

“Have you ever used this book with children?”: Elementary Children’s Responses to “Bilingual” Picture Books

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1. Introduction

We begin this paper with two vignettes from our work as literacy teacher educators:

Vignette 1: February 2000. It is Tuesday morning at 8:30 in the bilingual/second language teacher education literacy block, and it is Sarah’s turn to begin class with a read aloud. Sarah introduces the book for the day, Gary Soto’s Chato’s Kitchen (1995), commenting on the different kinds of writing Soto does and that a lot of his writing reflects his Mexican upbringing in Fresno, California. She reminds the students that she will ask for their responses to the book when she finishes reading. After reading, she opens the conversation with: Who has a comment to make about this book?” There are a few seconds of silence, and then Ariana, one of the bilingual Latinas, bursts out, “I would never use that book. It is full of stereotypes about cholos and lowriders.” Eugenia agrees, “The book makes it seem that all Spanish speakers are vatos. Look at how the animals are dressed – all those gang symbols.” Negative comments continue from Latino students for a few turns until another student, a self described Mexican American, says, “It reminded me a lot of the neighborhood where I grew up. I remember some people talking like that. I thought the book was fun. I would use it.” A few others agree with her. Sarah finally breaks in to comment that one of the reasons that she had chosen the book is that some students might identify with it, but she agrees that others might not like it.

Vignette 2: October 1999. It is Thursday morning, again 8:30, again in the bilingual/second language teacher education literacy block. Again it is Sarah’s turn to read. Sarah holds up the book La Mariposa (1998) by Francisco Jiménez. She shares with the class that this story comes from a memoir in which Jiménez tells the story of his early life in a series of interconnected vignettes. Jiménez and his family came across the border from Mexico to work in the fields of California, and this particular story is a version of something that happened to him in first grade. When Sarah finishes, she invites comments. One person comments on the beauty of the illustrations. Another notes that she is not sure she would use the books with kids because it is quite long. Another student comments that he is not sure children would like the book – It is kind of serious, and kids need funny books. One student asks, “Have you ever used the book with children? How would kids respond to it?”

These questions stayed in our minds. As literacy educators, one of the things we stress with future teachers is the use of quality children’s literature. We share literature with our students, engaging them in the kinds of literacy practices (including read aloud and response) that we hope they will engage in with children. Because of the multicultural/multilingual focus of our particular teacher education program, we select literature, including picture books, on the basis not only of the quality of the story and the aesthetics of the illustrations but also on the basis of linguistic and cultural diversity, including such linguistic realities as dialect features of English, and code switching from one language to another. The question about how children would talk about these books made us realize that we didn’t have any children’s responses to be able to share with our future teachers. We began thinking about “testing out” some books by conducting read aloud sessions with elementary school children and recording their conversations. We wanted to use some books where specific linguistic elements appeared. In the case of the *Chato’s Kitchen* (1995) and *La Mariposa* (1998), for example, the books featured lexical and phrase level code switching. The authors wrote their stories in English (the base language) but inserted Spanish into the texts.

An initial opportunity to record children's responses firsthand came when a friend who teaches a multiage 4th/5th/6th grade class in a culturally and linguistically diverse elementary school in central Phoenix brought his class to the university for the day. He wanted the students to experience the campus, and he asked Sarah if she would work with the children. The children gathered in a classroom in the College of Education and, among other things, Sarah (except for the authors' names, all other names used are pseudonyms) read *La Mariposa* (Jiménez, 1998). When she finished, the children were full of comments about the book. They noted that: It wasn't right for the English speaking teacher to forbid Francisco to speak Spanish. It was really hard to learn a new language. There were children in their class who were learning English and it was hard work. Francisco was like the butterfly in that he learned and changed. It was good that the teacher changed her mind at the end of the book and used some Spanish; she was trying to learn Spanish. The Spanish in the book was nice to listen to. There wasn't too much Spanish in the book, and you could learn a little Spanish by listening to the book. Their school had a bilingual program, and some of the children had been in bilingual classes when they were younger. In these rooms the teachers used Spanish and read in Spanish, and that was enjoyable. The Spanish speakers in the class commented that they understood all the Spanish.

From these experiences, we decided to carry out a year long study in which we would read carefully selected picture books to classes of children and record and analyze the children's responses. Karen was already carrying out a research project in a fifth grade Spanish-English dual language classroom. So she began reading aloud weekly to this class. The children in this classroom were nearly all Latino and were bilingual to some degree or other. The teacher who had brought his class to ASU asked Sarah if she would come and read to his multiage class on a regular basis. So Sarah took weekly trips to this site. The children in this classroom represented significant cultural and linguistic diversity. One child was African American and another described himself as half Mexican American and half African American. Four students were of American Indian origin; six students were native speakers of Spanish, now bilingual in Spanish and English. One child was an English language learner from the Sudan, and another had come from Bosnia. The other fifteen were European American.

In both classes, the teachers placed a high value on using quality literature. Time was set aside in both settings for daily reading aloud and conversations, as well as for independent reading and author and theme studies. In both classes the children were used to discussing books that they had read or that had been read to them. Over the course of the school year, Sarah and Karen read some books that included a dialect or dialects of English, use of a language other than English at a lexical level in an English language story, as well as use of lexical and phrase level code switching from English into Spanish. We also read some books whose themes related to being bilingual and/or to learning a new language. Broadly we wanted to know how the children responded to these books. How did they attend to these features? What comments did they have, and what did these comments reveal about their awareness of, understanding of, and curiosity about these features?

2. Theoretical framework

A transactional theory of reading and reader response and a social constructivist view of learning informed our interactions with the children and provided the intellectual lens for interpreting our data. We turned to these theories because we were interested in the range and content of responses based on students' thoughts, feelings, and interpretations of the stories heard. Transactional theory suggests that meaning is indeterminate because each reader brings a unique set of background experiences, world knowledge, social experiences, and cultural identifications to the act of reading (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1995). Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the social nature of learning provides a strong argument for the benefits of student-to-student, and student-to-adult interactions. According to Vygotsky, all thought is social before it is internalized; therefore, students' concepts and meanings as well as their understandings of signs and symbols are learned through interactions with other people; and it is through these social interactions that a student's growth is encouraged, cultivated, and moved forward.

The adults' role in this read aloud experience was not one of equal participant or intellectual servant who trails behind students to pick up the ideas they present. According to Edelsky (1999), adults must sometimes impose agendas where they ask students to step back and distance themselves in order to discuss a particular issue related to the text.

3. Methodology and data analysis

Data for this study consisted of audio- tape transcriptions of children's and adults' responses to 13 books that were read aloud to two classes over the period of one school year. A list of these books appears at the end of this paper. All of the books were illustrated picture books, and the illustrations were shown to the students throughout the read aloud process. While some responses were made during the read aloud sessions, most occurred after the reading of the book. Each session lasted about 45 minutes, with approximately 15 minutes devoted to the read aloud and 30 minutes to the discussion. The data were analyzed using modified analytic induction. Each of us read through all the transcripts several times and coded them. We then shared our codes and notes with our individual understandings of the data. After several meetings, and recodings, we arrived at a consensus of codes and made assertions based on these codes and the evidence found in the data. The wide range of responses was divided into three categories: children making sense of the story world, children attending to issues related to language, and adults forefronting linguistic and cultural information.

4. Children making sense of the story world

When assigning meaning to the stories' events, the students in this study dug into their past experiences of life and literature, selecting and activating elements and meaning that helped to illuminate and structure their lived through experiences with the texts. The reservoir of beliefs and knowledge which the children drew on to respond to these stories was coded knowledge of the world and literary knowledge. The connections students made to interpret the stories were not mere associations, one meaning added to another; they were, instead, connections that functioned to shape, sort out, and speculate on understandings about the story world.

The rich reservoir of understandings the students drew on to interpret the stories illuminated their own lived experiences and world views, and fell into two categories: first, thought about feelings and second, thought about facts. In the following segment, a student draws on her felt experience with the story *The Butterfly* (Polacco, 2000) to respond to what is happening:

C: I don't know why she wasn't scared when the girl was right there. I would be freaked out!

S: You mean at the beginning?

C: I would run out of the room.

L (classroom teacher): Beth, what did you say? I didn't hear.

C: I don't understand why she wasn't scared. I would run out of the room.

In this segment, the student retrieves her own sense of fear as she tries to grasp why Monique, the young girl in *The Butterfly*, is not afraid when she awakes from a sound sleep and discovers a ghostly little figure sitting on the end of her bed. By putting herself into the story, the student responded with confusion that what is happening is not as it should be according to her understandings of how Monique should act. Like many responses that grow out of felt experiences, there was no clear answer to this expressed tension.

Felt experiences were not just expressed through considering what one might do in a similar situation; they were made by actually moving into the story world and becoming a part of it. For example, during the reading of *Chato and the Party Animals* (Soto, 2002), students broke out in song when Sarah read that the party guests sang "*Las Mañanitas*" to Novio Boy. They had given themselves to the story world with both mind and soul, and it seemed only natural to do what the party goers were doing. Likewise, during the read aloud of *Little Gold Star* (Hayes, 2000), a student scolded the hawk as if she were the step sister, herself, when she called out, "You nasty bird! Give me back my wool!" Clearly, in all these events, the children revealed an ability not only to enter the story world, but also to live in it, feeling for the characters, joining them in activity, and helping them take action against others in the world.

Other responses provided insights into how students were drawing on thought about fact to bring order to the story world. During a discussion about an event in *The Butterfly* (Polacco, 2000), a student and Sarah talked about why Monique's parents buried everything that might provide evidence that someone had been hiding in their basement. Sarah's and the student's shared beliefs about the dangers

families would encounter if the Nazis discovered that the families were harboring Jews seemed to influence their response:

C: Why did they bury when they were coming?

S: Why do you think they buried when they were coming?

C: So in case the Nazis came. Because the Nazis might have killed Monique and her mother because they would have found out they were hiding.

S: They would have. Yeah, I think they would have.

C: They would have killed them too, even though they weren't Jewish.

S: Because, I think they did do that because I think they took away people who were collaborators, or that were trying to help the Jews.

Because Sarah and the students seemed to share assumptions about the dangers of a Nazi invasion, their individual interpretations, while reflecting a moment of individual discovery, resulted in a product of shared values and meanings. No one else contested their interpretation of this event, thus suggesting that these assumptions were also shared by the entire community of readers and listeners in this situation (Fish, 1980).

The children also drew on cultural knowledge to make sense of the story worlds. Sometimes their knowledge was rudimentary, but always sensible. For example, when introducing *Feliciiana Feydra Laroux* (Thomassie, 1995), the children's initial understanding of Cajun was limited to spicy food at McDonald's. Other times, it was more profound. During the read aloud of *Day of the Dead* by Kathryn Lasky (1994), children made connections between known traditions of Halloween and the celebration of Day of the Dead, and their ways of honoring the dead, to sort out what was happening in the story. When Sarah read, "That evening in the village, children dressed as mummies, ghosts, and ghouls run through the streets shouting 'Calaveras! Calaveras!' and hold out boxes or bowls for coins and candies," she also commented that this scene looked to her like Halloween. Children concurred, as one child said, "I think they look very similar, very similar to ours, our Halloween." Another, however, questioned why they collected coins and candy and not just candy. Sarah said, "I don't know. Maybe the coins would be to spend at the market." And the child speculated that, "They would probably get coins to get more candy." Eventually by hearing and talking about how in Mexico, the people gather once a year in remembrance of those who have died, the children began sharing their cultural ways of honoring the dead. One child talked about praying at the house of a deceased relative hoping to bring him back to life. Others talked about putting flowers on their relatives' graves. All this discussion, often about their grandparents who had died, led the children from the story world to their own world, with one student remembering her grandmother who had died when she was "only sixty-one." This child asked if she should bring her grandma's picture to class the following Monday.

Responses coded as literary knowledge fell into two categories. One category showed students drawing on knowledge of literary structure and devices, and the second category showed students drawing on experiences with other stories, or their knowledge of intertextuality. When Sarah introduced *Feliciiana Feydra LeRoux* (1995), she asked the children if they knew what tall tales were. One student said, "It's like a fairy tale." Another child responded that it was a stretch, ". . . a long way from the truth, like, say you would, uh, I can't give an example; it is a real stretch. It is like a big -- not like a lie." By situating themselves in this yet-to-be-experienced story world, the students began to limit its potential by imposing a structure of genre. By naming it as a tall tale, a story that is "a long way from the truth," the children were able to suspend disbelief and enter the story world and enjoy experiencing a young girl's prowess to win out over her older brothers' and grandfather's bravery.

Students also drew on their understanding of story structures and intertextuality to eventually figure out who the old woman was at the end of the story *The Red Comb* (Pico, 1991). As they talked about what happened, or how the young girl who appears throughout the story ended up being an elderly woman on the last page, they referred to *Pink & Say* (Polacco, 1994) as an example of another text that started out in one time period and ended in another. A student clarified what was happening by noting that both of these stories have been passed down from "generation to generation."

5. Children attending to issues of language

Students demonstrated awareness of another language through their use of code switching and their discussion of cognates. In addition, they demonstrated sociolinguistic awareness of how bilinguals appropriately use language in context. In this section, we discuss these two major categories related to students' focus on issues of language.

Some students used code switching and understanding of cognates to elaborate on discussions of texts containing Spanish. Bilingual children, in some of their talk about the texts, engaged in code switching for proper names and for names of food. For example, students used names such as *Señor Cat*, *abuela* or *abuelita* (grandma) without translating. They also used code switching with animated characters, or pets. One student commented that the dog in *Pepita Talks Twice* (Lachtman, 1995), instead of being called *lobo* (wolf) could be called *oso* (bear). Food was discussed using code switching as well. The children referred to *café con leche*, (coffee with milk) and *arroz con pollo* (rice with chicken) in natural contexts of discussions of the text and its meaning. Other examples included lexical switching for describing characters and events. One student described the illustration of a hair-do of the Juan Bobo character in *Juan Bobo Goes to Work* (Montes, 2000) as *helado como* hair-do, (ice-cream like hair-do), while another student described the action of Chicano cartoon characters in the story of *Chato and the Party Animals* (Soto, 2000) as “They’re tossing *suave* (softly, lightly, or gently)”. In this instance, code switching was employed when no lexical equivalent existed in English for the Spanish word.

Many students were aware of Spanish and English cognates – words that look and sound similar and have similar meanings in both languages. Some students noticed illustrations which contained cognates in them, such as *mayo* (May) printed on the calendar in Gary Soto's *Chato and the Party Animals*. After reading a text wholly in Spanish, *Elefante tiene hipo* (Preller, 1999), students discussed how they could understand the story.

S: You guys did a good job with this one. You understood. What helped you understand?

C: The pictures.

S: The pictures, a lot, right. Maybe also that you knew-

C: It wasn't very hard either. You could tell the words.

C: You knew what *hipo* was (hiccup)

C: Mono was a monkey.

S: Was it very hard?

C: No, it was easy because it was like little short words...

C: Yeah, the *mono* and *rata* (monkey and mouse)

Besides using the pictures to enhance their understanding of the story read to them in Spanish, students used their knowledge of words that looked and sounded alike and that were similar in meaning to help them understand the story. Other students easily identified the similarities of *mi familia*, (my family), as well as *papá* and *mamá* in both English and Spanish (Papa and mama are not used as much as they were only a few generations ago in English, but they are still encountered in literary texts and are familiar to most students).

The Spanish-English bilingual students were able to use their knowledge of Spanish to figure out meanings of words in French, a new language unfamiliar to all students. For example, when Sarah discussed characters from *Feliciana Feydra Leroux*, one student remembered the name *Octavio*, but, in reality, the character's name was “Octave.” This student gave the main character's brother a Spanish name, remembering the character's name in a language with which he was familiar, and not in the language presented to him in this text.

Another example where students used Spanish to comprehend French was found in *The Butterfly*. Near the end of the discussion, students asked Sarah to read the author's note which contained some French. In this case, Sarah helped students to think about cognates of French and Spanish, which lead to the children connecting to the meaning in English.

S: *Je vive*. Do you have any idea what that means?

C: *Je vive*.

C: Thank-you?

S: If you speak Spanish also, then you would say, “*Yo vivo*.” Can you then predict?

C: *Yo vivo*.

C: Ohhh, I am alive!

S: I am alive. I live, yeah.

While allowing children the opportunity to predict the meaning of *Je vive*, Sarah redirected their attention to the similar Spanish version of *I live*. Naturally, it was exciting for us to see how excited the children were to use their knowledge of Spanish to make a connection with the French in order to make meaning of the text.

Students demonstrated sociolinguistic awareness in many ways, including an implicit understanding of the necessity of translating into the dominant language of society when one comes from a family and background wherein a minority language is spoken. While reading *Speak English For Us, Marisol* (English, 2000) with Karen, many students raised their hands to express their own personal incidents of translating for friends and family.

K: ...How many here ever had to translate for somebody because you know English and they don't? Can you talk about a time when you had to do that?

C: Like when my aunt, my stepdad's sister, my aunt, she needs help like because when people they come like the phone bill and stuff, she wants me to translate for them like she can't pay, or something.

And another child shared this:

C: My dad always tells me to translate when someone speaking English comes and he always tells me to tell him what they say.

K: How do you feel when he says that?

C: I don't want to do it.

Many students wanted to share their experiences with the benefits and drawbacks of bilingualism. These students had first hand knowledge about the realities of being bilingual, which they expressed as they shared their real life experiences.

Not only did students understand the realities of being a language broker, but they also demonstrated sensitivity to the context in which language use occurs. Students used the context of the stories to discuss this understanding with us. One example occurred as the children discussed the bilingual text *Pepita Talks Twice* (Lachtman, 1995), a story in which a bilingual girl struggled with being bilingual and tried to only speak English. When the main character, Pepita, declared that she would find a way to not have to speak Spanish anymore, her family questioned her decision. Without any coaxing or questioning from anyone, a bilingual student questioned this decision with obvious irritation in his voice, as he commented during the reading:

C: Why can't she just admit that she speaks Spanish?

S: Why do you think?

C: Instead of saying, "I'll find a way."

S: She seems kind of stubborn, isn't she?

C: What if she was at the birthday party now and then she just says "Happy Birthday!" and everybody just says, "Huh? We don't understand your language. I am sorry," and they say it in Spanish. She'd be like, "Uuhhhh..."

This student understood that Pepita violated code switching norms of bilinguals that dictate when one uses a language and when one does not. He used the context of a birthday party, where the guests would be Spanish speakers, and pointed out that it would be sociolinguistically inappropriate for the bilingual Pepita to continue speaking English in this environment which called for communication in Spanish. This child demonstrated his understanding of an unwritten rule of language choice and code switching among bilinguals, namely, that one speaks to the interlocutors in the language they are most comfortable with. He accurately pointed out the absurdity of Pepita's choice not to speak Spanish.

Again, we found that students demonstrated sociolinguistic awareness by comments that connected their understanding of language brokering to the larger language environment in which the translating occurred. The children made connections from the story to real life and in so doing expressed an understanding of and argument for being bilingual. For example, one student spoke of the translating ability of Marisol, "I think she is special and, and there, because uhm, when they need help, they don't call somebody else, they only call her." This student highlighted how being a language broker makes the bilingual person special, and sought after.

Another student, in speaking of Pepita, expressed her opinion about Pepita's resolution to speak both Spanish and English, noting, "She finally figured out that to speak two languages is a good thing.

Because if you don't know how, if you don't want to speak another language, it is really bad because you won't know how to say... stuff like in English and so you'll just have to do it anyways, so"

In speaking of bilingualism, this student took the perspective of the importance for a minority language speaker to learn the dominant and majority language of English. She spoke not only of the fact that "to speak two languages is a good thing," but of the necessity of knowing how to speak English, in particular. Her attitude is a reflection of societal influences, especially of the dominance that English language is given in school settings. Even though the story focuses on a Hispanic girl who resists speaking Spanish, this student speaks to the importance of knowing English. This student demonstrates awareness of the dominance of the English language, and her comment, "you'll just have to do it anyways," implies that communication will not take place unless it is in English.

6. Adults forefronting linguistic and cultural information

As we looked closely at the children's responses to books, we noticed that the adults, too, were playing an active role in the literature discussions. As we analyzed this role, we came to define it as forefronting. By forefronting, we mean calling specific attention to, commenting on, and engaging with cultural, historical, and linguistic aspects of the books. Adult forefronting occurred in several ways, and it occurred both before and after the read alouds.

Before reading many of the books, the adults introduced the stories by sharing information about the cultures represented and the languages utilized in the books. The specific information provided varied, depending on the text. For example, two of the stories, *The Red Comb* (Pico, 1991) and *The Butterfly* (Polacco, 2000) were fictionalized versions of historical events in other countries. Before reading these books, Sarah provided information about the historical periods, creating a context for the children's listening to the stories, a context which included the reality of other languages.

Some of the books, such as *Little Gold Star/Estrellita de Oro*, *Days of the Dead*, and *Feliciana Feydra LeRoux*, represented places (northern New Mexico, central Mexico, Louisiana) and cultural experiences (New Mexican, Mexican and Cajun) that probably were unfamiliar to the children. In these cases, Sarah highlighted the settings and aspects of the cultures that they were knowledgeable about.

The adults also encouraged children to talk about their prior knowledge, what they already knew in relation to the texts, and they accepted the connections that the children made. But often the adults moved the conversations beyond the children's surface knowledge to deeper considerations. For example, in introducing *Feliciana Feydra LeRoux*, Karen and Sarah asked the children what, if anything, they already knew about the word Cajun. Several children talked at some length about Cajun style fast food, and their comments were allowed and acknowledged. But Karen and Sarah then took the floor to explain briefly both the history of the Acadians in Canada and Louisiana and the reality of contemporary "Cajun talk" with its English dialect features and French lexicon. Thus the adults established themselves as more knowledgeable others, as individuals with linguistic and cultural information that they were willing to share with the children. They used a conversational "Let me tell you something interesting" tone in this sharing, which provided the children with information.

For other story introductions, the adults made specific references to the language in the books. With *Juan Bobo Goes to Work*, (Montes, 2000) for example, Sarah shared that the main character was a common figure in Puerto Rican folklore, that the story took place in Puerto Rico, and that some words, specifically *bobo*, perhaps were more commonly used in Puerto Rican Spanish than in the Mexican Spanish she and the children were more used to. Sarah asked the children if they knew what *bobo* meant and urged them to think about the meaning as she read the story.

In addition to providing information, the adult readers frequently directed the children to listen to the language being used in the story. In this way, they signaled to the children that there were going to be words and phrases to attend to and that the adults were interested in hearing about the non-English language the children noticed. Prior to reading *Chato and the Party Animals*, for example, the class had made intertextual connections to another Chato story they already knew (*Chato's Kitchen*), connections which included a discussion of low riders. Sarah then said to the group that after she read the story, "I am going to ask you a little bit about Did anything interest you about the **language** that the characters used? And maybe even **that** is connected to low riders, so think about that a little bit too."

The adults continued to forefront language and culture in the discussions that occurred after the read alouds. This included providing additional information to the children. A particularly striking example of the adult role of informant during post-reading discussions came during the talk about *Feliciana Feydra Leroux*. The ongoing conversation had been about Feliciana being the heroine of this original tall tale because she saved her grandfather from the crocodile. One of the children had been looking carefully at the spelling of LeRoux and silently comparing spelling to pronunciation. Suddenly that child said: "It looks like Larux." Sarah immediately pointed to the word LeRoux and the following ensued:

S: Larux? Yeah, in French this is pronounced oo at the end, Luhroo (using the French r)

C: Luhroo (practicing the French pronunciation)

S: Luhroo, Luhroo– right

C: Luhroo, Luhroo

S: The book gives you some examples in here of the pronunciation but it also says that the French pronunciation has been changed a little bit because of the influence of English. So it's almost like English and French together. They don't really pronounce it so much Luhruu (with French r) any more but Luhroo (with more of an Anglicized r). But they still don't pronounce the X on the end. Sarah responded to the child's curiosity, in this case about written French, with relevant information.

In addition to responding to observations and questions, the adults also fronted language by asking the listeners to articulate their responses to and ways of dealing with languages other than English in the stories. On multiple occasions, Sarah and Karen asked questions such as these:

Was it hard to understand the Spanish in the book?

What did you do when the Spanish came on?

What did you do when there was Spanish in the story?

What did you think about the language in the story?

What did you like about the use of Spanish/French in the story? Could you understand the Spanish words?

You like those French words in there? Why do you think she [the author, Patricia Polacco] put those words in there?

Our questions and comments pushed the children to explain what they did to make sense of and/or cope with the non-English language in the story. Together, adults and children teased out multiple strategies for creating meaning such as using the pictures, thinking about the context of the story, relating the unknown word to known words to discover cognates, relating similar sounds, relying on words that have become a part of English such as *salsa* and *torillas*, and recalling words from classroom language (Spanish) lessons.

There were also multiple instances of adult-adult conversations related to the language of the books, where adults addressed each other rather than the children, although the children were present to overhear or listen in on what the adults were saying. One striking example occurred when Sarah and the classroom teacher, Len, engaged in an exchange about the use of French in a section of Patricia Polacco's English language story, *The Butterfly*. Their talk focused on the author's way of crafting using more than one language, and specifically her use of French for a special effect. In one part of the story, a Nazi soldier reached into a flower bed, put his hands around a flower, commented "Tres jolie, n'est-ce pas?", and then crushed the bloom. During the discussion after the reading, one of the children returned to that page and asked, "I wonder why it ends with French?" The following dialogue between Sarah and Len ensued:

S: Ah, he says, "Jolie, n'est pas?" He says, "it's pretty isn't it?"

L (classroom teacher): Yeah, he even uses that sweetness himself.

S: And he even uses French. He's a German soldier, but he uses French and then crushes it (the flower).

C: Oooh

S: Evil

The adult talk fronted Polacco's carefully constructed contrasting of language and illustration, which created an effect of foreboding and provided evidence of the power of the Nazi troops in the occupied French village.

7. Conclusion

In this paper we examined some of the ways that monolingual and bilingual intermediate grade children responded to carefully selected stories during read aloud sessions. We discovered, as other researchers have, that there were multiple ways in which the children entered into and made sense of the story world. Their responses to the texts were quite complex, and they drew extensively upon their knowledge and beliefs as they made sense of the texts. We found that children did attend to and comment on the languages represented in the stories and that many of them used their own life experiences growing up as bilinguals to reflect on characters and situations. Many of their comments illuminated their attitudes toward bilingualism and their understandings about the dominance of English in society. We also explored the active roles adults played in sharing cultural and linguistic information, and in challenging the children to think about both story and language. The adults took the stance that cultural and linguistic features of the stories were interesting, relevant, and worthy of specific note, and that the children surely would be interested in them. The adults encouraged the children to comment on these aspects of the stories as a part of their responses, thus making their interest in and valuing of multiple languages and cultures clear.

We want to state that the patterns of responses we found may be specific to the classrooms, or kinds of classrooms, in which we carried out our research. We are not suggesting that **all** teachers and **all** children in **all** classrooms would engage in the kinds of conversations that we have discovered. We chose to carry out this study in classrooms where literature and literature response were valued; where read aloud and opportunity for substantive, unhurried conversation (cf. Copenhaver, 2001) were daily classroom practice; where teachers and researchers shared perspectives on the importance and power of literature, the transactional nature of response, and the social nature of learning. These were also classrooms and schools with significant cultural and linguistic variation, where bilingualism and diversity were valued. Having said that, we return to our initial reason for this study: we didn't have any children's response to the kinds of books used in this study to be able to share with our future teachers. Now we have these responses, and that has raised for us the question of how the responses of future teachers to these books might compare and contrast to the responses we have shared. That may be our next study.

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