each discrepancy to consensus resolution. In the rare situation where two coders could not reach consensus, the first author, having read and coded all of the texts, made the final decision.

From a qualitative and an analytical perspective, these conversations were important to co-construct a more complete understanding of the themes, definitions, and texts. To illustrate the themes, we used descriptive information (e.g., how characters were described by the authors), spoken information (e.g., words spoken by or about the central characters), critical plot events and turning points, as well as visual images (e.g., images that portrayed the protagonist in a particular way).

All of the initial and final coding decisions were retained to provide descriptive and reliability statistics. From a quantitative perspective, interrater reliability was analyzed using percent agreement and Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960). Cohen's kappa is a way to measure interrater reliability with consideration for chance agreement. Cohen's kappa can range from −1 to +1, where zero represents the amount of agreement that can be expected from random chance, and one represents perfect agreement between the raters. All the statistical procedures were conducted in SPSS.

Following our qualitative analysis of the thematic constructs, or codes, and our quantitative interrater reliability measures, we were able to identify that the most consistent themes found throughout the text set did, in fact, affirm and celebrate Latina/o/e culture and identity. While there were nine themes identified throughout the text set, each theme was not equally present in all the texts. In Table 1, below, we show the quantitative analysis results.

Table 1

Content Analysis of Pura Belpré Award and Honor Chapter Books

Theme	Present	Absent	% Present	% Agreement	Cohen's Kappa
Identity Development	11	3	79%	86%	0.58
Interdependence	14	0	100%	100%	1.0
Luck	10	4	71%	86%	0.66
Resiliency	13	1	93%	93%	0.63

Resourcefulness	14	0	100%	100%	1.0
Collective Power	9	5	64%	71%	0.24
Economic Hardship	10	4	71%	93%	0.81
Marginalization	10	4	71%	79%	0.43
Travel	8	6	57%	86%	0.71

The content analysis showed that the most consistent themes in this text set were interdependence and resourcefulness. The least consistent themes were travel and collective power. Overall, the coding reliability was good (average Cohen's Kappa = 0.66). There were only two themes that were evident across every text in the text set. These two themes, interdependence and resourcefulness, are discussed in detail below to show how the two most prevalent themes found in each text across the text set support culturally sustaining pedagogy and create space in classrooms for asset-based literature that can serve as a window, a mirror, and a door.

Findings

Below we discuss the qualitative findings that demonstrate the two most consistent themes in the Pura Belpré award and honor chapter books, which were interdependence and resourcefulness. Regularly, the Latina/o/e characters were engaged in strength-fortifying interdependent relationships with those around them. These forms of interdependence showed the importance of family, community, and collaboratively striving toward justice as a common goal. Likewise, these texts demonstrated a wide variety of ways in which individuals, families, and communities pooled their physical, internal, and social resources in response to difficult situations evidencing resourcefulness as an asset.

Interdependence

The most common form of interdependence occurs within the family unit, where families respond to hardship by shouldering burdens and responsibilities together. For example, in *Under the Mesquite* (McCall, 2011), Lupita tells her mother, "Mami, I'm good for more than changing diapers and putting little ones to sleep. I can bear up when things go wrong. You're the one that raised me to be that way" (p. 17). When Lupita's mother falls ill, Lupita attempts to fill in the large vacancy. She notes,

> It's so simple [Papi]... while Mami is in Galveston getting her chemo, you can work closer to her, in Houston. I'll stay here and take care of the kids. That way you can see her every day at the clinic and just come home on the weekends to check on us. (P. 115)

Likewise, in *90 Miles to Havana*, Julian's mother, after having been separated from him when they fled from Cuba during the 1960s, realizes she is as dependent on Julian as he is on her and as the entire family is on their father. She tells him,

> Julian, you did the right thing. Tonight you can start telling me [your] whole story. Tomorrow I'm going to sell this little bird [the one he had been entrusted to guard on the arduous journey], and we'll have enough money to get Papi out. Then our family will be [whole and] together again. (Flores-Galbis, 2010, p. 291)

Julian and his family depend on one another to each do as they had promised in order for their family to be together again. The members of each family in these examples depend on their family unit and their family depends on them in order to persevere through hardship and to carry one another's burdens. Seeing this theme recounted throughout the text set affirms that, in Latina/o/e culture, the family unit is a strong, collaborative, and supportive system that individuals can depend on in good times and bad, which is an additive resource to be affirmed and celebrated.

Another significant form of interdependence occurs when non-family members develop an unexpected camaraderie. In *The Lightening Dreamer* (Engle, 2013), for example, the main character, Tula, forms a deep and life-changing friendship with Caridad, the family's once enslaved domestic worker, who is figuratively and literally freed through Tula's stories. Caridad depends on Tula's stories for strength and Tula depends on Caridad's companionship and listening ear to keep her secrets. After hearing Tula's story about a turtle who was brave enough to dream and grew wings to fly free, Caridad finds the courage to leave the family for good, stating,

> I do not know where I'll go, but I do know that [Tula's] words helped me flee... now so late in life, I've received this winged-turtle liberty mind, a freedom so huge that I can never be crowded onto anything as small and fragile as a page. (P. 98)

Their mutual interdependence allowed both Caridad and Tula to be free.

We find a similar interdependence in the text, *Hurricane Dancers* (Engle, 2011). Quebrado, a young boy who is taken and held captive on a ship until a massive shipwreck frees him, finds himself in a cave with his rescuers as well as his captors. Quebrado says,

> all faces turn toward me, both the painted one and the bearded. I am the only one in this cave who understands two languages. My quiet voice feels like a small canoe gliding back and forth between worlds made of words. (P.76)

Here there is a very unlikely camaraderie between Quebrado and his captors, as well as his rescuers. All look to Quebrado to communicate their words and feelings and Quebrado is dependent on his rescuers listening and truly hearing his words so they will protect him. Interdependence through the shared hardship amongst non-familial relations resulting in unexpected camaraderie is another additive characteristic of the Latina/o/e characters in this text set, showing that, during

times of hardship and trial, there is a dependence on one another, even strangers, to support and come alongside one another in order to persevere and help one another find their way.

Lastly, the texts in this text set also showed interdependence and a community solidarity where groups worked together to bring about social change. One example of this is from the text, *I Lived on Butterfly Hill* (Agosín, 2014). A central character, Tía Graciela, is talking to her niece, Celeste, about times past when Chile was in a political crisis. Tía recalls,

> …many Chileans began to help one another. They hid people in their homes, or found hiding places outside the city and brought them food, like the people who are helping your parents. Even if our own lives are in danger, we don't abandon others. That is solidarity. (P. 226)

Chileans who were politically active and supported the president prior to the military coup of the 1970s demonstrated community interdependence to help one another survive persecution and rebuild Chile when the regime fell.

We also see this type of interdependence in *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano* (Manzano, 2012) when Evelyn and her grandmother join a social activist group called the "Young Lords" to bring political change and equality to their community. The community needs the Young Lords and the Young Lords need the community's support and resources to bring about social change, "... for the last five weeks the Lords had been helping clean the streets to show the people that the system does not serve them" (p. 76). "It is not fair that powerful people beat up smaller people... sometimes rich people make believe they are helping you, but they are not… [we have] to fight for people who cannot fight for themselves" (p. 166) ... "sometimes [even] enemies had to get together to fight the bigger bad guy" (p.173). The Young Lords bring awareness of the covert and systemic racism that swept across this Puerto Rican community in the Bronx. In these texts, readers learn that community interdependence engages a social consciousness. Being in intimate and meaningful relationships that support the needs and well-being of one another empowers collaborative political action. This action, birthed out of interdependence and awareness of need, has the power to generate lasting change. As the same time, this change is sustained through the collective development of social consciousness that spurred the collaborative action of resistance to established systems of power and oppression.

Resourcefulness

A second theme across this text set was resourcefulness. Resourcefulness is one's ability to cope and survive in difficult situations by making the most of their resources; often, the characters realized that what was possible could be redefined because the character realized they were more capable than they originally thought (Baldoni, 2010). The theme of resourcefulness communicated an adaptability to less than ideal situations and the aptitude to deftly create positive

outcomes that would not otherwise be possible. In our corpus, three types of resourcefulness were identified: individual resourcefulness, familial resourcefulness, and community resourcefulness.

An example of individual resourcefulness can be seen in a clearly painted portrait of Celeste, as shown in *I Lived on Butterfly Hill* (Agosín, 2014), after she is forced to move to the United States to live with her Tía Graciela. Celeste uses her intellectual resources to stand firm against the school bully, Charlie. Charlie taunts Celeste in class when she shares she is from Chile. He asks if her family lives in a *hut* in an effort to be cruel and embarrass Celeste, but Celeste, drawing on her intellectual resources, recounts for Charlie the additive realities of life in Chile by talking about the modernity of transportation and technology. She then tells him,

> But more important [than all of the roads, modes of transportation and gadgets is the fact that] "Chile has poets, and people fill entire stadiums to hear them." [Celeste notes to herself that] suddenly I feel brave and I toss my head, "I know poems by heart. Do you?" He looks at me surprised, and then shrugs and pretends like he didn't hear me. I walk home with a huge smile on my face. On the side of the road I notice the tip of a daffodil bulb emerging from the ground… today I took a stand, and found myself. (P. 188-189)

Celeste shows individual resourcefulness when she responds to a bully with the power of words instead of physical force, drawing on her full linguistic repertoire by articulating the beauty of her native country, Chile, and the richness of her people. She is proud of who she is and emboldened when she discovers she is more capable than she originally thought.

Individual resourcefulness also was demonstrated in *The Living* (De La Peña, 2013), when Shy pulls himself out of a shipwreck only to find the side of the lifeboat has a huge gash. Shy knows,

> The boat surface [has] to be dry to use the fiberglass patch kit [he found in the supply compartment] so he pulled the soaking wet sweatshirt off the closest body, balled one of the arms and wedged it into the toothy hole. Then he started bailing water with his two hands cupped together. (P. 152)

Shy is resourceful in many ways, but the most significant way is in his determination to solve each problem that arises. For example, he finds a summer job on a cruise ship to help support his family after Romero disease takes his grandmother; he finds a way to tie a tourniquet around a shark bite to slow the bleeding and helps uncover the mystery of Romero disease. Even though hopelessness presses in on multiple occasions, Shy doesn't give up. His ability to cope and survive by using what is available to him affirms his intellectual resourcefulness, his courage, as well as his fortitude.

The courage and fortitude we see across these examples of individual resourcefulness are also found when family members collectively pool resources to cope and survive difficult situations together. In *Maximilian: The Mystery of the Guardian Angel*, written by Xavier Garza (2011), Maximilian and his family gather

their family resources to help their Tío Lalo and Tío Rodolfo raise money to fix the local church, a center for the community, by putting on a Lucha Libre exhibition for the local community. Tío Rodolfo is willing to sacrifice a great deal as he explains to his family his plan by telling them, "what I am talking about is doing a lucha libre fundraiser for the church so they can fix the hole in the wall that some fool made when the drove a truck though it" (p. 133). The family gathers their financial resources together to raise money for the church as well as to help Tío Rodolfo find a new beginning. We see another example of family resourcefulness in *Under the Mesquite* (McCall, 2011), when the family is battling cancer and the mother and father have to be away at the hospital for treatment. The children "managed to survive by [their] wits and the generosity of family" (p. 132). Just when they are about to lose hope because they are hungry and without money, "Papi's oldest brother, Tío Saúl, his wife, and their son showed up at [the] house bearing gifts, their pickup truck full of groceries" (p. 130). Even though Tío Saúl and his wife did not have an abundance, they collected the resources they did have to share with their family in an act that strengthened and built up the family. With the financial support and time provided by extended family, they are able to do more with less and come to understand they are far more capable than they originally thought possible.

Another form of resourcefulness we see in the text set is community resourcefulness. Community resourcefulness is prevalent when community members gather, contribute, and share resources to help one another cope and survive difficult situations. For example, in *The Revolution of Evelyn Serrano,* members of the Puerto Rican community in New York collected clothes, shoes, blankets, and other home goods at the local church in order to support the community members in need through a community giving closet.

> In the weeks that followed, the church got as busy and loud as Grand Central Station at five p.m., with people coming and going all the time. The word was definitely out, and Puerto Ricans from all over the city were showing up in *El Barrio*… the church basement was like being at Klein's on 14th Street on a Saturday afternoon. Controlled shopping hysteria. We looked around at all the mothers trying coats on their kids, teenagers looking for something hip, and old men looking for anything warm. (P. 151, 168)

The community, with the leadership of the Young Lords, gathered their resources to help one another, discovering collectively they could support each other. The collaborative assembling and sharing of resources empower the community to serve one another rather than just looking out for one's own individual good.

Another example of community resourcefulness takes place within the high school Piddy was forced to attend after moving in Medina's (2013) *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass*. Piddy is an accomplished student and is placed in the advanced academic track at her new high school because, according to Piddy, "Ma doesn't know it, but I'm going to be a scientist. I want to work with animals, big ones like elephants, maybe even live halfway across the world" (pp. 17-18). Piddy manages to make alliances with some of the kids from her science class and, in the end, they become her friends, her allies, and her community. It is through the

assistance and support of her community that Piddy finds a way to survive. For example, Lila, Piddy's family friend, helps Piddy after she is brutally beat up, de-clothed, and completely humiliated. Lila uses the resources she has to help heal Piddy's wounds and offer a mentoring presence for Piddy. Piddy's acquaintance at school provide Piddy with the video evidence of Yaqui beating her up. Rob, Piddy's friend, seeks out, finds, and gives Piddy an application to a magnet school for kids interested in science and math. Piddy convinces the school staff that Yaqui is a bully and Rob helps Piddy transfer to the magnet school. The resourcefulness of Piddy's community not only saves her from tormentors but also offers her an opportunity to pursue her dream of becoming a scientist.

These Latina/o/e characters survive and thrive in difficult situations by leveraging local resources, redefining what is possible while demonstrating strength, fortitude, and compassion. In order to be so resourceful, these characters are physically, mentally, and socially adaptive. Importantly, the positive individual outcomes are almost always associated with positive and more just community outcomes.

Discussion

In U.S. schools today, very few texts found in classrooms document, through an asset-based lens, the stories of diverse cultures and experiences. This absence covertly devalues the identity, culture, and history of diverse students and communities. All students have a right to experience literature that serves as a window, a mirror, and a door. To support culturally sustaining pedagogies that offer students an opportunity to develop an efficacious sense of self, integrating asset-based literature that is both written by and about the Latina/o/e experience is essential. Students must be able to see their own cultural and linguistic histories celebrated in school curricula.

Within U.S. schools, there persists a disconnect between school literacy programs, student populations, and students' home cultures. Some school and classroom libraries also showcase literature that tokenizes difference in lieu of normalizing diverse experiences and ways of being. Because of this, students often do not see themselves and their intersectional identities affirmed or celebrated but rather essentialized and othered.

Finding texts that offer honest histories and asset-based realities of diverse experiences can be challenging for educators who are already pressed for time and stretched thin with state, district, and building demands on their time and expertise. Being able to have a reliable resource that educators can turn to as they are look for vetted materials that support student identities in affirming ways is both supportive and important. This content analysis of the *Pura Belpré* award and honor books found that, across this text set, positive, affirming, and celebratory themes representing Latina/o/e cultural assets were consistently present. As such, educators who wish to implement a more culturally sustaining pedagogy in their

classrooms can turn to the texts found within this award set as a reliable place to start. As we have shown, these texts affirmingly portray Latina/o/es as highly interdependent and resourceful as individuals, within the family unit, as well as within the community. These themes affirm the exchange of goods and resources for the betterment of the community as a whole, valuing selflessness, community empowerment, collaboration, and social change. These embedded messages push back on negative stereotypes imposed through hegemonic discourses, reclaiming and affirming Latina/o/e youth as strong, powerful, and resourceful agents of change for social justice.

These texts are an important pedagogical resource to affirm positive identities for Latina/o/e students (Acevedo, 2017; Bishop, 1992), but no text is without the need to critically read how power is situated. These texts construct creative and progressive understandings of what it means to be Latina/o/e but they also offer an opportunity to engage students in a critical multicultural analysis to consider who is being foregrounded, backgrounded, and invisiblized in the stories being told. Reading texts that positively affirm Latina/o/e history and culture reshapes the discourse around what it means to be Latina/o/e in the United States today, as literacy serves as both a window and a mirror (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Bishop, 1990) to see and shape other worlds as well as our own. Furthermore, reading is a sociopolitical activity (Eskey, 2005), and is used to both acquire and expand not only linguistic knowledge but also to disseminate both overtly and covertly sociocultural understandings.

This study advocates for culturally sustaining pedagogy through curriculum as discursive practice (Qin, 2020) as a way to support the development of both literacy and social justice. The suggestion to use counter-hegemonic literature is important to "humanize the curriculum, honor student voice, and tap the cultural and linguistic knowledge of students" (Gonzalez & Montaño, 2008, p. 76). In addition, including culturally sustaining texts begins to change the discursive construction of what it means to be Latina/o/e in the United States (Rodriguez & Braden, 2018). Everyone benefits when the additive contributions of *all* students and their cultures contribute to the classroom community and body of knowledge (Hondo et al., 2008). "Children's literature can redress injustice as much as reflect it. It can inspire readers to reflect on their lived experience, re-imagine socially just worlds, provide new ways of exercising power and offer tools for building cultural and historical understanding" (Botelho & Rudman, 2009, p. 266). Using the texts in this text set as a tool to reshape the discourse of what it means to be Latina/o/e in the United States impacts the sociocultural norms of classrooms in ways that bring a more socially just pedagogy forward.

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Appendix

Themes/Codes for the Pura Belpré 2011-2015 Text Set

Thematic Constructs	Definition
Identity Development (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Holland, 2003)	The self-actualization of one's potentialities through a period of trying transition resulting in a self-situated identity, no longer claiming the identity purposed on one's self by others (i.e. parents, partners, teachers, society, etc.)
Interdependence (Kelley, Rosenberger & Botelho, 2005)	Mutual dependence: others depending on you and you depending on others to meet one another's needs
Luck (Botelho & Rudman, 2009; Kelley, Rosenberger & Botelho, 2005)	Either good or bad and refers to successes or failures occurring by chance which often leads to social change.
Resiliency (Kelley, Rosenberger & Botelho, 2005)	The ability to recover or conjure internal strength in order to endure and overcome hardships or misfortunes
Resourcefulness (Kelley, Rosenberger & Botelho, 2005)	One's ability to cope and survive difficult situations by making the most of one's resources
Collective Power*	The capacity of a group to realize their desires or produce desired effects towards a collective goal(s) as a unit which could not be accomplished individually causing a turning point in the plot
Economic Hardship*	Social stratification and economic inequality associated with race, class, and/or gender
Marginalization*	Being pushed to the periphery or fringes of society as a means of social oppression
Travel*	A journey aboard or over long distance resulting in a life altering experience that impacts the formation of self-identity and one's bicultural and bilingual ways of existing in the world

*Grey themes are new in this study, adding to the already existing framework

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