CONSUMING DORA THE EXPLORER: A CRITICAL PEDAGOGICAL EXAMINATION OF CULTURE, LITERACY, AND MEDIA

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Policy Studies with a minor in Latina/Latino Studies in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2012

Urbana, Illinois

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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to ground its method and theoretical discussion based on frameworks regarding difference and representation in children’s media. This study engages *Dora the Explorer*’s first five seasons that were produced from 2000 to 2010. This investigation seeks to understand the dialectic nature between media, culture, literacy, pedagogy, and identity. This study is a contribution to the theoretical and methodological frameworks currently in practice in cultural studies, media studies, and bilingual and bicultural education. For example, cultural studies examine questions of representation and difference in media; however, a focus on children’s media has not always been seen as a sufficiently scholarly project (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997). Through my personal vignettes with my niece, I attempt to shed light on children’s inherent intellect and their capacity to critique media from their own perspective. It is also important that educators and parents take children’s media into consideration when speaking about issues that affect children’s daily lives. In order to do future qualitative studies that involve focus groups, interviews, and audience focal groups, one needs theoretically and methodologically to decipher the messages and representations, which seem to be at work in children’s animated cartoons, from a bilingual and bicultural context. In order to do so, the study utilizes critical bicultural pedagogy (Darder, 1991) and borderlands theory (Anzaldúa, 1999) to construct a conceptual and analytical framework.
Para Esperanza Itzel, Celeste Angélica, the generations before me, and the generations to come
Acknowledgments

Thank you Mother Earth, the natural world, and Creator.

This document could not have become a reality, without the blessings from those who came before me, the generosity from those who are with me, and the possibilities that I imagine the future generations will bring, gracias.

I would like to thank everyone who encouraged me to continue when at times this journey became impossible. I was inspired to continue by those that through their acts of generosity, love, compassion, care, and love made this journey worth every letter typed, every tear cried, every joke laughed, every phrase revised, and every episode watched, mil gracias.

Para mis abuelitas que me guían desde donde estan, Otilia Sánchez López y Macaria Estrada Macias, por su fortaleza, por su perseverancia, y por darles vida a mis padres, gracias. A mis queridos abuelos, Mateo Estrada y Manuel Sánchez, gracias.

Para mi mamá Angela: Querida Mamá, gracias por todo! Tú eres la razón por que yo vivo. Todo lo que hago es por que tú me has motivado, me has dado amor, compresion, amistad, y sobre todo, la vida. Te amo. Para mi papá: Querido Papá, gracias por tú cariño y amor.

To my advisor Profesora Antonia Darder, a revolutionary mentor that through her passion, courage, and dedication to social justice, has taught me to be humble, be a warrior, and always keep grounded to life. I admire you and I only wish I continue to be blessed with your guidance, love, and friendship. ¡Sí se pudo!

To Arnie, my brother, who passed away during my last years of graduate school. Arnie, thank you for teaching me that life should be about having fun, having friends, and loving your family unconditionally. I miss you and I know that you’ve been my guiding star. I miss your
sarcasm and your jokes. You are always in my heart and will continue to be part of my life forever.

To my dearest, beautiful, generous, best friend, sister and comadre Adriana: thank you for your love and cariño, for being my 24/7 cheerleader, flying to the Midwest and being with us until Esperanza was born, always encouraging me to keep going, being there for my parents when I couldn’t, being my strength, being my rock, and for ultimately, always making me laugh and smile. I love you!

Dear Celeste, thank you for your presence, your youth, your love of music and dance. Because of you this dissertation was possible, gracias! You came into my life for many reasons, and this is one of many. I love you!

To my daughter, Esperanza Itzel, mis gracias por darme fuerza, thank you for your unconditional love and making me live life differently. Thank for making me play, laugh, jump, and run. Thank you for making me stop and literally, smell the roses. Thank you for holding my hand, caressing my face, and telling me you love me. Esperanza, thank you for giving me a new and precious reason to live. Tú mamá te ama y solo desea que seas feliz en este mundo.

Dear Jerry, gracias por tú amor. Thank you for assisting me in any way you can through this journey. We share our beautiful daughter who has given a new meaning to our relationship, and a new meaning to live. Gracias y espero que nuestra amistad y cariño siga creciendo a través de los años!

To my committee members, Professor Cris Mayo, Professor Kent Ono, and Professor Alejandro Lugo for their unconditional support, their dedication and commitment to my growth as a scholar, professional, and overall, human being. Thank you for all the advice and motivation you have provided me throughout my years in Illinois. Mil Gracias! Thank you!
Gracias a mi querida Tía Ofelia, que siempre a estado conmigo, en las buenas y en las malas. La admiro como madre, abuela, amiga, y mujer. Gracias por querer a mi mamá y por querernos tanto.

Gracias a mi querida Tía Isabel por todas sus oraciones y bendiciones, se lo agredesco de todo corazón.

To my teachers, counselors, administrators, principals, and professors, for providing me the guidance, encouragement, and hope throughout my 25 years of public education, mil gracias! Specially: To all my teachers in the Los Angeles School District (LAUSD): San Pedro St. Elementary, John Adams Middle School, and Theodore Roosevelt High School.

To my RHS teachers, Kristen Botello, Brian Gibbs, Susan Reynoso, and Greg Alexander, for introducing me to college, encouraging me to apply, giving up weekends with their families to revise college applications, personal statements, taking us to visit campuses, and willing to listen to our needs as youth and for always advocating for the youth that society did not care about or believed in. I am blessed to have had you during those years of my life.

To the faculty, administration, and familia from the University of California, Santa Cruz, gracias! Specially: Educational Opportunity Programs (EOP), the Career Center, El Centro: Chicana/o Latina/o Resource Center, Latin American and Latina/o Studies Department, Education Department, M.E.Ch.A de UCSC, Faculty Mentor Program (FMP), E-CORE, Marissa, Eden, Asena, and Leonard; Dr. Gabriela Arredondo, Dr. Lucinda Pease-Alvarez, Dr. Rosalinda Fregoso, Dr. Aida Hurtado, Alejandro Delgadillo, Sayo Fujioka, Yesenia Cervantes, Osiris Ortiz, Hortencia Cuevas, Tanya Rivas, Marisol Castañeda, and Raquel Armenta. To my college roommates and high school friends Ivonne Alarcón and Maricela Camañño-López, for their enthusiasm and friendship.
To Rosie Cabrera, for all those late night *Chicanada Talks*. Thank you for taking me under your wing, mentoring me, and encouraging me to continue my education. Thank you for being a beautiful human being always going beyond your “job description”. Gracias querida Rosie, de todo corazón.

To Dr. Larry Trujillo, for teaching me that earning a degree is not turning your back on your community but a link between your community and liberation. Thank you for being so passionate about your pedagogy—you continue to inspire me.

To Dr. Michelle Tellez for your animo, tú sonrisa, y tú amistad. Gracias por ser una madre, activista, profesora, amiga, y mujer ejemplar. Y por tú regalo a este mundo, Milagros.

To my SROP mentor at the University of Utah, Dr. Dolores Delgado-Bernal, thank you for encouraging me to pursue higher education and for acknowledging the work that bridged my family and the academy.

To the Department of Educational Policy Studies faculty and staff for assisting me with the administrative tasks necessary for completing my doctoral program: Jena, Linda, Heather, Evelyn Grady, Laura Ketchum, Deb Gough, Dr. James Anderson, Dr. Yook Pak, Dr. Cameron McCarthy, and Dr. Debbie Reese; and all the brilliant faculty and students who encouraged me to continue this journey, gracias!

To the Diversifying Higher Education Faculty in Illinois Fellowship (DFI), gracias.

To the Department of Latina/o Studies faculty and staff for assisting me professionally and personally, gracias: Dr. Edna Viruelle-Fuentes, Dr. Julie Dowling, Dr. Jonathan X. Inda, Dr. Alicia P. Rodriguez, Laura Castañeda, Dr. Isabel Molina, Dr. Richard T. Rodriguez, and Dr. Arlene Torres.
To the Department of Asian American Studies faculty and staff for assisting me professionally and personally: Dr. Augusto Espiritu, Mary Ellerbe, and Sherry K. Clayborn

To the professional and student staff of the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs & Office on Inclusion and Intercultural Relations, the Native American House, La Casa Cultural Latina, American Indian Studies Program, and M.E.Ch.A de University of Illinois: specially, Dr. Rene Romano, Dr. Anna Gonzalez, Jennifer DeLuna, Ross Wantland, Dr. Jamie Singson, and Berenice Sánchez for their consistent support and friendship.

To all the students who I have crossed paths with as a graduate assistant, interim assistant director, visiting instructor, and teacher assistant, you have made this journey worth every moment. I have high hopes for all of you and will always carry you in my heart. You know who you are!

To my precious and priceless group of compassionate, understanding, generous and loving friends, without whom I could not have survived graduate school, (this includes: cooking for me and my family, taking care of my daughter, baking goodies, reading & revising various drafts, offering “night-outs” for me and Jerry, and much, much, much, more): Dr. Aidé Acosta, gracias por tus palabras, tú amistad, y tú animo—you are a beautiful person that assisted me throughout some very difficult times in Illinois, our friendship is forever; Abel Correa, amigo, hermano, thank you for your sincere friendship, las micheladas, and always updating me about what is going on in the world; Dr. Francisco J. Galarte, thank you for being so courageous and teaching me that life is about living it; Dr. Jennifer Chung, thank you for being so generous with your time and love, I will always remember the day you drove me to Chicago after learning that my brother had passed away. You were my angel that day—you helped me pack, find a flight and fed me, I’ll always hold you close to my heart; Dr. Kevin Lam, brother, thank you for your
words of wisdom, fun times, and generous heart; Dr. Otoniel Jimenez, gracias por ser un gran amigo; Dr. Rufina Cortez, gracias por todo! We have shared many years at UIUC, and I consider you a sister. Your sincerity, patient, and generous friendship has supported me throughout the good and the bad, through academic and personal stress, we held each other’s hands through hard times and great times, and I honor our friendship, gracias; Dr. Laura Galicia, querida amiga, thank you for opening your home to me, when I first arrived to Urbana-Champaign. Your gracious friendship was what motivated me, when all I wanted to do is go back to Los Angeles. Your friendship is what kept me grounded in humanity, love, and social change. Gracias, te devo! Dr. Joe Feria-Galicia, hermano, gracias, gracias, gracias! You taught me that one must think critically, act with love, and to always fight for justice. I admire you and I thank you for inviting me into your family. To Laura & Joe’s children, Quetzalli & Amaru Feria Galicia, thank you for your smiles, you are the future; Sonia Mariscal, gracias por tú amistad, for putting things into perspective and for offering me feedback through a historical lens; Genevieve Clutario, thank you for being a great roommate, and for inspiring me to be a great mom and scholar at the same time, gracias! Glenn López, thank you for the laughs those first years of graduate school and for your and Gen’s son, Ethan López-Clutario; Norma Marrun, thank you for taking care of Esperanza, while Jerry and I had to keep writing, you offered your home and your time so this document could be finalized, thank you for inviting us to your home and making us part of your life, gracias! Constancio Arnaldo, thank you for your friendship; and all those who were involved with the Critical Research Collaborative (CRC) and Radio Liberacion. Y a tod@s mis colegas que no nombre, please forgive me, gracias, you are all in my heart!

To my Bundle Community, a group that continues to nurture my spirituality—my strive to be more human. This is a group that continues to take care of each other through reading
chapter revisions, attending and presenting at conferences, creating alternative pedagogical spaces, and developing new ways of teaching through decolonized praxis: Dr. Larry Emerson for your guidance, commitment, and unconditional love; Dr. Jamie Singson for your compassion and love—& for always encouraging us to think of the feminine and masculine-in balance; Dr. Gerardo Díaz, for keeping us grounded in what matters—the natural world, family and friendships; Dr. Charlotte Davidson—my sister, thank you for being so humble with your words of wisdom, I am always amazed with all you do and the reasons behind every action you set forth in this world, her husband Ryan, and her children William and Mathew; Sally Wilkinson; Nora Wilkinson; Lorna Williams; Jennifer McCann and her children; Ashley Tsosie-Mahieu—my little sister, thank you for your smile and optimism, I am so proud of all you do; Regina Tsosie—thank you for the beautiful daughters you created, for the unconditional love you have given our group; Tarina Galloway; and Marchant Martinelli; and all those who I did not mention by name but assisted me in my journey.

To my friends throughout my three decades of life, the distance never came between us—you are part of my heart: To my comadre and closest friend since elementary, Gladys Barbosa y su familia, mi compadre Ángel, and their son, my godson, Ángel Marquez. Comadre, gracias for always being there! Your friendship is uncomparable! In fifth and sixth grade I never imagined how our lives would end up, but I think that our friendship and sincere love and care for each other led us to our success, le doy gracias a Dios por nuestra linda y sincera amistad. To Elizabeth Ponce, thank you for being a great roommate, friend, and sister! You’ve been my cheerleader. You are there in the good, the bad, and the ugly, and for that I thank you! Mercy Barrera, thank you for taking the time to visit me and my family, for always making time for me when I’m in Los Angeles, and for always keeping me grounded, you are and will always be my
Chicana sister. Rodrigo Alatriste-Díaz, gracias por tú amistad, for sending me articles and images about Dora, and for always checking in with me. GE & SM, thank you for your unconditional friendship, unconditional cariño, and your motivation, this is for your child. Ernesto Maldonado, thank you for being such a great support through my first years of graduate school, even when it was just through a text “Como estas?!?” and a phone call here and there, to check if I was okay in the Midwest. Your friendship also helped me keep working hard and finish, te lo agradesco de todo corazón. To my girlfriends, who were ready to celebrate each summer and winter, when I returned from the Midwest to the Westcoast: Cindy Rodriguez, su esposo Ramiro y su hija Brisa; Mariana Rocha-López, su esposo Enrique y sus hijos: Max, Bella, y Sasha; Gabriela Rocha, sus hijos: Brian y Victoria; Olga Gastelum y su hija Jade; To my two childhood friends that always defended me throughout k-12, that were adopted by my parents, that took care of me as if I were there sister, and that were there when I needed a friend, gracias Alberto (Beto) Barbosa y su companera Evelyn, y sus hijos Vivian y Benjamin; and Luis Rosas and his daughter, Jade. Y a tod@s las familias de los nombrados. Y a todos mis amigas y amigos que no nombre, please forgive me, gracias, you are all in my heart!

To our Babysitters: Laura Guzman, Lauren, Djonanna, Abby, Laura Roman thank you for all those weekends and evenings you took care of Esperanza, that time you offered us made this possible. I will cherish you always.

Gracias a la Familia Díaz-Delgado, y Murillo; en especial a la Sra. Alicia y Sr. Guadalupe por quererme, apoyarme, y siempre tenerme en sus oraciones.

To my compadres José and Carlos Díaz, thank you for welcoming me into your family. I greatly appreciate your love towards Esperanza and myself. Gracias!
Gracias a mis ahijados Noemi y Gabriel Robles Frutos y sus hijos Adrián y Nivran por siempre estar conmigo, animarme, y hacerme reír; mis compadres Eva y Erwin y sus hijos Trisstan, Christopher, y Ángel, gracias por siempre llamarme, y celebrar los días que estamos con ustedes; mi primo Christian, su esposa y sus hijos Cristian, Cristina, Cesar, Melanie, por su animo y alegría; Gracias a mi tío Miguel, y sus hijos Miguel, Isabel, Angélica, y Hector; mis sobrinos en Colima, Saraí, Ricardo, Carolina, Miguel, Erick, Liliana, Daniela, y Pablo; Gracias a mi tío Mariano por su motivacion y cariño; Gracias a mi Tío Roberto por siempre darme su cariño, gracias a su familia—sus hijos, Julie, Roberto, Griselda, y mis sobrinos: Julie, Ernie, Roberto, Ruben, Cameron, y Michael.

To my dear cousins Veronica Estrada-Contreras, her husband Manuel Contreas, and their daughters Emily and Chloe; Patricia Estrada and her husband Rishad Mitha; Daniel y Gabriel Estrada, for your unconditional love. Vero, thank you for sending me care packages, beautiful texts, and messages of encouragement, I greatly appreciate your friendship.

Gracias a mi Nina Librada, que desde mi nacimiento a sido una mujer ejemplar y maravillosa, y mi nino Hugo. Gracias a mi Nina Marta y mi nino Gilberto, por todo el cariño que le han brindado a mi familia, y su hija Stephanie Cruz; Mi Nina Gladys y mi nino Santiago; Gracias a La Familia Quintanilla, Ocampo, Linares-Alvarado, por todo su cariño en este camino. Gracias en especial a la familia Rodriguez-Gil por estar conmigo siempre.

Para mi querida madrina Sra. Esperanza Alemán, que ha sido una guía espiritual para mi y mi familia, la queremos mucho!

Gracias a mi Familia Estrada por su amor y cariño: Tío José y mi Tía Antonia; Tía Maria Luisa y su hija Nadia; Tío Jamie y Tía Eugenia, Maria, Laura, y Martín; Tía Isabel y Tío Julio;
Tía Olivia; Tía Soledad y Tío Beto, Eduardo, Kiandra, Carlos y sus nietos; Tía Celina; Tío Alfredo; Mi querida Tía Marina, Mario, y su familia; y mi Tío Antonio.

Quiero agradecer a todos los que me animaron a seguir cuando a veces este camino se veía imposible. A través de actos de generosidad, amor, y compasión, este viaje vale cada página escrita, lágrima derramada, risa dada, frase revisada, y cada episodio visto.

Este documento no podría haberse convertido en una realidad, sin las bendiciones de los que vinieron antes de mí, la generosidad de los que están conmigo, y las posibilidades que me imagino con las generaciones que vendrán después de mí, gracias. ¡Sí se pudo!

Honor the sacred. Honor the Earth, our Mother. Honor the Elders. Honor all with whom we share the Earth:-Four-legged, two-legged, winged ones, Swimmers, crawlers, plant and rock people. Walk in balance and beauty. –Anonymous.
Table of Contents

List of Figures ............................................................................................................................. xvi

Chapter 1 Introduction .................................................................................................................1
  Background of the Study ...........................................................................................................5
  Key Research Questions .........................................................................................................7
  Overview of other chapters ....................................................................................................9
  The Significance of the Study .................................................................................................14

Chapter 2 Cultural Studies Influence on Chicana/o Representations in U.S. Media ...............16
  Introduction .............................................................................................................................16
  Cultural Studies .......................................................................................................................17
  Chicana and Chicano Cultural Studies ..................................................................................21
  Encoding & Decoding: Representation and Difference .........................................................25
  Difference and Racialization in Children’s Media .................................................................30
  Critical Media Literacy ..........................................................................................................35
  Summary .................................................................................................................................40

Chapter 3 Border Theories, Borderlands, and Border Pedagogy .........................................42
  Introduction .............................................................................................................................42
  Restrictive Language Initiatives ............................................................................................45
  Politics of Difference ..............................................................................................................51
  The Borderlands .....................................................................................................................58
  Border Pedagogy .....................................................................................................................62
  Critical Bicultural Pedagogy as Border Pedagogy ...............................................................68
  Summary .................................................................................................................................69

Chapter 4 Interpretive Method and Methodologies ...............................................................71
  Dora the Explorer ....................................................................................................................74
  Children’s Animated Cartoons as Pedagogical Spaces .........................................................77
  Cultural Studies Criticism ......................................................................................................79
  Critical Discourse Analysis ....................................................................................................80
  Critical Bicultural Pedagogy ..................................................................................................83
  Methods for the First Five Seasons of Dora the Explorer ....................................................86

Chapter 5 Crossing Borders: Recurring Themes – Towards a Border Consciousness .........88
  Data: Dora the Explorer 2000-2010 .....................................................................................89
  Thematic Analysis: Crossing Borders ....................................................................................92
  At the Crossroads ...................................................................................................................129

Chapter 6 Identity, Ambiguity, and the Pedagogical Borderlands .........................................130
  Dialectical Continuum of Ambiguity ....................................................................................130
  Data: Selected Dora the Explorer Episodes .......................................................................132
  Textual Analysis: Pedagogical Borderlands .........................................................................141
  Discussion ...............................................................................................................................153
Chapter 7 A Critical Bicultural Media Literacy Possibility .................................................. 156

References ................................................................................................................................... 162

Appendix A: *Dora The Explorer* ............................................................................................... 168

Appendix B: *Dora The Explorer: Translated in Other Languages* ............................................. 169
List of Figures

Figure 1. Dora the Explorer Mug Shot................................................................. 2

Figure 2. Out of the 8.7 million U.S. children 43% are from Mexican decent. Urban Institute .... 7

Figure 3. Photography courtesy of Lori Rodriguez at an immigration rally against Arizona’s State Bill 1070 (May 1, 2010 Minneapolis, Minnesota) ......................................................... 77

Figure 4. Dialectical Continuum of Ambiguity...................................................... 131
Chapter 1

Introduction

This study begins with my eleven year-old niece, Celeste. During the summer of 2010, I was invited to be a chaperon on a field trip with my niece’s class. I had the pleasure of sharing a seat with my niece and her friend, who I will call Giovanni. Giovanni is a charming boy who made conversation easily. I noticed he had a phone, and I asked him if his parents let him have it and who paid for it. I asked these questions, because my niece has been asking for a cell phone, but my mother refuses to purchase one for her. As we continued to talk about phones and responsibility, Giovanni showed my niece an image on his phone. For an illustration of this *Dora the Explorer* (see Appendix A).

However, unlike the innocent images we are accustomed to seeing in cartoons and media ads, this was a mug shot of *Dora the Explorer* (see Figure 1). My niece didn’t know whether to smile or shake her head. She said, “Look.” I asked them what they thought about the image. I had a conversation with my niece earlier about the image. She said, “It’s not true. Dora is a cartoon. It’s fake.” However, I still asked, “but what if a child was really hurt like that? What about the people that do get hit just because they look different and simply because they ‘look’ a certain way, what about them?” She shook her head and said, “It’s not fair. That shouldn’t happen. That’s mean. That’s not good.”
In the school bus, she continued with the conversation, telling her friend, “That’s not good.” Giovanni replied the same as Celeste had earlier, saying, “it’s a cartoon. She is not real.” At that point my niece looked at me as if she were telling me, “Ask him the same thing you asked me.” With her approval I went ahead and asked Giovanni, “But what about those people that do cross the border and do get beat-up? What about them? Do you think that’s okay?” He quickly responded “oh no!” Giovanni shared with us that his parents crossed the border and that many of his family members were undocumented. He told us that his parents share stories about the difficulties of people crossing the border and that it’s awful that people treat them differently because of whom they are, the language they speak, and their appearance.

The unexpected image of Dora (see Figure 1) made possible a conversation that probably would have never occurred, given the context and my role on that field trip. However, the image made it possible for the student to trust me and share that part of his lived experience and his family’s reality. The connections that children make to their lived experiences, given a parody that was not created necessarily for them, gave us the opportunity in this instance to engage such delicate topics as immigration, citizenship, difference, harassment, and what is “real,” and what
is “not real.”

Stories such as this one are the impetus of my research on language, culture, children’s media, and education. Young children become socialized to view the world in particular ways, given their lived experiences. In my case, my parents immigrated to the United States in the late 1970s from Jalisco and Colima, Mexico. They met in Los Angeles, California at a garment factory. Because of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, my parents were able to gain legal residency. My siblings and I were born in Los Angeles, California, and raised in South Central Los Angeles. We were enrolled in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), where we attended ESL, bilingual, magnet, and English-only classrooms. We all graduated with honors from Theodore Roosevelt High School, located in East Los Angeles (East L.A.). The demography of Los Angeles is predominantly Latina/o-Mexicana/o. According to the Los Angeles Almanac, 85.5% of Hispanics or Latinos in California reside in this area (LA Almanac). Thus, issues of culture, literacy, language, media, and education are embedded in my lived experiences, as it is for so many bilingual, bicultural students in public schools today. This is important to note, because my own lived experience is the impetus for this study. This study illustrates the connections among education, policy, and popular culture as it engages the complexity of a bilingual and bicultural existence.

My parents taught us to care, love, and be compassionate for others. These values carry much weight when one enters into research that links media representations, which are often offensive fabricated representations (i.e., undocumented immigrants steal U.S. citizen jobs) and false depictions of lived experiences (i.e., undocumented immigrants risk their lives to offer
better opportunities for their families). My niece Celeste is growing up with these same values. She introduced me to *Dora the Explorer* when she was a young child.¹

Celeste was four years old when we were watching *Dora the Explorer* and, all of the sudden, she asked, “Why doesn’t Boots speak Spanish? When he does speak Spanish it sounds funny.” Dora’s sidekick friend, Boots, is a Monkey that wears bright red boots; Boots is her faithful companion on all of the adventures she participates in. Celeste made me aware that there was a language difference among the cartoon characters. At that point I wondered if she was able to notice this because of her own bilingualism. Celeste has been raised with my parents in a monolingual Spanish household. According to the Los Angeles Almanac, 37.89% of children in Los Angeles five years and older speak Spanish at home, while 45.87% speak only English.

At the age of three she was enrolled in a bilingual Head Start program. The Head Start program was created in 1965 to assist low-income children and their families. It is a national school readiness program in the United States. This program provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and allows for parent involvement. This is important to note because Nickelodeon, National Teacher Parent Association, and the Children’s Defense Fund launched one of the new school readiness programs, “Beyond the Backpack,” on March 2, 2010 in Burbank, California. *Dora the Explorer* is the representative of “Beyond the Backpack” school readiness program, a relationship that will be further discussed in the body of this work.

At an early age, Celeste was very aware that she spoke two languages. One day she asked me, “What am I speaking?” I said, “English.” She followed her question with another one, “Y ahora? (And now?)” I answered “Español” (Spanish). She also commented “Dora is the one that teaches Spanish to Boots; why doesn’t he know?” I wonder if she thought Boots should have

¹ *Dora the Explorer* is an animated cartoon that attempts to portray a seven-year old bilingual Latina girl.
known Spanish because they are from the same place. The difference was clear: Dora and Boots did not speak the same language yet, but they were from the same place. This is where my curiosity about so-called bilingual cartoons began. From this conversation, I wanted to find out…

Celeste attends junior high school now and although she has left her adoration for Dora behind, my memory of those vivid conversations with my niece strike me as important and continue to be relevant to how we understand a bilingual and bicultural way of life and the experiences of bilingual children. My own awareness of bilingualism made me curious about what Celeste thought, but my questions only surfaced when Celeste thought they were important to ask. She had not spent hours thinking about these questions, but I know they were important to her at that precise moment. Fortunately, I was there to engage her questions critically. No doubt, it was Celeste’s bilingualism that prompted her to ask about language issues in these cartoons, perhaps because Spanish is an essential part of her life at home and school.²

**Background of the Study**

This study was conducted at a time when the largest populations of students attending urban schools were from underrepresented communities. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2010), “The increasing proportion of children with non-English backgrounds in urban locations has led to a greater proportion of children with difficulty

² Celeste attended an elementary where 98.8 percent of students were Latina/os and the majority of the children spoke Spanish (http://search.lausd.k12.ca.us). This is in concert with the research of Dana Bartholomew and Connie Llanos (2010) who confirm, “some 220,000 Los Angeles students, or nearly a third of LAUSD's population, are (p. 1).
speaking English in those locations.” Thus, language is an increasing and challenging issue in urban schooling settings.

The link between urban schooling, language, and poverty is also evident. For example, the National Center for Children in Poverty (2010) reported that 22% (5, 450, 274) of young children live in poor families, defined as income below 100% of the federal poverty level. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in 2009, for a family of three the poverty guideline was $18,310 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). For a family of five it was $25,790 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Thirty three percent (2, 085, 089) of young Hispanic children live in poor families, and 32% (1, 451, 738) of young children of immigrant parents live in poor families (nccp.org). In this case, if you are from Hispanic descent, live in a mixed legal citizenship status family, and attend public school that have a higher risk of encountering multiple levels of adversity. Thus, these numbers show that many young Latina/o children are vastly vulnerable in school due to their language, class, and the legal status of their parents or their own citizenship. In fact, “currently, 8.7 million U.S. children age 0 to 8 have at least one foreign-born parent, a doubling from 4.3 million in 1990” (Fortuny, Hernández, & Chau, 2010).
Figure 2. Out of the 8.7 million U.S. children 43% are of Mexican descent. Urban Institute

The numbers above (see Figure 2) point to the relevancy of animated cartoons with respect to issues of identity for Latina/o children. Latina/o children’s identities become homogenized within televisual children programming such as Dora the Explorer. This prompts us to rethink the impact of Dora the Explorer as a media representation of Latina/o childhood. With this in mind, this study engages Dora the Explorer’s first five seasons that aired from 2000 to 2010. This investigation seeks to understand the dialectic nature between media, culture, literacy, pedagogy, and identity.

Key Research Questions

As previously mentioned, 33% of all Latina/o Hispanic children live in poor families. Consequently, young children from Latina/o communities with immigrant backgrounds in the United States have a higher risk of living in poverty. Given this reality, I argue that identities represented in children’s media are important and require careful analysis, because too often they are dismissed as not valid sources of investigation. Televisual animated cartoons merit careful analysis, because they assist viewers in forming opinions about language, culture, and identity. Much of the literature that I examine for this study highlights the diversity that animated
cartoons (re)present, as well as the growing market they generate, along with new characters that translate into new products for children to consume. Conceptually, consumerism and, more specifically, what Mary F. Rogers (1999) terms the *consumerization of children* are used in this study to provoke us to think critically about how children are targeted to buy and consume intentionally made products. Rogers (1999) conceptualizes the “consumerization of children,” in her book *Barbie Culture*, in an effort to demonstrate how Barbie epitomizes this concept by transforming children “into consumers with some measure of autonomy as spenders and buyers” (p. 62). Accordingly, Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe L. Kincheloe (1997) in their influential book, *Kinderculture: The Corporate Construction of Childhood*, argue that “Using fantasy and desire, corporate functionaries have created a perspective on late-twentieth-century culture that melds with business ideologies and free-market values” (p. 4).

*Dora the Explorer* has been produced to represent a perspective of how the world may be viewed, but in the same way it has also been used to build a variety of products that can be purchased for profit in accordance with these same worldviews. Thus, schools and parents should critically engage and interrogate these cartoons. Creating a place for dialogue with the child in regards to what she is learning by watching the cartoons. I am also positing a critique about how *Dora the Explorer* is often advertised as ‘multicultural,’ in a climate where anti-immigration laws are being debated in Congress and the attack on bilingual education has led to its current decline. I am not arguing that *Dora the Explorer* is not educational. My intent is to highlight the philosophy and goals that inform the creation of *Dora the Explorer* animated cartoons, as well as their inherent contradictions. I also argue that *Dora the Explorer* has created a venue for children to negotiate different cultures and languages, while creating a tool for children to learn about various cultures. Accordingly, my guiding questions for this study are:
1. In what ways do animated cartoon representations contribute to the fabrication of distorted identities in children? More specifically, how does *Dora the Explorer* contribute to the creation of a fabricated Latina identity?

2. What are the implications of fabricated identities in children’s media, given the social and material conditions that Latino children, who consume them, face in their daily lives?

3. Do the messages embedded in these cartoons influence children, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, citizenship status, and class, to become material consumers at an early age, while becoming both consumers of literacy and learners of a second language (in some cases ‘foreign language’), game, and song?

4. In light of the potential impact of cartoons to the formation of children’s identities, what can educators do to create the conditions for children to become more critical of cartoon messages and representations, while remaining receptive to the positive elements that “Dora” might teach them?

**Overview of Other Chapters**

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters including the introduction chapter. Chapter two, *Cultural Studies Influence on Chicana/o Representations in U.S. Media*, provides an overview of the pertinent cultural studies, Chicana/o cultural studies, and critical media literacy literature. It examines the origins of cultural studies and the ways it has been engaged historically. It provides a genealogy of works from Britain to the United States, as well as points out the influence of the Frankfurt school on the field. Following this section, I turn to Chicana/o cultural studies. I acknowledge the contribution of Chicana/o cultural studies to the study of Latina/o communities in media and other forms of popular culture that shape and help to construct and deconstruct representations of Latinas and Latinos in the United States. The concept of representation as developed by Stuart Hall (1977) is vital to this discussion. His work on representation is followed by a discussion of difference, which is useful to understanding issues of multiculturalism, diversity, and Latinidad—all central to this study. Lastly, chapter two discusses the need for cultural studies theorists to engage with critical media literacy, calling for
a necessary conversation among theorists and practitioners that engages with media, language, identity, representation, pedagogy, political economy, resistance, and social transformation.

Chapter three, *Border Theories, Borderlands, and Border Pedagogy*, provides an overview of anti-bilingual and anti-immigrant bills, more specifically California’s Proposition 187, Proposition 227, Colorado’s Amendment 31, Arizona’s 203, Arizona’s State Bill 1070, and Alabama’s HB 56, to further contextualize the repressive context in which these cartoons are produced and consumed. These laws are particularly important to highlight here, because they have had a direct impact on the quality of life of Latina/o community members. Anti-immigrant and anti-bilingual laws promote the notion that home or subordinate languages are deficient and, often, deem them as a threat to the nation. Understanding the social context in which these laws were passed is also important when considering the direct effect such legislation has had on Latina/o children’s sense of belonging in the United States. The chapter also examines: 1) politics of difference, 2) borderlands and border theory, 3) border pedagogy, and 4) critical bicultural pedagogy.

I discuss the politics of difference in relation to the experiences of bilingual, bicultural students, more specifically difference in language issues. Most importantly, I discuss difference as key to understanding the relationship between anti-bilingual education sentiments and anti-immigrant legislation and its impact on Latina/o children and other disenfranchised populations. This is followed by a discussion of border theory and the concept of borderlands. These two frameworks, inspired by the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), engage issues of difference, power, resistance, and survival that are critical for theorizing Latina/o communities in the United States more effectively. Following that, I discuss border pedagogy. As might be readily noted, border pedagogy is informed by the ideas of border theory and the borderlands. Additionally,
border pedagogy involves making sense of issues of power, knowledge, identity, culture, and language in different pedagogical settings. Finally, I introduce Antonia Darder’s (1991) concept of critical bicultural pedagogy. Critical bicultural pedagogy is discussed to capture the praxis found in border theory, borderlands frameworks, border pedagogy, and the politics of difference. This praxis creates a possibility for educators, students, and communities to struggle together toward a liberatory education. This praxis is reflected in chapter five, where the data for this study is discussed. Accordingly, this chapter is key to the study of Dora the Explorer and the inherent contradictions found in the episodes because of her acclaimed “Latina” identity. While she is recognized for using her language, being literate in both Spanish and English, and never showing shame in regard to language, she never calls herself “Latina.” Is there no need for self-identifying as a “Latina”? Questions of identity are undeniable in this study, thus a borderlands discourse in which a critical bicultural pedagogy as border pedagogy is engaged in the data analysis is evident.

Chapter four, Interpretive Methods and Methodologies, examines and interweaves three major interpretive methodologies relevant to and appropriate for use in this study, providing the rationale for their use and how the inherent epistemologies of these methodologies can help capture and interpret the animated representations associated with Dora the Explorer. More specifically, these methodologies include: a) cultural studies criticism, b) critical discourse analysis, and c) critical bicultural pedagogy. These create a new way of interpreting cartoons and highlight how they can help us understand issues of identity, language, and culture.

For this study, the first five seasons were examined chronologically, because these seasons cover the decade that is the focus of this study, namely 2000 to 2010. By doing so, I was able to pinpoint different moments of rupture in regard to identity, culture, language, and
literacy. Following this initial examination, I then selected specific episodes for an in-depth analysis. The criteria for selecting these latter episodes had more to do with the themes they embodied, which was quickly evident when viewing them the first time. Noteworthy to this study were observations such as:

1. What language does Dora speak to the different characters? Is there a relationship between the language she employs at certain points and to whom she is speaking? Is there a relationship between when and where she speaks each language?

2. Are there new characters in the newer episodes? If so, what purpose do they play with respect to representations of difference (i.e. race, gender, class, etc.)?

3. What appears to be the overall cultural relevance attributed to the representations found in the cartoons? What constitutes the overarching ideological lens that informs the cultural production of these cartoons?

The notes taken were, of course, based on my bicultural and bilingual understanding, as well as my academic preparation in the field. They reflect my understanding of life and my understanding of the world, as well as my reading of the literature and how it helped inform my critical bicultural lens as a scholar. This is to say that I “read” these cartoons and interpret them based on my bicultural understanding, as well as my knowledge of the manner in which cultural politics, economics, history, ideology, hegemony, and critique inform my capacity to read the veiled power relations that inform the curricular intent of these cartoons. I make careful reference to my cultural and intellectual formation here, because meanings are not fixed, and such meanings can change given who is viewing the show and how their lived experiences inform what they are viewing. The transmission process of encoding and decoding assists with the naming of such meanings as they are produced by the creators of the program (encoders), but as viewers we decode the meaning given our lived experiences and various positionalities. As a Chicana, bilingual, bicultural human being, my personal lived experience informs my theoretical
lens, as have the fields of critical theory, critical bicultural pedagogy, cultural studies, border theory, and Indigenous ways of knowing the world, which I have drawn from over the last six years. Given the literature, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies presented in this study, I have chosen to focus on the following themes as salient to my content or discourse analysis of the cartoons as text:

1. Biculturalism (identity issues and cultural values)
2. Bilingualism (language issues)
3. Gender relations (Feminism/Patriarchy)
4. Latinidades (Cultural symbols and cultural relevance)
5. Power relations (Cultural invasion; domination; subordination; and conquest)
6. Empowerment (social agency, decolonizing aspects)

Chapter five, Crossing Borders: Recurring Themes, discusses the themes listed above. This chapter encompasses a full scope of what Dora the Explorer and her friends do through various episodes and in other media outlets. Nevertheless, the title also encompasses what the viewer may experience by encoding and decoding the program thematically, whether consciously or unconsciously. At the end of the chapter, I introduce the concept of a “dialectical continuum of ambiguity” (see Figure 4) that can then emerge through the process of analysis.

Chapter six, Identity, Ambiguity, and the Pedagogical Borderlands, engages six selected episodes from Dora the Explorer. As discussed throughout this study, pedagogical borderlands are found throughout the animated series of Dora the Explorer. These pedagogical borderlands embrace the multiplicity and complexity of identity formations. In this chapter ambiguity is discussed as an example of the politics of cultural difference. Thus, this chapter gives concrete
examples of how a “dialectical continuum of ambiguity” is decoded through specific full-length episodes.

The concluding chapter addresses the implications of education, identity formation, and language differences in children’s media. It suggests new methods of viewing children’s media and offers a new emerging theoretical lens that assists in deciphering the complexities of children’s media that employ a bicultural and bilingual entity.

**The Significance of the Study**

This dissertation seeks to ground its method and theoretical discussion based on frameworks regarding difference and representation in children’s media. This is a contribution to the theoretical and methodological frameworks currently in practice. For example, cultural studies examine questions of representation and difference in media; however, a focus on children’s media has not always been seen as a sufficiently scholarly project (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997). Kinderculture theorists Shirley Steinberg and Joe Kincheloe (1997) claim that it is important, as cultural theorists, to take consideration of children’s media and its impact seriously. Through my personal vignettes with my niece, I attempt to shed light on children’s inherent intellect and their capacity to critique media from their own perspective. It is also important that educators and parents take children’s media into consideration when speaking about issues that affect children’s daily lives. Thus, in order to do future qualitative studies that involve focus groups, interviews, and audience focal groups, I need to decipher the messages and representations theoretically and methodologically, which seem to be at work in these cartoons, from a bilingual, bicultural context. This is to say that this study represents a starting point for a much larger project as a children’s media theorist and critic.
This dissertation is interdisciplinary, so that critical ideas tied to education and media studies are theoretically and methodologically placed into conversation. I do this by utilizing both cultural studies and borderlands frameworks. This approach provides a rupture in Chicana/o cultural studies due to the focus on children’s media, which is currently limited in this canon of work, both in theory and in practice. With regard to bilingual education, my discussion is informed by Darder’s (1991) notion of critical bicultural pedagogy, which seeks to bring complexity to our understanding of bilingual education and interrogates traditional multicultural tendencies in education. Critical bicultural pedagogy, as discussed in Chapter 3, is a pedagogy that calls for students to reflect on their lives and the manner in which they choose to live it, while negotiating social relationships of difference and the asymmetrical power relations at work. These challenges include, but are not limited to, language, skin color, gender, class, and place of origin. Thus, a politics of difference and representation with respect to Latina/o bicultural identities are the central impetus guiding this study.
Chapter 2

Cultural Studies influence on Chicana/o Representations in U.S. Media

Introduction

For the past several decades, the field of cultural studies has taken on a life of its own. Scholars, such as Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, and E.P. Thompson describe it like this: “cultural studies has never had one distinct method of approach to its object of study” (Storey, 1998, p. x). The lack of a distinct method is considered a problem for those who are positivists in their approach, but is an opportunity to others. For scholars who are interested in combining different approaches of inquiry into distinct media projects, cultural studies has become the theory and practice to embrace. With this in mind, this chapter focuses on four related areas: 1) Cultural Studies, 2) Chicana Chicano Cultural Studies, 3) Difference and Racialization in Children’s Media Representations, and 4) Critical Media Literacy. These areas of study are important to describe given their relevance to this study. Cultural studies is the broad lens that is applied in this study; Chicana Chicano cultural studies encompasses the issues of identity, ethnicity, and culture; the section of Difference and Racialization in Children’s Media Representations sets up the stage for the analysis on Dora the Explorer; and finally, critical media literacy will help me address the educational aspect of the television show in this chapter.

In developing my discussion of these areas, I have divided this chapter into the subsequent six sections.

The first part of this chapter provides an overview of how cultural studies has been described, practiced, and engaged. The second section focuses on why Chicana and Chicano scholars felt the need to create a particular space within cultural studies in order to address the issues of Chicanas/os and Latinas/os, which include both U.S. born and immigrant Latina/o
populations. In the third section, a description of ‘representation,’ as defined by cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1977) in *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*, will be presented. This work on representation will be followed by a discussion of ‘difference.’ The fourth section focuses on previous studies that look at ethnicity and racialized communities in the media. In particular, it centers on issues of multiculturalism, diversity, and Latinidad in television shows and other cultural forms. This section will also focus on the issue of difference, representation, and racialization. The fifth section discusses the need for cultural studies theorists to engage with critical media literacy. It examines key concepts and central arguments from border crossers\(^3\) moving among cultural studies, critical media literacy, and critical pedagogy. And lastly, the sixth section and conclusion offers a brief overview of why a conversation among these literatures is necessary, so that new spaces for projects that engage media, language, identity, representation, pedagogy, political economy, resistance, and social transformation can be created, using both historical and contemporary theoretical lenses.

**Cultural Studies**

Cultural Studies has always been an unfolding discourse, responding to changing historical and political conditions and always marked by debate, disagreement and intervention (Storey, 1998, p. xv).

Established in 1923, the *Institut für Sozialforschung* located in Frankfurt, Germany, is considered to be “the first Marxist-oriented research center affiliated with a major German university” (Kellner, 2009). Key theorists such as Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm, Herbert

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\(^3\) Conceptually, I refer to those who culturally and linguistically navigate multiple spaces and come from marginalized communities as border crossers. See Giroux *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and The Politics of Education* (2\(^{nd}\) Ed).
Marcuse, and Theodor W. Adorno helped lead the Frankfurt School during the early 1930s. Their studies included critiques of capitalism and its hegemonic control of the media. They theorized modes of production and distribution through a materialist, interdisciplinary, and social theoretical approach. Under the directorship of Horkheimer, the Institute’s engagement with interdisciplinary work in the areas of philosophy, social theory, sociology, psychology, cultural studies, and political economy served, as Douglas Kellner argues, as “an instrument of social transformation.” It was recognized that through a cross-disciplinary approach much more could be done in arriving at a better understanding and consciousness of how media serve as vehicles of social oppression and material confinement with respect to people’s lives.

In the 1930s, fascism was a major interest of the Frankfurt School theorists, and this led to a series of studies on German fascism. Since most of the scholars of the Institute were both Jewish and Marxist radicals, they were forced to flee Germany for the United States after Hitler’s ascendancy to power. However, Adorno and Horkheimer, returned to Germany after the Second World War. Other theorists from the Frankfurt School stayed in the United States and took on other intellectual pursuits. For example, Herbert Marcuse aligned himself with the student movement of the 1960s and was influential in the formation of a new cadre of critical scholars. Most of the Frankfurt School theorists residing in the US were affiliated with Columbia University from 1931 until 1949. From 1936 to the present, the Institute referred to its work as a ‘critical theory of society.’ Much of the work the Frankfurt School draws from belongs to this tradition. It is also crucial to note that this school of thought is simultaneously grounded in Hegelian-Marxian dialectics, historical materialism, and a Marxist critique of political economy and theory of revolution. Hence, these schools of thought shaped the definition of critical theory.
Critical theory is motivated by an interest in emancipation and is a philosophy of social practice linked to the struggle for the future.

Mass culture, as a hegemonic phenomenon, according to the Frankfurt School thinkers, fabricated false desires, dreams, hopes, fears, and longings, as well as produced an insatiable desire for consumer products. The culture industry was thought to produce cultural consumers who would disburse its products and conform to the dictates and the behaviors of the existing capitalist society. Consequently, Frankfurt School theorists challenged the structures they believed homogenized the needs and desires of the masses, through the production of a consumer society.

It is important to recognize that the Frankfurt School very much influenced British cultural studies and consequently American cultural studies. The Frankfurt School and British cultural studies both focused on the intersections of culture and ideology. They also engaged with issues of hegemony and conditions that are (re)produced through media. Hence, the Frankfurt School was not only engaged in unveiling structures, but also organizing and producing transformational change in a similar fashion to the way cultural theorists Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, and E. P. Thompson did.

John Storey (1998) describes cultural studies’ praxis (theory and practice) as something always moving, not static, and always changing for those who use it as a tool for inquiry. Different political projects have employed cultural studies as an important analytical approach for better understanding cultural artifacts, social phenomena, and public policy. For the last few decades, there has been an increase of projects that embrace a British cultural studies practice; however, there has also been an increasing number of fields branching out from cultural studies
(e.g., Chicana/o Cultural Studies) from what has been considered the original context of cultural studies—namely British Cultural Studies.

Although cultural studies is informed by aspects of Marxist ideology, some practitioners do not necessarily espouse this ideology. Consequently, we see a split between the theory and the practice, which cultural studies strives to unite. This can be seen as a critique of cultural studies theorists, because how can politics be separated from the practitioner? According to Storey (1998), this split should not be seen as detrimental to the overall project. Rather, as long as the practitioner knows that cultural studies is linked to Marxist theory, there should be no surprise when questions of social class, class struggle, the economy, and politics are raised.

Moreover, cultural studies is invested in articulating competing meanings found in different cultural forms (i.e. animation, television, magazines, etc.). But, not only are cultural studies theorists invested in articulating competing meanings—or hidden messages—but once those meanings are unveiled, they demand that we ask: What are the next steps? Calling for the constant (re)engagement with practice in an effort to challenge structures of domination is essential to the work of cultural theorists. Hence, cultural studies has shifted due to historical social changes, economic crisis, and new sites of struggle and resistance, pointing to a theory of articulation that Lawrence Grossberg (1997) posits “is the assertion of struggle over necessity, [which] struggles both to produce structures of domination and to resist them” (p. 156).

Cultural studies can then be seen as both a methodological and theoretical lens that can be used to analyze, engage, research, and critique different moments, movements, and events, and to create a new sense of meanings and representations given the subject of study.

Grossberg’s description of cultural studies acknowledges cultural studies as a methodology, which can support those who are interested in developing a border theory;
simultaneously, it illuminates the importance of both emerging and historical scholarship in the tradition of cultural studies. Border theory is mentioned here as an example of how cultural studies is practiced as a transdisciplinary approach and how different disciplines, theories, and methodologies can ultimately utilize cultural studies as a means of production and also as an analytical lens.

Given that cultural studies functions as a theory and methodology used for the study of difference and representations, creating awareness about what else needs to be understood and developed for engaging different possibilities of freedom and liberation is key to this work. Along these lines, Chicana/o cultural studies is presented as exemplifying an emerging and continuously expanding paradigm within this scholarly tradition.

**Chicana and Chicano Cultural Studies**

Chicana/o cultural studies is cited as a resource for addressing a colonial condition in a supposedly postcolonial world and for a study of emerging Chicana/o and Latina/o associations and networks that does not disregard culture or the global economy (Chabram-Dernersesian, Chicana/o Cultural Studies Reader, 2006, p. 7).

Chicana/o cultural studies theorists focus much of their work on issues of Chicana/o Latina/o media representations and other forms of cultural production. Chicana/o cultural studies practitioners do not negate the importance of British and American cultural studies. However, they feel that due “to the accelerating changes associated with globalization and a response to the constant pressure exerted by social political movements that advance the points of view of the disenfranchised who cross international borders,” Chicana/o cultural studies is best suited to analyzing and engaging these issues (Chabram-Dernersesian, 2006, p. 98).

Chicana/o Cultural Studies is a methodology and theory that various scholars have embraced due to its interdisciplinary and provocative nature. It is fairly recent that the term
Chicana/o cultural studies has been utilized, but it has been practiced for some time. Chicana/o cultural studies has been practiced within other theoretical traditions associated with studies of difference, including Border theory, critical theory, critical pedagogy, and cultural anthropology. For example, the writings of Gloria Anzaldúa, Renato Rosaldo, Américo Paredes, and other border theorists are considered part of the Chicana/o cultural studies canon. Cultural theorist Angie Chabram-Dernersesian (2007) offers a selected chronology of published works that contributed to the growing scholarship of Chicana/o cultural studies (p. 241). The volume includes texts such as Renato Rosaldo’s chapter, entitled “Changing Chicana/o Narratives,” first published in Culture and Truth. Rosa Linda Fregoso and Angie Chabram edited a Cultural Studies issue on Chicana/o cultural representations, which included articles by Chicana/o scholars such as Rosaura Sánchez, Alicia Gaspar de Alba, Emma Perez, and Chela Sandoval.

As illustrated through this discussion, Chicana Chicano cultural studies crosses disciplinary boundaries. Scholars argue that Chicana Chicano cultural studies, “Within the academy, … addresses the dazzling array of differences within mainstream cultural theories while fomenting another type of awareness of the fact that ‘difference’ is itself ‘different’” (Chabram-Dernersesian, 2007, p. 9). This means that difference cannot be seen or taken up solely because of difference for trendiness sake. Scholars, specifically scholars who are dedicated to social justice and social transformation, have the utmost responsibility to call out those who have taken the study of difference as a self-fulfilling project. Many of the scholars, who write, whether directly or indirectly, through a Chicana/o cultural studies lens claim that they write from a place of resistance and conflict. For example, critical pedagogue Alejandra Elenes (2007) states, “Since we didn’t have a space, faculty, or courses, it was pretty much ‘work on your own.’ So I was trying to find works from Chicanas/os, and one day, I was in the library,
looking at the journal Cultural Studies, and boy did I make a discovery! I thought I’d faint because I couldn’t believe that there was one whole issue (October 1990)” (Chabram-Dernersesian, 2007, p. 129). Thus, cultural studies as a field of study is also seen as a place at which scholars of color have found space, a *sitio*, where their perspectives and scholarship are valued.

Chicana and Chicano scholars who have embraced cultural studies approaches claim to have been influenced by this tradition early on in their academic trajectories. Elenes explains that she was highly influenced by cultural studies theories and many times confronted with the question “Why cultural studies if you are in Education?” As she explains, “People even say to me: How can someone in education be involved in cultural studies? They don’t know that some of the original works in cultural studies focused on schools. I don’t think it’s that people are paranoid in terms of their fear: everywhere we see the process of erasure in U.S. academies” (Chabram-Dernersesian, 2007, p. 42). This is a clear example of how cultural studies: 1) influences different traditional disciplines, 2) has shifted people’s expectations of who is allowed to study culture and cultural artifacts and who cannot or should not question cultural forms, and 3) has produced transdisciplinary approaches by allowing itself to be changed.

Scholars invoking questions of feminism, gender, and sexuality within a Chicana feminist consciousness have also engaged with cultural studies and now more specifically with the emerging Chicana/o cultural studies canon. From analyzing literary work, film, popular culture, music, and its impact on Chicana/o Latina/o community, these scholars have transmitted new knowledge about: 1) the importance of asking questions about culture, 2) the need to interrogate feminism, gender, and sexuality in these texts, and 3) interventions and contributions across disciplines.
In *Women Hollering: Transfronteriza Feminisms*, Sonia Saldívar Hull (2007) reflects on Chicana feminism on the border. She argues that this Chicana feminism’s “reference to the borderlands is not meant to be a free-floating metaphor or a fashionable trope, as is sometimes suggested. This border feminism is materially linked to a raced, working-class condition and subject, a specific history of women and people of color, an embodied theory and practice, and concrete geopolitical borders” (p. 113). Thus, her work on Chicana feminisms on the border is a cultural project that links different principles of cultural studies, while simultaneously addressing issues of women, geopolitical borders, and race.

Grossberg (1997) states that the field of cultural studies is, itself, a border where both contradictions and possibilities are possible and co-exist. Chela Sandoval speaks of an urgency to reanalyze and re-engage reflexivity as cultural studies practitioners. Cultural studies requires the differential method that Anzaldúa talks about, which emerges from having that painful consciousness, that awareness of where and how one stands in relations to signs, or identifying how value slides inside sign and meaning systems, in order to subvert whatever is dominating, silencing, regulating—“la conciencia de la mestiza.” Above all, the field of cultural studies must be about enabling scholars to skillfully and self-consciously position themselves in relation to knowledge (italics added, p. 75). Additionally, Sandoval argues that cultural studies has the potential of engaging ‘la concencia mestiza,’ a concept which Anzaldúa (1987) introduces in *Borderlands/la frontera*. Within Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands*, we see how differences are celebrated, engaged, critiqued, and challenged. Her text offers those interested in the bicultural/bilingual human being a new way of articulating those differences and representing those differences with integrity, even when these representations may be very contradictory and messy. This is the possibility that Gloria Anzaldúa offers us with her cultural production. Anzaldúa’s work supports
that of Chicana/o cultural studies scholars who offer new ways of (re)presenting our realities and ideas, in ways that Chicanas and Chicanos can produce their work from their own positionality. This further provides a place for Chicana/o scholars to create new ways of knowing and articulating our different histories.

**Encoding & Decoding: Representation and Difference**

Dora represents that gray area where meaning is unstable, where history is not fixed, but rather is controlled by agency of viewers and producers alike (Guidotti-Hernández, 2007, p. 213).

In her study on *Dora the Explorer*, Guidotti-Hernández (2007) uses Latinidad as a discourse of analysis of the decoding and encoding process that happens with *Dora the Explorer*. As stated by Hall (1993), “the moments of ‘encoding’ and ‘decoding,’ though only relatively autonomous in relation to the communicative process as a whole, are *determinate* moments” (as cited in Guidotti-Hernández). Guidotti-Hernández furthers this statement in regard to Dora by stating that

Encoding represents the distribution of ideas. These ideas are encoded through the production and circulation of Dora products. The encoding process is where objects are consumed and reproduced. Decoding is the process where we untangle the messages of the text and understand their meanings (p. 213).

With regard to *Dora the Explorer*, Guidotti-Hernández provocatively makes us aware that even Latinidad as a discourse can be “a double-edged sword. It can be socially and politically dangerous as well as socially and politically liberating. Viewers can decode and manipulate discourses of Latinidad for self-empowerment similar to what we have seen with feminism. On the other hand, Latinidad can be decoded to represent a homogenization of race, language, ethnicity, and culture” (p. 214). The issue of representation and difference is discussed in this chapter in light of this process of decoding and encoding that influences meaning making.
One must understand these concepts as crucial to the meaning making process that happens within media programs, such as *Dora the Explorer*. More specifically, these concepts are important when these programs claim to produce a monolithic and authentic Latina/o program, and move away from acknowledging the homogenous nature of such communities, as well as the colonialism and conquest that these communities have resisted and continue to navigate as part of their survival. These concepts are discussed throughout my investigation and are important to investigate, particularly when representation and difference are decoding and encoding markers that inform the analysis of *Dora the Explorer*’s border crossings.

**Representation.** Representation is key to an understanding of cultural studies. Representation, as expressed by Stuart Hall (1997), “connects meaning and language to culture” (p. 15). Cultural studies theorists have explored the question of representation, given its connection to culture and the meaning making that is inherent to any society. While representation is linked to language and hence, to culture, we must understand that language is also linked to power and to the manipulation of symbols that preserve or disrupt that power.

Hall argues that, “Representation is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, of signs and images, which stand for or represent things” (p. 15). Thus, it is crucial for someone who interacts with cultural artifacts (i.e., films, newspapers, animation, or music) to understand the function of representation. While one does not necessarily have to go in depth with the details of deconstructing the origins of each word, phrase, symbol, or language seen as a cultural artifact, we do have to be conscious of competing symbols and signifiers in our research. Thus, the notion of representations becomes a tool through which the cultural studies practitioner can disrupt power.
As a practice, theories of representation encompass principles and primary functions. Hall (1997) introduces three key approaches to representation: “(1) reflective approach: Does language simply reflect a meaning which already exists out there in the world of objects, people and events? (2) intentional approach: Does language express only what the speaker or writer or painter wants to say, his or her personally intended meaning? And (3) constructionist approach: Is meaning constructed in and through language?” (1997, p. 15). Hall’s own work is most tied to the constructionist approach, which is the approach that has most defined cultural studies. Accordingly, two major variants of the constructionist approach include—the semiotic approach (e.g., Ferdinand de Saussure) and the discursive approach (Michel Foucault).

Saussure’s contribution to cultural studies concerns issues of language, meaning, culture, and representations. As such, his writings on language have influenced and shaped semiotic perspectives and consequently shaped the constructionist approach. This leads us to what Saussure called, according to Hall (1997), the signifier and signified. The signifier is what you “see”: the object and the signified is the concept or definition or interpretation of this object. “Both are required to produce meaning but it is the relation between them, fixed by our cultural and linguistic codes, which sustains representation” (p. 31). Thus, for cultural studies theorists, this is a significant approach in ‘reading’ representations, whether they engage with racism, class, gender, sexuality, or the intersections of such in newspapers, animation, film, television sitcoms, literature, music videos, and other forms of media. The reading and interpretation of representations are commonplace to the practices of many cultural theorists in their work. Hence, theories of representation are considered significant to cultural studies research.

According to Saussure and Hall (1997), meaning is not static or fixed. Thus, language and representations are not fixed, yet some meanings attached to objects have become so
embedded into a culture that meanings seems fixed (e.g., street lights, in which red means ‘stop’ and green means ‘go’); however, many meanings do change over time and new meanings emerge (e.g., ‘9-11,’ ‘Chicana/o,’ ‘Black,’ ‘Queer’, ‘Brown Pride’, etc.). Even though Saussure did not look at how power is influential in language—e.g., the person speaking and positioned differently to the one listening—his contribution has greatly influenced cultural studies thinking.

Hall (1997) persistently asserts that, “There is thus no single, unchanging, universal ‘true meaning.’ …This opens up meaning and representation, in a radical way, to history and change” (p. 31). Cultural studies theorists have thus, taken up the task to engage with representation, meaning, language, culture, history, change, hegemony, and power—and consequently, with competing ideologies linked to these. Furthermore, “representation is the production of the meaning of the concepts in our minds through language” (p. 31). Accordingly, representation informs the transmission process of encoding and decoding and, thus, becomes linked to questions of difference as well, particularly as groups in society struggle over conflicts associated with language, meaning, and power.

**Difference.** The notion of difference in the analysis of media, education, policy, and social practices can serve to naturalize privilege or to interrogate and disrupt the status quo. Difference as described by Iris Marion Young (1990) can be an essentialized and practiced by those who believe in assimilation or those who represent the interests of privileged groups. Young (1990) argues that “Essentializing difference expresses a fear of specificity and a fear of making permeable the categorical border between oneself and the others” (p. 170). This understanding of difference furthers Hall’s and other cultural studies theorists' arguments when they speak to issues of ‘them’ and ‘us.’ This use of difference makes the interventions of border theorists, such as Anzaldúa and other Chicana/o cultural studies theorists, more viable and useful.
to the notion of social change, social justice, and social transformation. For example, the notion of difference should not serve to reproduce ‘otherness’ but rather to create spaces of transformation and equity for those continuously marginalized and oppressed by those in power. The notion of difference is at times celebrated as something that the mainstream culture ‘accepts’ and ‘tolerates.’ So at the same time that difference may be accepted and tolerated, it can also be essentialized and used to preserve xenophobia. For example, Darder (2004) argues,

Underpinning nativist views are unexamined assumptions of the ‘‘other’’ as inferior and dangerous to the conservation of democratic life and the capitalist enterprise. As such, the ‘othering’ of cultures and languages outside of the mainstream has consistently burdened minority language populations to prove themselves as ‘decent human beings’ worthy and deserving of entrance into the inner sanctum of nation-state citizenship and the opportunities it affords (p. 233).

The ‘Othering’ that Darder speaks to is the same ‘difference’ that Young warns us about when it is not positioned politically to engage with questions of social transformation and the liberation of disenfranchised communities.

For Chicanas/os and Latinas/os (this includes all indigenous and immigrant communities that are often not named, but that are encompassed within the use of these labels), ‘difference’ and the process of ‘othering’ is present in everyday practices and embedded in policies that serve to normalize their differences as ‘other.’ Furthermore, as explained by Darder (2004), “Key to nativist perceptions of Latino immigrants is the manner in which the process of racialization is manifested through the suppression of linguistic rights and exclusionary practices that formidably impact social welfare benefits, labor market participation, and educational opportunities for Latino immigrants” (p. 233). Racialization in the sense of media and cultural studies is a highly useful construct, due to the extensive work done to decipher and to understand meanings that are portrayed of and by Latinas/os, as well as other marginalized ethnic communities. Racialization is, thus, inherent in paradigms of differences. As such, notions of
Difference can be used to understand the politics of representation found in *Dora the Explorer*'s episodes.

**Difference & Racialization in Children’s Media**

Previous studies have shown how television programs often function as a *partial* ‘window to the world’ (Berry, G. L., & Asamen, J. K. 1993; Palmer 1993). According to Eleanor Blair Hilty (1997), “The concept of educational programs for children arrived with television, but it was the Carnegie Commission of Educational Television that recommended in 1967 the use of children’s television as a “means of social reform” (p. 70). It is important to emphasize this public programming phenomenon, given that advertising, then and now, constitutes as much airtime as the program itself, in at least commercial run networks. Berry, G. L., & Asamen, J. K., argue that “PBS programs for children yield [a] rich and broad array of cultural variability” (1993, p. 141). According to Edward Palmer (1993), “[w]here available, ethnic media provide ‘safe haven alternative’ for identification with one’s own culture and background. As the most rapidly growing minority group in the United States, the Hispanic population has the most direct access to alternative media programming” (p. 145). Scholars suggest that there is a need to move beyond an “American world view” in order to produce better American programming (Berry, G. L., & Asamen, J. K., 1993, p. 153). The Cultural Awareness Group, as well as other ‘Hispanic’ marketing groups, targets the Latino/Hispanic child in order to sell their products and their research, at the expense of the child’s education and socio-cognitive development. This is done

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4 They are specifically referring here to Spanish television, in which Hispanic PR Wire reports currently include more than 250 television channels in the U.S. and Puerto Rico (retrieved December 2, 2005).
through the marketing of cartoons such as *Dora the Explorer*, the focus of this study, in which her cultural and linguistic identity markers become the guiding marketing scheme by which to sell products.

In her study, Hilty (1997) posits that children, specifically disadvantaged children, are not in the conversation of creating children programming, thus reproducing what adults think is “good” and “right” as well as reproducing what is seen in other hegemonic children’s programming in different languages and cultures. Hilty further poses questions regarding children’s programming, such as, “Do we adults ‘need’ to believe that when we ‘park’ our children in front of an electronic baby-sitter that it addresses the real or perceived educational needs of children? ... Is it any surprise that children come to school unprepared to take responsibility for their own learning as active participants in the teaching-learning process?” (p. 77). While these questions are provocative, I would argue that if children are given the opportunity to engage these programs in a significant way, they would not only critically engage them as an educational activity but also as a political activity in which social transformation could potentially occur. For example, given the story of Giovanni and my niece Celeste discussed earlier, I am confident that, if teachers, parents, and community members offered or simply listened to children’s concerns, we would be amazed at the critical skills that children possess at a very early age. Children’s critique of and engagement with social justice is a reflection of their lived experiences; but, given how research already prepares these children as “rebels,” “naïve,” and even “passive,” it should cause us to wonder about the child who lives in and out of various markers of identity. How do these children challenge these labels? And, what happens when childhood is complicated even more, in a society where the “corporate construction of childhood” is at play and where their language, race, ethnicity, culture, sexuality,
gender, and other identity markers become part of a profit driven ideological practice? Thus, your identity becomes important to those who are attempting to sell you something and make you consume a product in the name of your “culture,” while they reap the profits.

Arlene Davila (2001) argues that, “in seeking the more profitable nationwide campaigns, which appeal to the entire U.S. Hispanic market, advertisers are still left with the need to emphasize the existence of essential commonalities that are supposedly shared by all Latino [communities] in order to safeguard the cohesiveness and profitability of this market” (p. 82). Thus, the “familismo” found in representations of Dora and other ethnic based media is a characteristic that enables the market to make these cartoons more appealing to the Latina/Latino child and family and, thus, make them more marketable.

Edward L. Palmer and his colleagues (1993) posit that “[t]he current [1990s] impact of U.S. commercial television can be traced to an evolving marketing strategy that has played upon the public susceptibility to closed-minded stereotypes” (p. 153). Desjardins’ (2004) report, Popular Hispanic Cartoons Expand Licensing Appeal, confirms that stereotypes--such as Latino communities having large families and loving bright colors and loud music--are teeming in the marketing of Latino targeted merchandise. Concerns predicted in the 1990s can, unfortunately, be seen at work today in the growth of consumerism. The ‘Hispanic market’ is skyrocketing, as is the abundance of educational products that parents are encouraged to purchase, so their child can be better educated across a variety of subject areas. As quoted in Palmer, George Comstock (1993) critiques the commercialization of television programs and questions the socialization that is transmitted to children:

Children are expected to pay for the programming they view through their exposure to commercials. Below the age of 8 years, most do not comprehend the self-interested persuasive intent of commercials, ... In any case, whether or not they comprehend persuasive intent, children become persuaded to want products, ask parents for them, and
Consequently, parents are, wittingly or unwittingly, implicated in childhood consumerism gone amok. But, should parents be blamed when supporting what they understand to be educational programming? There is no single entity to be blamed for this sort of socialization, given the many factors at work. For example, identity is highly ambiguous in *Dora the Explorer*. More specifically, as discussed in this study, *Dora the Explorer’s* identity moves in the spectrum of a dialectical continuum of ambiguity, in which at times this ambiguity can be hegemonic, such as when her language and culture is marketed to sell toys, books, and other material goods for profit. Her identity also can become a decolonized moment and practice of resistance, in which Dora’s mug shot (Figure 1) is taken up as a representation of the violence that happens to immigrants and these same immigrants and children of immigrants say “enough is enough,” through reframing the image. Also important to this discussion here is the often “downplayed” heterogeneity of Latina/o communities. Davila (2001) rightly explains how *Heterogeneity* is consistently downplayed or else subject to a range of “knowledges” for its management and containment according to marketing needs and requirements (p. 80).

As with other ethnicities, Latina/o communities cannot be lumped into a single category. It is important to note, then, that the identity of such a heterogeneous group cannot be limited to an essentialized ‘Latina/o’ label or representation. Thus, an essentialized notion of “Latindad” is also problematic and requires critique when utilized as an all-encompassing umbrella term—without interrogating the inherent contradictions of identity politics, which surround it. More specifically, where would an Indigenous consciousness be found in such a label? In reference to *Dora the Explorer*, Guidotti-Hernández (2007) states “Dora’s ambiguous ethnic and national identity reflects the deliberate choices of her creators” (p. 215). Thus, this analysis of such
ambiguity puts into account identity politics, which are illustrated through the different episodes of this program. As Giroux (1994) explains: “Identity politics covers a complex and diverse terrain of theoretical positions and discourses concerned with questions of subjectivity, culture, difference, and struggle” (p. 34). Many who have arrived, or were born, in the United States might choose to identify through political, nationalist, or religious inclinations. Identity politics is then a form of agency practiced in different ways, while interrogating its positionality and historical specificity. In light of this statement, Angharad Valdivia (2005) argues that

The marketplace seeks to resolve the unstable and tension-filled situation of hybridity [italics added] through the construction of a syncretic identity, which can in turn be marketed as a commodified style (p. 310).

Thus, the concept of heterogeneity is useful to problematizing how the marketplace works to colonize the overriding attention of the majority of a population, by making these representations ambiguous, yet familiar. As Valdivia also states: “[a]mbiguity is by far the most common representation of hybridity in mainstream media, and this maps out onto representations.” The market ultimately uses, as Davila (2001) notes, ambiguity to essentialize a group of people in order to profit from them. This plainly illustrates that, as it was noted, “[t]he current impact of U.S. commercial television can be traced to an evolving marketing strategy that has played upon the public susceptibility to closed-minded stereotypes” (Berry & Asamen 1993, p. 153). And this, in many ways, translates to a false notion of multiculturalism and social acceptance of Latina/o communities in the United States In order to read what is presented critically, we need to become equipped with tools that will assist us in studying difference within the media as text. These media texts and their meanings, then, can vary in form. Yet, one effective approach to reading issues of power and difference, particularly with respect to media constructed bilingual, bicultural representations, is critical media literacy.
Critical Media Literacy

Critical media literacy (CML) is used to create a venue where the child has the opportunity to talk about, interrogate, and disrupt, what is viewed on television, in order to make empowering choices in everyday life. CML is a method by which educators and teachers, as well as parents, invest their time in becoming literate in what is being presented in their surroundings, such as, television, books, radio, and billboards. Becoming literature about culture is carried out by interrogating different meanings and questioning who produces these programs and for what purpose. From this perspective, meaning making becomes a crucial part of watching television; in order to make meanings, one therefore must interrogate the consequences of representations. In regards to ‘media and education,’ the process of meaning making is vital to unraveling the different discourses at play.

David Sholle and Stan Denski (1995) argue that “[t]he media (including its structures of production, distribution, economics, policy, technologies, etc.), media education at all levels, and critical literacy, each exists as a site of struggle across the terrain of contemporary cultural politics in the United States” (p. 8). Thus, the production and distribution of such ‘shows’ are important to consider, because they relate to both economy and policy-making. In this case, economy, education, and policy are intertwined with language, culture, and literacy. In the following chapters, I will illustrate the interconnectivity of such concepts through an analysis of Dora the Explorer. It is undeniable that a border zone is at play.

Economically speaking, cartoons may be seen as marketing ‘bait’ for children to become consumers via their parents. Pedagogically, children’s television programming can also be seen as supplemental to the education received in school. Politically, television is used to inform the viewer of happenings, both locally and globally. In addition, policy is also driven by many of the
competing ideologies represented by the media. For example, the viewer is persuaded by what he or she watches on television; his or her point of view, and where she or he stands on a given political issue is influenced by television. Thus, it is crucial that children, as Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo (1987) assert, become literate in the process of reading the word and the world. Moreover, they link this to “a theory of cultural production”:

For the notion of literacy to become meaningful it has to be situated within a theory of cultural production and viewed as an integral part of the way in which people produce, transform, and reproduce meaning. (p. 142)

Children view cartoons as a form of entertainment, and the benefit of educational programs is that the child learns while being entertained. However, what we find in *Dora the Explorer*, is a form of literacy that translates to a palatable multiculturalism. Cameron McCarthy (2005) argues that “powerful tropes such as ‘multiculturalism’ have become reconfigured “through a proliferation of images and practices into a normalized, non-politically charged discourse that assume[s] that ethnic minority communities [are] homogenous and somehow representative of an authentic and unified culture” (p. 154). Similarly, Henry Giroux (2005) posits that “[m]ulticulturalism is generally about Otherness, but is written in ways in which the dominating aspects of white culture are not called into question and the oppositional potential of difference as a site of struggle is muted” (p. 89). Moreover, if educators and/or parents want children to become more critical and conscious of their surroundings, then they need to demand that the school environment become a place where the child can critique and learn how to be critical, not only in school but in other settings as well.

David Buckingham (1993) states “Television, it is argued, exerts an extremely powerful and predominantly negative influence, particularly on children: it is held to be ‘addictive,’ harmful to mental health and personal relationships, and a cause of social unrest and
disintegration” (p. 21). For Giroux (1996), “[c]hildren’s culture is a sphere of entertainment, advocacy, and pleasure that meet to construct conceptions of what it means to a child occupying a combination of gender, racial, and class positions in society, positions through which one defines oneself in relation to a myriad of others” (p. 89). Both of these perspectives make it clear that television is viewed as a potentially harmful socializing medium for children. This points to the importance of teachers and parents’ efforts to engage children’s popular culture, in order to become more critical of its language, its representations, its persuasiveness and seduction of children, whether this entails learning a language, to count, to knit, to buy, to consume, to read, or to simply view for ‘entertainment.’

Giroux’s (1996) research on Disney as a commercial empire echoes many of the concerns raised here with respect to Viacom/Nickelodeon’s program, *Dora the Explorer*. However, these three networks do not compare to the $22 billion empire, an empire in which Disney profits from “products found in box office movies, home videos, theme parks, hotels, sport teams, retail store, classroom instructional films, CD’s, television programs, and family restaurants” (p. 92). Although the TV network profits are not close in numbers to the Disney Empire, they nevertheless are infused with an insidious consumerism that permeates children’s lives in the guise of alternative educational content. Hence, Giroux (1996) argues that the examination of children’s culture is necessary in order to comprehend the different power structures that are found outside of the more traditional pedagogical sites, such as schools and other sites of ‘high’

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5 The last suggestion is what makes me wary about television. Is there true ‘entertainment’ and leisure when watching television? When do children break from being entertained to being critical of what they are watching, and what are the limits? These questions might not be answered through this study but are questions to keep in mind.
thus, it is important not to privilege ‘high’ culture sites but to engage popular culture (such as, video games, internet sites, televisual cartoons, and films) critically as venues where an immense amount of knowledge can be gained.

Cartoons such as *Dora the Explorer* then are important to watch and critique, given that children and youth are significantly shaped, both politically and pedagogically, by the television programs they consume. Television is a critical medium that must be considered with respect to children’s lives. Television programs hold enough credibility within society that the child (viewer) is directly and indirectly socialized about who she or he is or should be and how he or she should look, walk, talk, and dress. Television is also political, in the sense that these students are learning about what is “right” and “wrong” and how democracy, agency, and even citizenship works, but it is nevertheless steeped in the murky contradictions of a consumer-oriented educational process.

Media and popular culture appeal to all children, regardless of whether they come from the same cultural background of the program they are viewing or not. As such, we come to the question of human agency and “to the ethos of a facile consumerism. This speaks to a media apparatus in which the past is filtered through appeals to cultural differences, and social struggles” (Giroux 1996, p. 91). Keeping this in mind, we must become more astute about what children are viewing on TV, which requires that adults view programs with them. As educators, parents, and community members, we are responsible not simply for critiquing the programs, but also for engaging with the historical, political, educational, and economic implications that arise from their consumption.

As we become more conscious of the implications and potential consequences of children's TV viewing, and hence their supplementary education to regular school learning, this
also requires that educators and parents act upon them. By creating a venue for critical media literacy in the classroom, the student, as well as the educator, can move beyond simply teaching and learning to read and write, but rather toward a critical understanding of reading and writing and media as another form of text. Parents and child caregivers can utilize media as outlets to communicate and connect with their children. Media are sources of literacy that can be used to create a scenario in which the child describes what they are watching, critically deconstructs what is happening, and predicts outcomes for the characters or personas they are viewing. The parent can facilitate this conversation by asking questions and making room for the child to ask their own questions. Critical media literacy thus can become a practice in schools and at homes.

Freire and Macedo (1987) argue that “[f]or the notion of literacy to become meaningful it has to be situated within a theory of cultural production and viewed as an integral part of the way in which people produce, transform, and reproduce meaning” (p. 142). In addition, Buckingham (1993) insists that textual literacy is not all that shapes a person. Similar to Freire and Macedo, he advocates for a more critical and conscious notion of literacy. Within such a notion of literacy, we can see how multicultural cartoons hold different layers of meaning, depending on who the viewer is and for what purpose the viewer is watching a program. In the last few decades, “literacy” has become a heavily contested terrain, when considered within the context of political and economic shifts towards globalization.

Due to these shifts and the rapid growth of ethnic populations in the United States, there is a need to advocate for new pedagogical methods that will assist students to become more critical of their historical and cultural development, as well as the institutional contexts in which they exist. It is for this reason that Darder (1998) insists that “[i]t is impossible to arrive at an emancipatory politics of biculturalism without questions of cultural consciousness and
knowledge derived from lived experiences receiving a rightful place within critical discourses on
culture of difference” (p. 133). Thus, border pedagogy and, more specifically, a critical bicultural
pedagogy (to be discussed more fully in the next chapter), seem viable conceptual frameworks,
particularly in efforts to meet the educational needs of Latina and Latino students and other
racialized students who must navigate across subordinate and dominant worldviews in the
process of their survival. A critical bicultural pedagogy, with its Freirian underpinnings, has the
potential to serve as the foundation for a critical media literacy, which can potentially create a
more democratic and critically conscious educational process for all children, specifically
bicultural children.

Summary

It is without a doubt that concerns and perspectives held by cultural studies and critical
pedagogy scholars remain influential in important ways. In the process, Chicana/o studies and
cultural studies, critical media literacy and cultural studies, critical media literacy and critical
pedagogy, can all be brought into conversation. By so doing, a theoretical and practical place is
forged from which cultural studies theorists and critical pedagogy educators can bridge
understandings. These two schools of thought can inform one another and create new paradigms,
in which disenfranchised populations can be placed at the center of the discourse.

As theorists, researchers, and educators we must deepen our understanding of
representations, which do not always serve the interests of racialized populations. Therefore it is
important to unveil how racialized populations are often shown in the media as different or
“other,” and just as often, as threats to mainstream society. Nonetheless, within cultural studies,
Chicana/o cultural studies, and critical media literacy, there is room to engage disabling
representations that deem communities inferior and create a critical moment to move us beyond the stereotypical. In the same manner, we can critique mainstream media outlets where difference is falsely celebrated, yet sold as ‘multicultural’ or pedagogical authenticity.

Differences and representations are key concepts that will continue to be discussed through the following chapters, as they are both closely linked to identity formation, media, and education. I chose to use these two conceptual points of reference, in order to understand them as they apply to the field of cultural studies, media representation, and education. Both of these concepts flow from these different fields of study, which can help one understand more readily how the notion of difference and the politics of representation affect marginalized communities differently. In this study, the politics of difference and the politics of representation are central to positioning *Dora the Explorer* within a critical context where a discourse of borderlands is possible. In the following chapter I engage more substantively the issue of borderlands and border pedagogy, in an effort to integrate a politics of difference in my examination of media production aimed at bilingual and bicultural children.
Chapter 3
Border Theories, Borderlands, and Border Pedagogy

Introduction

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 81).

At an early age I became aware of the need for a bilingual education that could offer a humanizing pedagogical experience. In first grade, I remember lining up with other fellow classmates in order to walk to Mr. Alvariño’s classroom, our “ESL/Bilingual” class. Our teacher, Ms. Miller, would call out our names and ask us to line up in a straight line in order to walk to another bungalow classroom. There was a feeling of inferiority, embarrassment, and shame that would always take over my body when she would call my name. I envied those who did not have their names called and remained in their classroom, their home, and never had to walk to Mr. Alvariño’s class. I did not understand why some of us had to walk over to an ESL classroom, when many of us had Spanish surnames and had spoken both languages since we were born. Different questions would come to my mind that still haunts me to this day.

At the age of six, I was very much aware of the tracking system and the feeling of being marginalized. I tried to prove myself every time. I wanted my teachers to know that I understood and could speak English. But my name was already on that list, and there was not much I could have done to change that. In Mr. Alvariño’s classroom we would take our seat with his own “ESL” students, while the “English” students would form a line and walk to Ms. Miller’s classroom. I imagine that all of Mr. Alvariño’s students who stayed would have wanted to be called to walk to Ms. Miller’s classroom. I recall reading books with headphones; the narrator would pronounce the English word while I repeated it (phonics-practices popular in the 1980’s).
Was this a bilingual or ESL classroom? Or was it an English learning boot camp? Other activities would involve playing games that would help teach bilingual lessons. The ultimate goal of such exercises was for us to become English proficient. At the end of the “ESL” lesson we would all take out our reduced lunch tickets\(^6\) and walk over to the cafeteria where we would be reunited with our teacher.

Questions that I can still vaguely remember twenty-three years later include: Why was I viewed as different when we were all coming from similar backgrounds? Why was it assumed that because my mom checked the “Spanish” box to indicate the language spoken at home, it meant that I did not speak English? And, why was I in a classroom with most of the new immigrant students when I was born in the United States? Thus, questions of identity, class, citizenship, and belonging were all embedded within me at a very early age. I loved my classmates and had a high regard for my teachers; however, these questions and the feelings imposed on my mind and body became markers of the inequalities and adversities I faced as a child, markers that children continue to face today at an early age due to culture, class, language, gender, citizenship, and geographic location.

I am an advocate of a bilingual education that engages first languages as an asset rather than a deficit to one’s identity. My formal bilingual education fell short in making my bilingualism an asset, yet I value the attempt to create a bilingual space within the classroom. My

\(^6\) The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children each school day. The program was established under the National School Lunch Act, signed by President Harry Truman in 1946 (referenced from: http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch/).
pedagogy in the playground is what I can best recall as being a site where my bilingualism was affirmed and accepted. My friends and I would speak both Spanish and English on the playground, lunch area, afterschool, and at our homes. We would talk about telenovelas (soap operas in Spanish television programming) and cartoons. When speaking about telenovelas, I remember, we would speak in Spanish; we would recall our best scenes and predict what would happen with so-and-so. We would also act out our favorite scenes and talk about our favorite actresses and actors. Telenovelas were part of our popular culture, as were televised cartoons on our local networks. Popular culture was a vehicle to speak in our language and by default it was where our bilingualism was accepted, enriched, and valued.

The community I grew up in was predominantly Mexican. That same community today continues to be a predominantly immigrant Mexican community. Due to the predominance of a Mexican population in this neighborhood, Spanish was a language spoken daily among teachers, students, and community members. Yet, the curriculum we were subjected to taught us language through the use of phonics and placed little value on the languages we spoke. This practice was an example of how Spanish and English were separated from our whole being, making our schooling experience fragmented in the classroom; while on the playground, we were whole with our differences, speaking both languages happily, creatively, and freely.

I lived this experience in the early 1980s, yet it is constantly relived every time an anti-bilingual or anti-immigrant bill is being debated in the courts (CA Proposition 187 and Proposition 227; Colorado Amendment 31; Arizona Proposition 203; and most recently Arizona SB 1070). This experience is also relived through the research and literature I have engaged with to write this chapter. It causes pain to remember, although this pain is what has given me passion to pursue higher education and to acknowledge it assists me in the healing process. In her entry,
Childhood memories, Lourdes Díaz Soto (2001) shares how many of her graduate bicultural students “relayed how [their] childhood experiences have led directly towards a passionate pursuit of equity and social justice. But mostly [they] allowed [their] narrative imagination draw critical linkages to [their] praxis” (p. 110). Much of what drives my research is due to my schooling experiences and my lived pedagogies.

Alienation, humiliation, and the process of ‘othering’ is what encompass many experiences of schooling for children who are considered to be “non-mainstream,” “bilingual/bicultural,” and “English Language Learners.” Students who are labeled even before they enter school are tracked and placed in groups that school administrators perceive are “best” for their academic development. This process of tracking is accomplished through the use of restrictive language practices and standardized testing and/or language tests. These educational practices limit the capability and creativity of students, rather than encouraging them to succeed in whatever they are interested in and capable of accomplishing. The following section underlines some of these limits.

Restrictive Language Initiatives

In the past decade, several states have passed initiatives that restrict language practices, fostering anti-bilingual and anti-immigrant sentiments. In 1998 California passed Proposition 227, and two years later Arizona also passed an identical initiative, Proposition 203. The only difference was that Arizona made it more difficult to obtain waivers, “and the threat of lawsuits is aimed at administrators—not at teachers like in California” (Gutierrez, et al., 2002, p. 331). California’s Proposition 227 and Arizona’s Proposition 203 initiatives included the following mandates:
1. Require all public school instruction be conducted in English

2. Requirements may be waived if parents or guardian show that a child already knows English, or has special needs, or would learn English faster through alternate instructional technique.

3. Provides initial short-term placement, not normally exceeding one year, in intensive sheltered English immersion programs for children not fluent in English.

4. Appropriates $50 million per year for ten years funding English instruction for individuals pledging to provide personal English tutoring to children in their community.

5. Permits enforcement suits by parents and guardians (CA Secretary of State, Primary 98, Proposition 227, accessed 4/17/2010)

The targeted populations of these propositions are primarily immigrant children.

Immigrant children are presented as a threat to the equality of schooling in California and Arizona. Immigrant children are also seen as those who need to be “saved” by assisting them in learning English. Supporters of English-only legislation use the rhetoric of serving and saving the immigrant child from educational failure as justifications for initiating that legislation. English-only supporters claim that by learning English and only speaking English, immigrant children will better fit into the mainstream society and be accepted. However, learning English often leads to losing their first language, as they are expected to assimilate into English more rapidly.

There are many upsetting details linked to these propositions; however, one that is highlighted in this chapter is the denial of students’ lived pedagogy and epistemologies, regardless of what language is spoken at home. “English for the Children,” as California’s Proposition 227 was titled, became a way to protect a way of life and a response to the threat of a rising Latino and Asian population in California. Spanish and other languages were, and are still seen, as a threat to the dominant concept of the nation (Crawford, 2000). As Lucy Tse (2001) explains, “Not only is the unity of U.S. society being threatened, according to proponents, so too
is English as the national language” (p. 3). In Tse’s study, ten of the speeches she analyzed warned that “if English is not actively preserved as the national language, then another language—such as Spanish—is likely to take its place” (p. 3).

Students who have a first language other than English develop formative cognitive, social, cultural, spiritual, and political knowledge in their own language before they even enter school. This phenomenon should be viewed as a valuable asset and encouraged in the learning process, rather than be reprehended and reproached. Yet, rhetoric of anti-bilingual laws did not directly speak against immigrant populations or their languages; instead, it insisted that all children have the right to learn English, as if they were not doing this before the proposition. As Crawford explains, “English for the Children…established a false choice in voters’ minds: Either teach students the language of the country or give them bilingual education” (Crawford, 2000, p. 106). California’s Proposition 227 and Arizona’s Proposition 203 are examples of the dismissal of children’s languages, and additionally, the dismissal of their identity. However, these propositions were rhetorically presented, and in so doing they appropriated the language of pro-immigrant and bilingual education advocates, which ironically assisted anti-immigrant proponents in successfully passing the initiative.

In Conversations: Sounds American: The consequences of new reform on English language learners, the article by Gutierrez, et al., (2002), examines the conclusions reached by different studies conducted by pro-bilingual educators and discusses the negative impact that English-only policies have on bilingual and bicultural students. Moreover, the authors argue, “Without doubt, the elimination of the students’ home language from the learning process has had profound and negative consequences on the viability of democratic schooling in the 21st century” (Gutierrez, et al., 2002, p. 329).
In addition to the propagation of anti-bilingual propositions, there was an increase in standardized curriculum, standardized testing and defined reading programs, which exacerbated the negative impact of these propositions (Gutierrez et al.). Tse (2001) states, “We also need to keep in mind that although standardized tests provide important information about student achievement, there are cognitive and linguistic abilities less susceptible to pencil-and-paper measures” (p. 23). Eugene Garcia also expresses concern about the overall effect of these initiatives in his interview with Professor Gutierrez, “They are subtractive in nature and ignore the linguistic resources these students bring to the classroom, and they are out of alignment with responsive learning attributes of programs that work well for these students” (Gutierrez, et al., 2002, p. 330).

In addition to these troubling pedagogical practices, it was observed that the least prepared teachers were sent to schools with high English learners,\(^7\) which meant that the inexpert pedagogical practices of these inexperienced teachers created an even more detrimental learning context for students and their schooling as whole. These practices are an example of reductionist practices that Luis C. Moll (1986) details in *Writing as communication: Creating strategic learning environments for students*. He explains pedagogical justifications often used to support reductionist practices:

When faced with LEP children, usually at different levels of English-language fluency, the rationale makes it seem quite reasonable for teachers to group children by fluency and adjust the curriculum accordingly, usually starting with the teaching of the simplest skills—at least until the children know sufficient English to benefit from more advanced instruction. Of course, learning English will take some time, and the students may fall so far behind academically that failure is guaranteed. That risk seems unavoidable to those who advocate this approach (p. 103).

\(^7\) Limited English Proficiency (LEP)—the deficient term often used in the literature.
While conducting research in a bilingual community, Moll (1986) observed how students serve as interpreters and negotiators in their communities for their parents. For example, most of these students assisted their monolingual Spanish-speaking parents in paying bills or completing school related paperwork. These findings were similar to those in Tse’s (2001) study,

What students are able to do in real-life situations give us another indication of their skills. A good example of a skill that many immigrant students have but that is generally untapped by standardized test is ‘language brokering,’ the interpretation and translation bilingual people conduct on behalf of others. For many of these students their education is a means of survival (p. 23).

Moll’s (1986) research also entailed creating a space for teachers to explore new ways of bridging English language education with critical thinking skills, rather than watering down the curriculum. This research was in collaboration with teachers who were working with English Language Learners. Teachers assigned their students a research topic that entailed interviews, research, gathering data, sorting of data, and writing a report. The theme for the student’s report was “bilingualism.” It demonstrated the enthusiasm of both the teacher and the student. The students were given a set of questions they would take out into the community, in order to poll the views held by community members of bilingualism. For example, some of these questions included: “What language do you speak at home? What language do you read and write best? Would you be willing to take classes to become bilingual?” (p. 107). It was reported that students were enthusiastic about a research project that allowed them to go out into their community and learn about others’ opinions on bilingualism. Above all, their enthusiasm was connected to a sense of value they felt from the teacher and their peers. They were not only learning English, but they were learning important writing skills that would further their education. Thus, their bilingualism was acknowledged as an asset rather than a detriment.
However, as Tse (2001) explains “Monolingualism in the United States is too common and true bilingualism so rare that it is difficult for the public to grasp the concept of ‘additive bilingualism,’ the learning of a second language without losing the first” (p. 43). The previous assignment called for students to ask the questions in English in order to practice their oral skills, and later to translate these findings into text in order to practice their writing. What the teacher and researcher found was that “extracurricular sources for the development of writing” are useful (Moll, 1986, p. 107). Such approaches recognize the student’s capacity to learn and simultaneously strengthen her/his second language skills, while learning how to conduct research and countering any sense of shame associated with their bilingualism.

In order to create instructional change, Moll (1986) proposes that researchers and teachers working together can explicitly shape instruction; however, student and family input is also considered valuable and necessary to this collaboration. Thus, while we are faced with propositions, standardized testing, inadequate teacher preparation, and most of all, ideological and pedagogical differences of how to teach children, teachers are also set up for failure. Yet, there is hope that teachers and researchers can become creative in order to best prepare the student whether bilingual or not (Darder, 2012, 2004; 2002; Darder & Uriarte, 2011; Crawford, 2000; 1995; Moll, Saez, & Dworin, 2001; Nieto, 2005; Tse, 2001). However, Moll’s study can be viewed as a special case, in that it takes dedicated teachers and school districts to acknowledge these students’ capacity to learn English while maintaining their home language—something which, unfortunately, most do not.

Tse (2001) insists that “Learning English while maintaining the heritage language is perhaps the easiest and most efficient way to achieve bilingualism, and being bilingual carries advantages in many domains” (p. 48). According to Tse, most studies have shown that students
who are bilingual have higher aspirations to obtain higher education, as opposed to those who are monolingual in either Spanish or English classes, solely. Tse (2001) also states,

[P]sychologists have found evidence that bilinguals have more creativity and better problem-solving skills that monolinguals. These researchers suggest that bilinguals have an advantage because they have more than one way of thinking about a given concept, making them more “divergent” thinkers and more effective problem solvers (p. 48).

Hence, an approach that values home languages as tools for socialization into society has been found to be more effective in meeting the comprehensive needs of English Language Learners. By acknowledging students’ home languages, educators are better able to create a sound pedagogical space where not only their language skills can flourish but also these students can succeed academically.

**Politics of Difference**

The politics of difference is essential to understanding the education of Latina/o bilingual and bicultural children in the United States. Difference, as explained by Iris Marion Young (1990), can become essentialized as a stereotype for those who support assimilation or those who are members of privileged groups. Notions of difference here are predominantly discussed with respect to linguistic difference. However, although practices related to difference are practiced in a variety of ways, these are overwhelmingly practiced daily in the education of racialized children, specifically immigrant Latina/o children. These practices can occur even when *citizenship* cannot be determined by language or skin color.

The question of difference is, thus, central to theorizing about bilingual, ESL (English as Second Language), ELL (English Language Learners) and bicultural students, due to the undeniable categorization that occurs within the schooling process. Categorizations would be helpful if they acknowledged students’ differences, and the pedagogy served to build on their
lived histories outside of schools. However, traditional categorizations as acts of racialization track students into limited spaces, such as vocational schools and incarceration, while restricting their creativity and social growth. Often, these students are stigmatized, alienated, and seen as the “other” in the classroom as a result of many variables, but primarily because of the way they speak and look. Thus, by understanding the politics of difference within the process of schooling we can move toward an education in which differences are not simply celebrated as “multiculturalism,” without real interrogation into the structures of difference, but rather differences are interrogated in the interest of a liberatory pedagogy (Darder, 2012; 1995; McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood, & Park, 2005).

Young (1990) argues that, “Essentializing difference expresses a fear of specificity and a fear of making permeable the categorical border between oneself and the others” (p. 170). Yet, making the categorical border between oneself and others porous also points to what Henry Giroux (1991) calls a politics of difference. In his writing on education, Giroux (1991) argues for a politics of cultural difference. A politics of cultural difference as posited by Giroux is an attempt to learn to live within difference in a way in which differences are readily acknowledged, rather than dismissed. When a politics of cultural difference is at work in the classroom, Giroux (1991) argues that it offers "the opportunity for raising questions about how the categories race, class and gender are shaped within the margins and centre of power, it also provides a new way of reading history as a way of reclaiming power and identity” (p. 509). Thus, a politics of cultural difference practiced in the classroom can lead to a profound understanding of how power and identity work and ultimately can assist those who feel powerless and stigmatized to critique and engage asymmetrical power relations.

It cannot be assumed that students are not engaging issues of difference or that they do
not understand the politics of difference. Often, students who might not have the language to name their oppression can describe it only in terms familiar to their families and communities. This is where the bilingual/bicultural teacher is needed and where a critical pedagogy is helpful. As Darder (1991) states, “Critical pedagogy relegates to critical reason the possibility of establishing the conditions of discourse for the raising and reconciling of controversial claims related to knowledge and power” (p. 92). If power and knowledge are always of central concern, then critical pedagogy can assist students to question and challenge notions of difference by developing an understanding of the power relations that exist within the classroom.

Giroux’s (1991) article, Democracy and the discourse of cultural difference, engages a politics of cultural difference through a politics of border pedagogy (p. 502). In the article, Giroux (1991) provides a theoretical lens for engaging notions of cultural differences, yet he resists creating a totalizing theory. Instead, he moves toward a theory that Homi Bhabha calls “a space of negotiation and ‘translation’… a theoretical discourse that creates a cartography for creating new boundaries in order to explore, negotiate, and translate between new and old questions, problems, and objects of knowledge” (p. 507). This is an example of how border crossings are created through an understanding of the spaces where power and knowledge both collide and coexist. And, while a border crossing perspective may be necessary for all students, it is even more crucial for bilingual and bicultural students, who must struggle to develop a sense of autonomy within the dominant context of schooling. Hence, the concept of border crossings can lead to an acknowledgement of bilingual and bicultural students’ language and culture via a critical bicultural pedagogy that embraces the border as a place of consciousness and creativity.

In the same spirit, a critical politics of cultural difference functions against the erasure and elimination of difference (Giroux, 1991). Instead, such a perspective encourages educators to
become open to the differences that students bring into the classroom and to learn to better understand and live with these differences. It is a matter of being respectful of one another, to recognize the power relations in the classroom and elsewhere, to live with one’s own differences, and to learn to exist in this world and let others exist. These differences include, but are not limited to, gender, sexuality, race, class, ethnicity, and language. Additionally, Alejandra C. Elenes (2003) cautions how, “It is also necessary for a theory of difference to deconstruct and decentralize white patriarchal norms from which difference is constituted as deviance” (p. 202). Too often, students’ cultural differences are seen as dangerous and deviant. This perception of difference can be traced to colonized notions of the “other,” which result in mistrust of, misrepresentation of, and violence to those deemed less legitimate within society. The erasure of cultural difference is even found at work within multicultural education, where the “other” may be celebrated and exoticized, while simultaneously erasing the importance of difference, particularly as it exists within disenfranchised communities.

It is useful to note that even though there has been a move in the past three decades toward multicultural education and an enriching curriculum, we find ourselves now in a new era, where there is greater standardized testing; elimination of funds for programs that once assisted bicultural students, and more rigid standardized curriculum used in the classroom (Darder, 2012, 2002; 1995; Gutierrez, et al., 2002; McCarthy, Giardina, Harewood, & Park, 2005; Moll, 1986). This is unfortunate, because in the process differences are often obscured or negated; thus, differences are unable to serve as important sites of learning, where teachers and students can draw from their lived experiences to respond to literature, media, and other pedagogical tools more critically. In contrast, integrating a politics of difference and cultivating a desire for different perspectives based on different life and social experiences can serve as a site of
knowledge that can be used to interrupt and challenge nativist ideologies.

Notions of difference with respect to bicultural and disenfranchised populations are significant due to the social consequences that these students face in and outside of schools. For example Darder (1991) argues that,

Bicultural students must find opportunities to engage in classroom dialogues and activities that permit them to explore the meaning of their lived experiences through the familiarity of their own language. But also important to their development of social consciousness and their process of conscientization is the awareness of how language and power intersect in ways that include or exclude students of color from particular social relationships (p. 103).

In this case, Darder (2012, 1991) is calling for a pedagogy that reflects students’ lives in ways that assists them in negotiating social relationships of difference, by which they are often challenged solely on the basis of their language, the color of their skin, or their community of origin (this includes U.S. born children).

With respect to the politics of difference, language debates in the United States are especially heated conversations. The English-only movement in the past decades has become an undeniable assimilative force that not only affects bicultural and bilingual students academically, but also affects them emotionally, physically, and spiritually. An imposed English-only curriculum undermines the capacity for students to engage difference, while learning how to navigate through various sites of power. For many bicultural students, particularly those from immigrant and disenfranchised communities, the message is to learn English in order to be accepted into “American” culture. But, to fully be accepted into the U.S. mainstream requires bicultural students to deny their first language and assimilate. Assimilation is a process of conquest that neglects people’s primary language and culture. Instead of building on students’ home language and culture, it is expected that through the assimilation process students erase and ‘cleanse’ their identities from any difference. Those who support English-only legislation
believe that they are doing a service to disenfranchised communities, by ‘inviting’ them to participate in the mainstream and learning what they consider to be the national language, namely English.

Metaphorically speaking, Lucy Tse (2001) states, “English is a badge of prestige, a membership card for entry into the mainstream. English is one of the primary keys to fitting in and being accepted” (p. 19). Hence, students are taught that English is key to success in this country and that, by learning and speaking it correctly, they will be accepted into mainstream society. However, even when students do become fluent English speakers, there will be other differences that continue to position them as a possible threat to the nation. For example, Tse (2001) explains that

Whereas knowing English may bring prestige and acceptance, speaking another language—especially a low-status language—can do the opposite. The negative consequences of speaking a heritage language can range from experiencing shame for being different to facing racist or xenophobic reactions in school, work, or community. To sound different is to be different, especially for visible minorities who have physical characteristics that signal them as part of a minority group (p. 33).

Differences become not only a great concern in schooling, but also of concern to the nation as a whole. Schools are intended to (re)produce fragmented citizens and workers whose wholeness (politically, spirituality, physically, and emotionally) would otherwise present a threat to the nation\(^8\). Therefore, “Educating for difference, democracy and ethical responsibility is not

\(^8\) Citing bilingual nations with political instability, Huddleston claimed: “Bilingualism…has torn apart communities from Canada to Brittany, from Belgium to India. It expresses not a sense of tolerance but a demand for divisions…In countless places, differences in language have either caused or contributed significantly to political, social and economic instability. While the
about enshrining reverence in the service of creating passive citizens. It is about providing students with knowledge, capacities and opportunities to be noisy, irreverent and vibrant” (Giroux, 1991, p. 508).

The notion of difference should not serve to reproduce ‘otherness’ but rather, to create spaces of transformation and equity for those continuously marginalized and oppressed by asymmetrical structures of power. The notion of difference is at times celebrated as something that the mainstream culture ‘accepts’ and ‘tolerates.’ At the same time that this difference is accepted and tolerated, it is also essentialized and used to preserve hidden xenophobia. For example, Darder (2004) argues,

Underpinning nativist views are unexamined assumptions of the ‘‘other’’ as inferior and dangerous to the conservation of democratic life and the capitalist enterprise. As such, the ‘othering’ of cultures and languages outside of the mainstream has consistently burdened minority language populations to prove themselves as ‘decent human beings’ worthy and deserving of entrance into the inner sanctum of nation-state citizenship and the opportunities it affords (p. 233).

The ‘othering’ that Darder speaks of here is similar to the ‘difference’ that Young warns us about, when it is not genuinely positioned to engage with questions of social transformation and the liberation of disenfranchised communities.

For Chicanas/os and Latinas/os (this includes all indigenous and immigrant communities that are often not named, but which are encompassed within the use of these labels), ‘difference’ and the process of ‘othering’ is present in everyday practices and embedded in policies that serve to normalize their differences as ‘other.’ Furthermore, as explained by Darder (2004), “Key to nativist perceptions of Latino immigrants is the manner in which the process of racialization is

absence of language of difference does not guarantee that these problems will not occur, I believe that it does significantly reduce the chances that they will occur” (Tse, 2001, p. 2).
manifested through the suppression of linguistic rights and exclusionary practices that
formidably impact social welfare benefits, labor market participation, and educational
opportunities for Latino immigrants” (p. 233). Racialization is, thus, inherent in paradigms of
difference. As such, assimilative notions of difference, as Darder argues, only undermine the
cultural knowledge and personal histories that bilingual, ESL, ELL, and other bicultural students
bring to the classroom.

However, as Giroux (1991) contends, difference “does not [have to] become a marker for
deficit, inferiority, chauvinism or inequality; on the contrary, it opens the possibilities for
constructing pedagogical practices that deepen forms of cultural democracy that serve to enlarge
one's moral vision” (p. 509). In this case, if difference is accepted and understood as a way of life
and respect extended across differences, then educators might be able to both exist and teach
without borders. Until then, we must engage borders as sites of conflict and contradiction, as
well as possibility.

The Borderlands

Yet the struggle of identities continues, the struggle of borders is our reality still

When teaching bilingual/bicultural students, we find ourselves at the crossroads of
knowledge and borders of difference—physically, spiritually, and politically. These borders must
be understood both ideologically and literally. Hence, an understanding of borderlands and
border theory is helpful to understanding a politics of difference, because difference is what
creates borders and the phenomenon known as the borderlands.

Anzaldúa posits a theory of the borderlands as an important conceptualization and
epistemological devise for Chicana scholars writing about culture, identity, and language.
Borderlands and border theory are helpful analytical tools for those interested in making sense of disfranchised communities. Anzaldúa (1999) posits that, “A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants” (p. 25). By this definition, borderlands exist as a dialectical relationship between those in power and those oppressed. As Anzaldúa describes, it is a place that is continuous and, yet, always in transition. If borderlands are always in transition, then it is a place in which power can be transferred and where there are cycles of continuity that make room for growth within difference. Thus, difference is accepted as a way of life. Borderlands are also the place where new cultures are formed. Anzaldúa (1999) argues that “The U.S.-Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to from a third country-a border culture” (p. 25). Hence, a border culture exists via the existence of other cultures, and borderlands provide alternative ways of knowing how to live, survive, and transgress in this world.

It is obvious by Anzaldúa’s explanation of a border culture that pain results when the Third World and first world meet. However, due to this space for creating a new world, new languages, identities, and ways of knowing also come to life. A borderland, then, conceptually is not simply a place of refuge but an organic place of creativity, a cultural in between space that exists in neighborhoods, schools, and nations. Borderlands exist in writing, dialogue, and ways of living. Thus, the concept is captured in everyday thought and action. However, a borderland cannot solely be reduced to a single factor; it is a phenomenon that emerges from efforts to survive exploitation by, oppression by, and alienation within the nation and oppressive practices. As such, borderlands are cultural forms fueled by both survival and resistance. Anzaldúa
provokes us ways to think about borderlands in which a new mestiza consciousness can take place. As she states: “from this racial, ideological, cultural and biological crosspollinization, an 'alien' consciousness is presently in the making-a new mestiza consciousness, una conciencia de mujer. It is a consciousness of Borderlands” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 100).

Thus, physical borders are important to our understanding of borderlands as well. James Crawford (2000) rightly reminds us that

_Destruction of lands and livelihoods; the spread of consumerism, individualism and other Western values; pressures for assimilation into dominant cultures; and conscious policies of repression directed at indigenous groups—these are among factors threatening the world’s biodiversity as well as its cultural and linguistic diversity (p. 55)._

Linguistic and cultural differences are at risk when borderlands are inspected and policed, which is always the case with “unfamiliar” places. “The border is policed, accessed denied or permitted, always on the ground of reading, interpretation” (Michaelsen & Johnson, 1997, p. 22). This is a caution for those of us who are interested in theorizing about both the border and border crossings. We must be cautious to not essentialize the border, yet we must not take the borderlands for granted either. The fear is that we will become part of the process of policing of the borders, in our attempt to capture a glimpse or a snapshot of a way of living that is constantly changing, transforming.

Thus, we must ask, _why study the border? Why study or attempt to understand border crossings? And why invest our time to understanding the borderlands?_ When those in power are threatened by the difference of the borderlands, and when the borderlands are not defined anymore by holding those unwanted in one place, such as reservations and fenced borders, those in power create laws that define the differences of the “other” as threatening, alien, foreign, deviant and dangerous. In contrast, borderlands as a conceptual tool leads those invested in the betterment and safety of all people to look at borders and border crossings more closely and
humanely. This then leads us to understand why borderlands are formed and transformed for survival. For example, Crawford (2000) speaks to the external pressure felt at the borders of language.

More often language death is the culmination of language shift, resulting from a complex of internal and external pressures that induce a speech community to adopt a language spoken by others (p. 55).

Hence, language policies are extremely important to aspects of borderland conceptualizations. Language loss is not simply a recent phenomenon but a continuous practice of asymmetrical power. We cannot deny that even when there has been a threat of language loss, especially of disenfranchised communities, there has not been resistance to retain Indigenous languages. Anzaldúa’s work is, therefore, essential to our understanding of language and identity formation. Her seminal text, *La Frontera/Borderlands* stretches conceptually from the physical U.S.-Mexico border to the ideological and conceptual borders where knowledge, power, differences in epistemologies, styles of writing, sexuality, language, identity, and culture are intertwined.

Borders, according to Anzaldúa, are not simply imposed on people but rather transcend through textual and written artifacts. These borders are also carried on bodies and used as markers of identity, survival, and resistance. Moreover, *La Travesia* (or travesty) as she sees it is “For many mexicanos del otro lado, the choice is to stay in Mexico and starve or move north and live” (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 32). Hence, the borderlands cannot be essentialized as a place of harmony, for it is also a place of sorrow. The borderlands, then, is also an actual and metaphorical place of movement and transition.

Scholars have engaged border theory in order to conceptualize and strengthen their analysis of society and inequalities within it. Most recently, border theory has begun to become
an interdisciplinary approach, as opposed to solely being situated in the discipline of anthropology. One of the strongest contributors to this shift is anthropologist Renato Rosaldo’s (1993) work in *Culture and Truth: The remaking of social analysis*. In regard to pedagogy, Rosaldo states, “Classrooms then produce a range of feelings, from intimate to distant, and the feelings have to be addressed. In my experience such classrooms, even at their most uncomfortable, have produced student work of exceptional quality” (p. xiv-xv). Rosaldo’s call for a new social analysis is vital to the principles of border pedagogy.

**Border Pedagogy**

Borderlands theories can be applied to border pedagogy in order to decenter Eurocentric thought (Elenes, 2003, p. 206).

Border pedagogy, just as does border theory, works through articulations of power and difference, as well as ideological, physical, and metaphorical lenses of analysis. Giroux (1991), a critical educational theorists who has contributed to conceptualizing border theory, explains the category of the border in the following way, “The category of border signals in the metaphorical and literal sense how power is inscribed differently on the body, culture, history, space, land and psyche” (p. 510). Giroux, like other critical scholars, has borrowed from Anzaldúa’s work in order to deepen his own analysis of the border. Border in this sense is what determines ‘us from them’ and creates the differences discussed earlier. Giroux developed a critical understanding of borders within pedagogical practices, through his engagement of media and popular culture. For Giroux, border theory and a borderlands framework does not solely focus on visible borders (i.e. the U.S-Mexico Border, signs of do not enter/enter); rather, it also focuses on those borders that are lived within the daily experiences that cannot be easily ‘seen’ by those who exist outside of particular cultural exchanges and negotiations. Thus, border pedagogy becomes a different way
of theoretically and practically speaking about daily negotiations situated within a process of continuous negotiation, as well as the acceptance and rejection of different spaces. This praxis, I argue, has the sufficient latitude necessary to encompass the realities of the bicultural, bilingual child.

Border pedagogy moves away from traditional forms of pedagogy that perceive ethnic minority groups as homogenous and harmonious, without contradictions or critique and without room for transformation (i.e. static, apolitical, and ahistorical). Border pedagogy moves, instead, toward critical engagement, while attempting to transform the conditions of heterogeneous groups that live in a state of continuous border crossings. These border crossings are made metaphorically or literal in students’ lives, which must be recognized as a living pedagogy. Again, Rosaldo (1993) reminds us that “[s]uch cultural border zones are always in motion, not frozen for inspection” (p. 217).

Thus, if border zones are always in motion and cannot be frozen for inspection, how then can these moments be theoretically spoken about and engaged with? This is one of the challenges of border theory and border pedagogy. It cautions and alerts us to the fact that we cannot fall into a positivist way of looking at different data, practices, and ways of living. However, within a borderlands framework and border praxis, we can ultimately theorize about a moment in time, yet not fall into generalizations due to the continuous movement and transformation which is the subject of our study. This then anchors researchers in border theories and praxis to be ever vigilant of what, how, and why we are doing such research.

This is a particularly important consideration when conducting research on bilingual education and with bicultural populations. For example, due to the high demand on assessments No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the way this has affected especially public K-12, border
theories and practices can serve to highlight the need for greater participation with
disenfranchised communities in order to develop a theoretical and methodological lens that can
best serve these communities (Gutierrez, et al., 2002). Different forms of assessments related to
bicultural students’ academic development might be more easily formulated by integrating
border pedagogy. One example would be to not assume who is and who is not a bilingual and
bicultural student, but perhaps assuming that all students are in need of a culturally relevant
curriculum that is conscious of the differences that all students bring. Border pedagogy should
not be limited to classroom settings; rather, it should embark to include the study of other
pedagogical venues, such as media.

Border pedagogy, when in practice, can serve to engage different public venues. Giroux
(1991) argues, “Border pedagogy decenters as it remaps” (p. 511). However, Elenes (2003), in
Reclaiming the borderlands: Chicana/o identity, difference, and critical pedagogy, raises some
questions and concerns with regards to Giroux’s definition of border pedagogy when she writes,
“Giroux proposes that border pedagogy should create conditions for students to become border
crossers; however, he does not specify how the different ways in which students who are already
border crossers (and in some cases transgressors) can be worked out in these pedagogical
contexts” (p. 201). Subsequently, Elenes cautions us to be vigilant in how we define border
crossers, who we refer to as “students,” and whether border pedagogy can acknowledge the
histories of those who are born to generations of border crossers. Elenes refers here to the
bicultural child that enters the school system already living in-between different languages and
experiencing difference at an early age. Consequently, her concern is valid and further contends,
“In order for border pedagogy to avoid the reproduction of universalizing tendencies; it is
necessary to theorize difference further.” As Anzaldúa (1999) insists, “[f]or some of us, language
is a homeland closer than the Southwest—for many Chicanos today live in the Midwest and the East. And because we are a complex, heterogeneous people, we speak many languages” (p. 77). Hence, border pedagogy is a living pedagogy that is not simply practiced within school, but practiced daily in all aspects of our lives. Border pedagogy, thus, becomes a part of our constant resistance towards colonialism and patriarchy. It can also serve as resistance against the totalizing of peoples and the standardized curricula of school that suffocate the creativity out of our youth and teachers.

Additionally, as Freire and Macedo (1987) posit, “Literacy cannot be viewed as simply the development of skills aimed at acquiring the dominant standard language” (p. 142). As such, critical educators must become aware of the competing forces at work in the lives of bicultural students and consider their lived histories when teaching them. In concert with Anzaldúa (1999), Elenes (2003) and Freire & Macedo (1987), Giroux (2005) speaks to the bordered politics of education:

[Border pedagogy] also means understanding how fragile identity is as it moves into borderlands crisscrossed within a variety of languages, experiences, and voices [emphasis added]. There are no unified subjects here, only students whose multilayered and often contradictory voices and experiences intermingle with the weight of particular histories that will not fit easily into the master narrative of a monolithic culture. Such borderlands should be seen as sites for both critical analysis and as potential source of experimentation, creativity, and possibility (italics added, p. 23).

Hence, border pedagogy offers a place in which new languages, new cultures, and new possibilities are formed and transformed. Latino children in the United States live border pedagogy and, consciously and unconsciously, they are always negotiating and navigating two different worlds. Border pedagogy also offers a place in which ‘multiculturalism’ can be critiqued due to its multiple dimensions. Anzaldúa (1999) contends that “…the struggle of identities continues the struggle of borders is our reality still. One day the inner struggle will
cease and a true integration take place” (p. 85). The inner struggle that Anzaldúa notes here is what Elenes also challenges Chicanas/os to acknowledge in their efforts to practice a Chicana/o border pedagogy. For example, Elenes (2003) argues that “This movement would need to take into consideration the many contradictions and discontinuities within the Chicana/o subjects” (p. 204). Hence, as Elenes argues, advocates for a Chicana/o border pedagogy must tease out and interrogate those contradictions within Chicana/o communities in order to create a “rupture (explosion) of the neat dualistic axis of a visible enemy (white America, men, of capitalism, for example) to situations where the so-called enemy is not visible, but more ideological and discursive.”

Anzaldúa grapples with the struggle to interrogate and challenge the tensions and relations of power that are manifested in relationship to ones legitimacy as a bilingual person in the United States Anzaldúa’s words also signal the significance of biculturalism in the borderlands; a topic which merits closer examination. Bicultural children find themselves constantly “slipping” in and out of different languages (i.e. Spanish, English, and Spanglish). Students that live within the borderlands of language by being bilingual and bicultural are exposed to a different way of negotiating and surviving adversities.

As in my own personal narrative, the borderlands were found in the playground, at home, in other spaces where those considered ‘different’ were positioned with our own rules and our own ways of communicating. During recess, a borderland of sorts for many bicultural/bilingual children, we were free to talk with our imperfections, we corrected each other so we could all learn, some knew more than others but we were on the same playing field. Our experience was not humiliated or labeled; we were free to make mistakes and to explain however we best could. Sometimes this meant speaking in English or Spanish or a mixture of both. We were free to talk
about our parents, families, popular culture, homework, etc. To an extent, we were free. However, I cannot say that this is how all my friends felt specially those who had recently arrived from Mexico, South America, Central and or Latin America. The city I lived in was predominantly Mexican and Salvadorian with a small number of Asian and African American families. Our biculturalism was a lived experience that we all shared and had in common—our differences are what made us the same—making a politics of difference relevant to our development as bicultural and bilingual children.

A politics of cultural difference practiced in the classroom can lead to a profound understanding of how power and identity work and ultimately can assist those who feel powerless and stigmatized to critique and challenge the power relations that shape their existence. Furthermore, the acknowledgement of difference in the classroom can make transparent the underlying oppressive measures that deny educational equity to children of the borderlands.

Although a critical bicultural pedagogy precedes most discussions of border pedagogy, it nevertheless engages many of the themes and concerns encompassed by border pedagogy. Because of the inherent support for bilingualism and biculturalism in these pedagogical frameworks, it is important to have a theoretical framework and practice that can help us denounce the contradictions intrinsically present within traditional, English-only pedagogical measures. Such a framework is found in Darder’s (1991) conceptualization of biculturalism and critical bicultural pedagogy.
Critical Bicultural Pedagogy as Border Pedagogy

Biculturalism must be understood as a contested terrain of difference (Darder, 1991, p. 130).

Critical bicultural pedagogy holds many possibilities for addressing the academic needs of Latina/o children, who are negatively affected by anti-bilingual/bicultural and anti-immigrant legislations. Without a doubt, Proposition 227 in California, Proposition 203 in Arizona, and Article 13 in Colorado, all create enormous conflicts and tensions that bicultural/bilingual children must face in schools whether or not they fully understand the legislation or public policies that shape their classroom lives.

On May 19, 2010, for example, Univision (Spanish televised news program) broadcast a program in which a young student asking the first lady Michelle Obama what was going to happen to her mother because of her undocumented status. Children are aware of the inequalities and adversities that happen daily through media outlets, such as television news broadcasting. First lady Michelle Obama simply said they were working on solutions. How then can a teacher take this moment and support different levels of conversations with ten year olds (fourth graders), such as this student, about immigration, education, politics, and ultimately, human rights? I propose that a critical bicultural pedagogy offers a space in which intellectual and physical border crossings at work within schools such as this can be addressed.

The questions young children ask about such issues are valid and important to take seriously as they benefit our understanding of bicultural and marginalized communities. Given that undocumented children are worried about their own family’s future, discussions of legislation, such as Arizona’s SB 1070, need to be brought into the classroom and addressed, so that they can be critically interrogated with students. By doing so, children can begin to gain knowledge about how laws affect them as students, their families, and their communities.
Raising such discussions with families can assist them to better prepare themselves in ways that protect their families. Hence, within a critical bicultural pedagogy, the development of critical consciousness is closely associated with students developing their abilities to read power and move toward changing the conditions that confront them daily.

Darder (1991) brings together six principles in comprising an effective critical bicultural pedagogy in the classroom. Thus, a critical bicultural pedagogy:

1. “Is built on a theory of cultural democracy;

2. Supports a dialectical view of the world, particularly as it relates to the notion of culture and the bicultural experience;

3. Recognizes those forms of cultural invasions that negatively influence the lives of bicultural students and their families;

4. Utilizes a dialogical model of communication that can create the conditions for students of color to find their voice through opportunities to reflect, critique, and act on their world to transform it;

5. Acknowledges the issue of power in society and the political nature of schooling; and

6. Above all, is committed to the empowerment and liberation of all people” (p. 97)

Thus, critical bicultural pedagogy, along with aspects of border theory, notions of borderland, the politics of difference, the politics of representation, and border pedagogy can be effectively integrated into a conceptual framework for engaging the education of Latina/o children, in order to support their sense of social agency and their capacity for voice and participation in the larger society as both students and cultural citizens.

Summary

In order to counter disabling pedagogical practices, such as standardized testing and English-only measures, educators must remain ever vigilant of the manner in which
pedagogical practices impact the development of bilingual and bicultural students. Even when pedagogical practices are well intended, they must, nevertheless, be scrutinized critically and with an emancipatory approach before, during, and after their application. This chapter has considered the notion of difference, in order to examine the manner in which an understanding of border theory and border pedagogy can help address the needs of bicultural students. Similarly, critical bicultural pedagogy as an educational practice geared specifically to bicultural students has been shown to incorporate many of the salient issues raised by theories of the borderlands and border pedagogy. Moreover, this calls for a pedagogy that may not only serve bilingual bicultural students become fully integrated in schools, but one that also engages larger societal challenges in the hopes of creating a more just world, across our differences.
Chapter 4

Interpretive Method and Methodologies

This chapter illustrates three major interpretive methodologies relevant to and appropriate for use in this study. The discussion here comprises different epistemological approaches that help capture and interpret more effectively the animated cartoon, *Dora the Explorer*. These methodologies include a) cultural studies criticism, b) critical discourse analysis, and c) critical bicultural pedagogy. These methodologies create a new way of interpreting cartoons, highlighting important aspects related to identity, language, and culture. Rather than simply stating that *Dora the Explorer* is ambiguous, the concept allows the images to be interrogated with respect to their ambivalence in important ways. As such, questions of how, why, and who does this ambiguous identity serve become critical to the overall interpretation of the episodes and other media venues in this study.

The notion of ambiguity is important to this study in that different scholars have pointed to *Dora the Explorer’s* ambiguous identity in their work (Guidotti-Hernández, 2007; Molina Guzman & Valdivia, 2004; Carter, 2008). Hence, this study acknowledges a decade of *Dora the Explorer*, in which the politics of her ambiguity is everpresent in the cartoon episodes; scholarly articles, websites, and blogs written about Dora. This ambiguity is also apparent in the paradoic images created to encode different readings created in order to distort her identity or (re)present her identity as a Latina for their political or ideological purposes. This was apparent in the image earlier discussed in the dialogue with my niece Celeste and her friend Giovanni, circulated on the web in 2010 after the announcement of Arizona’s contraversial anti-immigrant bill SB 1070.

The study, thus, examines a ten-year trajectory of *Dora the Explorer*, 2000 to 2010. Dora, the main animated character of the show, is a seven-year-old Latina heroine that helps her friends
navigate the different landscapes found in the No-name Island. The namelessness of the island is critical to rendering the identity of Dora the Explorer and the other characters identities ambiguous and amorphous. In the study, I refer to this island as the No-name Island from here on, to keep this characteristic at the center of my discussion.

Guidotti-Hernández (2007) describes Dora, “She has light brown skin, dark brown eyes, and a voice bounding with endless enthusiasm” (p. 210). Her popularity among children is vast. “Frey (2004, C01) reported that ‘Dora is watched by 21 million viewers (adults and children) each month…and, of that total viewership, 3 million are Latino children ages 2 to 11. Derdeyn (2005) reported the program was viewed by 8.8 million children in North America and was broadcast in seventy-four countries in fifteen languages” (cited in Carter, 2008, p.77). Dora the Explorer is recognized globally and her popularity demonstrates how images from children’s programming can be readily spread and consumed in countries other than the United States. But, what is it about Dora the Explorer that makes her popular among children, parents, and educators? Is it her innocence? Her bilingualism? Her “culture”? Or her ambiguity?

What we know from Dora’s creators, Chris Gifford, Valerie Walsh Valdes, and Eric Weiner, is that she is a Latina child, living on an Island, the No-name Island. Caitlin Sanchez, born to Cuban American parents, performed the voice of Dora most recently. We can assume that this Island is Puerto Rico, given an episode about “El Coquí” (Estrada, 2006). El Coquí, is an amphibian that is only located in Puerto Rico, however this knowledge is never confirmed in the episode. Thus, only those that are culturally and historically knowledgeable of this information can encode this information and assume that it is Puerto Rico. For those viewers who have no idea of El Coquí’s story, they have no reference and can completely gloss over this cultural marker.
The producers have chosen intentionally to keep this ambiguous, so that Dora can morph into different cultures and travel through different borderlands, in order to make her visible, yet remain invisible due to the lack of specificity in her identity. This renders her identity interchangeable, without the grounding or specificity of national origin. Through other episodes, we learn she is from an island that can be situated in the Caribbean, but cultural references vary from Mexico, to South America, to Latin America, thus, making her an aggregated representative of all Latina/o communities. Her ambiguous identity is meant to intrigue, and so is emphasized throughout. Hence, one might theorize that it is this very ambiguity that generates her popularity, by making it possible for viewers, particularly Latina/o populations, to identify with Dora. A politics of ambiguity, as will be shown, is irrefutably present through the different border crossings, and borderlands tied to language, land, culture, and identity that she crosses in each episode.

Yet, despite Dora’s popularity, this seemingly ambiguous identity is also problematic. Her “Latina” identity is so ambiguous that it renders Latina/o identity as homogeneous and easily interchangeable, while the differences disappear or "melt away" from one episode to the other. However, it also conditions the public to encode Latina/o identity interchangeably, so that all who phenotypically resemble Dora (depending on the episode the viewer watches) are positioned as being from Mexico, Puerto Rico, or somewhere in South America. Moreover, the cartoon's representations suggest that all that are like Dora are Latina/o are immigrants. This question of (non)citizenship is apparent in the parody of Dora discussed earlier, which was circulated in connection to the SB 1070.

Although there has been an increasing number of Latina/o programming by way of Dora the Explorer and other children’s cartoons that attempt to teach Spanish and appreciation for the
Spanish language and Latina/o cultural diversity, the representation of Dora remains a favorite among children. Nevertheless, the creators of other cartoons, such “Maya & Miguel,” twins of Mexican and Puerto Rican decent; Max and Emmy (PBS), in “Dragon Tales” the dragon Quetzal is Puerto Rican; “Diego” (Nickelodeon) from somewhere in South America and who is Dora’s cousin; young Mexican wrestlers, Mucha Lucha! (Warner Brothers), and Handy Manny (Disney), also broadcast the message that Spanish and cultural diversity are good.

The pilot episode of Dora premiered in 1999, Dora’s debut aired in 2000. In the decade since her first television appearance, she has gained global recognition. As mentioned earlier, my study centers on the programming aired from 2000-2010. Has her viewership increased or declined? Are there any new characters? Have there been any major changes in the cartoon? If so, what are those changes and what might they represent? While interpreting cartoon segments and any major changes in the past decade, I will also reflect on major laws that have affected Latina/o communities, specifically Latino children in the United States.

**Dora the Explorer**

Dora Marquez, protagonist of Dora the Explorer, is a popular animated cartoon figure among many children, parents, and educators. She is popular among children, whether Latina/o or not. Dora is a bilingual Spanish and English speaker. She is, as discussed earlier, an ambiguous Latina character. We do not know specifically where she is from. Dora the Explorer, first aired in the United States in 2000, now has global play. “The animated series is now broadcast in more than 100 countries—it’s the No. 1-rated preschool show in many of them,
including France—and dubbed in 30 languages, such as Russian, Mandarin and German, with Dora mostly teaching English (in some cases Spanish)”⁹ (Benning, 2010).

Apart from Dora, I will also examine the relationships and roles of the other primary characters in the series; for example, these include Boots the Monkey (sidekick of Dora), Swiper the Fox (the villain that is rescued from evil and brought into the group), as well as Fiesta Trio, Backpack, Map, Isa the Iguana, Tico the Squirrel, and Benny the Bull.

As discussed in the introduction to this study, it was my niece who introduced me to this complex animated cartoon. Celeste was a small child when Dora the Explorer became popular among many children. She would request the cartoon in the morning or whenever possible. She became owner of Dora’s DVDs at an early age. She also became a consumer of Dora clothing, kitchen utensils, zippy cups, pillows, toys, dolls, piñatas, party supplies, birthday cake, and other assorted products. The consumerism associated to this young Latina cartoon character drew my attention. Everywhere one looks one can find Dora the Explorer items or someone who knows about her. Her popularity goes beyond imagination. Some may think that her charisma makes her popular. Others may think it’s because of the bilingualism she teaches, or simply because she has a high pitched voice that draws children in. There are various reasons why children like Dora the Explorer. However, throughout this study I challenge these notions and critically engage the hidden issues that reveal themselves in the episodes.

Again, most recently her image circulated on the web in response to Arizona’s State Bill 1070. “The provisions of the law are intended to work together to discourage and deter “the unlawful entry and presence of illegal aliens and economic activity by illegal aliens in the United States” (Federation For American Immigration Reform, 2010). Her image appeared as a police

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⁹ See Appendix B for more details about the different languages dubbed for Dora the Explorer.
mug shot (see Figure 3). She became the representation of a bruised immigrant caught crossing the border. The image speaks to the abuse that immigrants face daily at the border and once in the United States. Acts founded on violence, nativism, racism, and xenophobia are perpetrated against those who do not fit neatly into the national fabric of this country. Thus, this image had different meanings for different people. Some changed the image to make a statement about what happens to those who “look” Latina/o regardless of their citizenship status. The variety of images produced well-illustrate the impact that Dora has on the viewership. Hence, the encoding and decoding of Dora the Explorer go beyond the cartoon episodes.

Hall (1980) argues, “Producing meaning depends on the practice of interpretation, and interpretation is sustained by us actively using the code - encoding, putting things into the code - and by the person at the other end interpreting or decoding the meaning” (p. 61). This iconic character captures different meanings that connect the history of those who she supposedly represents, while simultaneously making them invisible through an ambiguous identity that homogenizes. Rather than asserting clearly Dora’s national origin, she is said to originate from a No-name Island, a Latina/o melting pot, if you will, rendering invisible the extensive heterogeneity of Latina/o communities.
Figure 3. Photography courtesy of Lori Rodriguez at an immigration rally against Arizona’s State Bill 1070 (May 1, 2010 Minneapolis, Minnesota)

Children’s Animated Cartoons as Pedagogical Spaces

Cultural studies connected to a democratic pedagogy for children involves investigations of how consciousnesses are produced around issues of social justice and egalitarian power relations. (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997, p. 6)

Animated cartoons and children’s media can serve as social critique, given that issues tied to gender, feminism, Latinidades, geography education and neocolonialism often inform their production (Thompson and Zerbinos, 1995; Projansky, S. & Vande Berg, L., 2000; Valdivia, A. and Projansky, S., 2006; Guidotti-Hernández, 2007; Carter, 2008; Ono, K. 2001, 2009; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997). Apart from stereotypes, distorted realities, and assumptions
of other cultures, animated cartoons can also be used to teach children history, language, and about cultural events, friendships, and morality. Steinberg & Kinchloe (1997) insist that “Children’s entertainment, like other social spheres, is a contested public space where different social, economic, and political interests compete for control” (p. 7). Childhood upbringings are also rooted in assumptions and distorted notions of reality that one grows up with and accepts as commonsense.

Another reason animated cartoons are important to interpret is to unveil the hidden curriculum directed at children. Some people will say that they are “just” cartoons. Why do people get so offended about cartoons that are not even real! Why should we engage cartoons in a serious way; aren’t they simply entertainment? Posts from blogs voice these types of questions, while others criticize historic cartoon characters for their racist overtones. For example, *Frito Bandito* and *Speedy Gonzalez* are two historical animated characters that offended Latina/o communities, given that these cartoon characters where deemed stereotypical images of Mexicans. In 1971 after a lawsuit that would have caused Lay to lose millions, the representation of the *Frito Bandito* was banded. Although many think animated cartoons are innocent and simply entertain, the stereotypes and fabricated representations they perpetuate affect people’s opinions about the communities they “represent”, especially when there is a limit on “positive” ethnic media images.

Thus, children’s programming is designed to connect with children, who interact with television more than with “real” relationships with those represented. After *Dora the Explorer’s* “global” launch, she became internationally acclaimed (Dora travels the worlds-Tanzania, China, and Italy). Her global popularity well-illustrates that animated cartoons are excellent cultural
artifacts that must be critiqued for their colonizing as well as decolonizing impact on children who are the loyal viewers.

To better understand the context for *Dora the Explorer*, I will use a) cultural studies criticism, b) critical discourse analysis, and c) critical bicultural pedagogy as the analytical lens with which I will attempt to make sense of the images. These methodologies assist with understanding the possible effects that *Dora the Explorer* episodes can have on the child’s social imaginary. The following describes these methodological approaches that undergird the methods employed for this study.

**Cultural Studies Criticism**

The methodology proposed for this study is similar to what Leah R. Vande Berg and Lawrence A. Wenner (1991) call cultural studies criticism in their book *Television Criticism*. The purpose and aims of television criticisms are: 1) To create a critical climate, 2) To legitimate television and the practices of television criticism, and 3) To provide pedagogic, interpretive and judicial services. Specifically, cultural studies criticism “Assumes that ideology, economic structures, social structure, and culture are inseparable. ... This approach examines class, race, and gender issues in television programs by invoking ideology, hegemony, and discourse as central critical constructs” (p. 28).

Therefore, a cultural studies approach examines television texts through posing several key questions:

1. To whom is the program addressed?
2. What kinds of social relationships are constructed or reproduced in text and in audiences viewing the program?
3. What definable discourses (such as masculinity, individualism, capitalist economics, education, etc.) does the narrative affirm as natural, preferred ways of viewing the world and various social roles?

4. Whose interests are best served by this view?

5. Does the text allow the viewer to construct meaningful alternative or even opposing readings that questions the dominant ideologies? (Vande Berg & Wenner, 1991, p. 28).

Given that this project aims to decolonize children’s media, knowledge drawn from my lived experiences makes me aware of the colonizing processes of racialization inherent in the representations of this cartoon and other media representations discussed in the study.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) often informs studies that use the ideas of critical theorists from the Frankfurt school, as well as that of a cultural studies paradigm. The research carried out by cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall, for example is most recognized for its association with discourse studies in media research, involving critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 2003, p. 359). Roger Fowler (1991) contends that “later critical studies of the media continue this tradition, but also pay tribute to the British cultural studies paradigm that defines news not as a reflection of reality, but as a product shaped by political economic, and cultural forces” (cite in van Dijk, 2003, p. 359). According to Kieran O’Halloran (2003), critical discourse analysis “explains connections between texts and the wider social and cultural context and/or explains how wider social and cultural contexts might shape the interpretation of a text” (p. 2). Thus, a methodology that connects the text to societal contexts falls within the domain of this methodological canon. As explained by various authors, CDA does not claim to one theoretical approach but, rather, combines multiple lenses, providing greater possibilities for how texts are interpreted and viewed (O’Halloran, 2003; Van Dijk, 2003).
Hence, studies that employ CDA as a methodological approach are those that hope to provide strong societal interpretations to challenge dominant norms. A study that employs critical discourse analysis involves important principles for study. For example, “with regard to questions of discourse (2), Fairclough and Wodak (1997:271-80) pinpoint the following common tenets or principles:

1. Address social problems
2. Power relations are discursive
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture
4. Discourse does ideological work
5. Discourse is historical
6. The link between text and society is mediated
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory
8. Discourse is a form of social action (O'Halloran, 2003)

Since there is not just one approach to utilizing CDA in research, it does not claim a unitary theoretical framework. There are many forms of research that fall under the critical discourse analysis umbrella, and these may be theoretically and analytically diverse (van Dijk, 2003, 353). Moreover, a researcher’s lived experiences and critical perspectives of the world are understood to inform critical discourse analysis. This study integrates many elements of CDA and relies heavily on the branch of CDA tied to discourse analysis of media, where critical principles of cultural studies are at work.

A main idea of CDA is power and more specifically control. As explained by van Dijk (2003), “A central notion in most critical work on discourse is that of power, and specifically the social power of groups or institutions. Summarizing a complex philosophical and social analysis, CDA defines social power in terms of control. Thus, groups have (more or less) power if they are able to (more or less) control the acts and minds of (members of) other groups” (p. 354). This view of power will be employed to examine closely the content of various parent blogs and articles written about Dora. There will also be analysis of television news clips, newspaper
images, Internet images, personal communication, and journal entries, again with a primary
focus on understanding the power in televisual representations.

Examinations of discourses of power in this study particularly focus on questions of
culture, identity, and language. Is Dora’s cultural identity powerful or not? Is being a young
Latina adventurer and well-accepted cartoon figure a powerful image for children? Does it
imply the strength of the vast Latina/o population in the United States? Moreover, I will examine
her ambiguous sense of home and its impact on the representation of Latina/o children. What
purpose does this geographical ambiguity serve? What messages related to Latina/o identity
does the cartoon overtly or covertly present to children? What is the political impact these
messages have on children’s developing consciousness about identity?

Van Dijk (2003), drawing on Antonio Gramsci’s work, argues that control and hegemony
are important concepts within a critical discourse analysis. In concert, Darder (1991) notes,
“through his theory of hegemony, Gramsci argues that there exists a powerful interconnection
between politics, cultural ideology, and pedagogy” (p. 87). A central concern in this study is the
issue of hegemony and social control that are not evident at the first glance of Dora the Explorer.
Everything is harmonious, innocent, and differences are widely accepted in the representations of
the cartoon. Fundamentally, this study seeks to rupture the dominant bubble of Dora’s
ambiguous and uncomplicated portrayal. With this purpose in mind, questions that help to
expose the conflicts and contradiction at work are key to the study. We know that often, control
of meaning and hegemony are present and widely represented, yet obscured, for example, in
animal stories and other storytelling formats.

Different approaches need to interrogate critically the commonsense notions found in such
cartoons and to unveil hidden messages that are easily obscured in the colorful panorama and
Critical Bicultural Pedagogy

Given that this study focuses on bicultural and bilingual children, I found it useful to employ a critical bicultural pedagogy as a method and more precisely as a praxis that assisted me in reevaluating the episodes and other media representations, in order to move towards a critique in which I could engage the politics of difference and the politics of representation in *Dora the Explorer*. Critical bicultural pedagogy as a borderlands discourse is also useful due to the border crossings that I was forced to do, while encoding the various animated representations.

Also important to this study is the question: How is children’s media colonized? To get to the core of this question, I employ six principles of "critical bicultural pedagogy," that I mention earlier in chapter three, assisted me in teasing out decolonizing media images, by considering their homogenizing impact or impact to how they (re)present communities of color. Given this understanding, the principles of a critical bicultural pedagogy can assist educators who want to integrate critical media perspectives into their classrooms and find ways to interrogate these cultural productions with their students. Darder also notes that “Discourse is derived as a system of discursive practices that reflect the values, beliefs, ideology, language, and economic constraints found within a particular set of inscribed power relations” (p. 92). As such, critical bicultural pedagogy is understood with respect to its relationship to critical theory and critical pedagogy.

**Critical Theory.** Education is not neutral, a point many cultural theorists of education have observed (Darder 2012, 1991, Giroux 1991, 2009; Freire 1971). These critical theorists affirm that schooling is linked to cultural and historical processes (Darder, 1991, 78). Further,
Darder (1991) explains, “select groups are positioned within asymmetrical relations of power on the basis of specific race, class, and gender groups rather than a process that is value-free and neutral” (p. 78). Key to the work of critical theorists is a political project that challenges the relationship between school and society. This makes critical theory a useful lens of analysis when contesting the relationship between televised cartoons and schooling. Specific to this study, it assists with the claim that *Dora the Explorer* teaches more than her creators may have intended. Through the use of these methodological frameworks this study unveils the hidden and subtle pedagogical moments as well as more obvious lessons taught by *Dora the Explorer*.

Methodologically, “through this form of analysis, dialectical thought replaces positivist forms of social inquiry. That is, the logic of predictability, verifiability, transferability, and operationality is replaced by a dialectical mode of thinking that stresses the historical, relational, and normative dimensions of social inquiry and knowledge” (Giroux, 2009, p. 45). In this sense, my interpretations move beyond a predictable and quantifiable set of claims resulting from content analysis. They go to the heart of media and social practices and the implication that media (children’s programming) can contribute to others’ well-being.

**Critical Pedagogy.** Darder (1991) contends that the practical intent of critical theory is vital to the study of media. Critical theory provides critical pedagogy with its philosophical underpinnings. Underlying ideas that stem from critical theory to critical pedagogy are: class, race, culture, hegemony, ideology, discourse, hidden curriculum, social reproduction, and cultural capital (McLaren, 2009). All these elements are prevalent in this study. Hegemonic ideologies are unveiled in the episodes that make up the bulk of the data for this study. The hidden curriculum is unavoidable and is something I draw attention to and critique in the next chapter. These are important to highlight, given their impact on the storyline for the cartoon
episodes being studied. Giroux (2009) states, “The critical educator endorses theories that are, first and foremost, dialectical; that is, theories which recognize the problems of society as more than simply isolated events of individuals or deficiencies in the social structure” (p. 61).

Similarly, Darder (1991) explains, “True to this underlying principle, the theory calls for the examination of schools within not only their social practices but also their historical realities. Here lies a counterlogic to the positivist, ahistorical, and depoliticizing analysis of schooling that searches for inner histories within a specific historical context” (p. 79).

Earlier chapters discussed cultural studies and border pedagogies. These two canons of work point toward the development of a methodology that incorporates both my own bicultural identity and concern for children’s programming. Both of these paradigms call for the writer/researcher to become incorporated into the study. Thus, both of these models incorporate principles that Indigenous methodologies also employ. Through this perspective, I can come closer toward developing an Indigenous methodology that I can effectively use in my analysis of Dora the Explorer.

More importantly, I integrate the six principles in my analysis of media, discussed earlier, that Darder (1991) ascribes to a critical bicultural pedagogy. Namely, it is an approach that is: 1) built on a theory of cultural democracy; 2) supports a dialectical view of the world; 3) recognizes a those forms of cultural invasion that negatively influence the lives of bicultural communities; 4) uses a dialogical model of communication to create conditions for students of color to find voice to reflect, critique and transform the world; 5) acknowledges the issue of power in society and the political nature of education; and above all, 6) is committed to the empowerment of the disenfranchised.
Methods for the First Five Seasons of *Dora the Explorer*

For this study, the first five seasons were viewed chronologically, given that these cover the decade from 2000 to 2010. Grouping the review of the episode this way, facilitated my process of coding and decoding aspects related to identity, culture, language, and literacy. After carefully viewing and taking notes on all episodes from each season, I imported my notes to Nvivo in order to code prominent themes. Nvivo is a qualitative data analysis software as noted earlier. “It’s used to inform business decisions, policy formation, communication and research. Focus groups, in-depth interviews, content analysis, ethnography, evaluation and semiotics are among the many formal approaches that are used, but qualitative research also involves the analysis of any unstructured material, including customer feedback forms, reports or media clips.” (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2007). After importing my notes to NVivo I identified the density of quotes/notes and organized my data thematically, in order to facilitate my subsequent discussion. I later selected specific episodes for an in-depth analysis. The criteria for selecting the episodes for the in-depth analysis were related to the themes embodied and the decoding of representations that were evident when viewing these for the first time. Notes taken on the episodes consisted of observations such as:

1. What language does Dora speak to the different characters? Is there a relationship between the language she uses and to whom she is speaking? Is there a relationship between when and where she speaks each language?

2. Are there new characters in the newer episodes? If so, what purpose do they seem to play with respect to representations of difference (ie. race, gender, class, etc.)?

3. What seems to be the overall cultural relevance attributed to the representations found in the cartoons? What seems to be the overarching ideological lens that informs the cultural production of these cartoons?

I began this process by viewing the cartoons and jotting down what “I see and read” based on my lived epistemology and the theoretical discussion that has informed my academic
reflections and dialogues about the phenomenon of children’s media. As a Chicana, bilingual, and bicultural human being, my personal lived experience inform my theoretical lens, as I have, over the years, drawn from fields of critical theory, critical bicultural pedagogy, cultural studies, border theory, and Indigenous ways of knowing the world.

Given the literature, theoretical frameworks, and methodologies presented in the previous chapters, the following themes comprised the focus of my lens of analysis when viewing the episodes and moving through the coding and decoding process.

1. Biculturalism (identity issues and cultural values)
2. Bilingualism (language issues)
3. Gender relations (Feminism/Patriarchy)
4. Latinidades (Cultural symbols and cultural relevance)
5. Power relations (Cultural invasion; domination; subordination; and conquest)
6. Empowerment (social agency, decolonizing aspects)

The significance of these themes is visibly evident in Chapter 5, *Crossing Borders: Recurring Themes* and Chapter 6, *Identity, Ambiguity and the Pedagogical Borderlands.*
Chapter 5

Crossing Borders: Recurring Themes – Towards a Border Consciousness

To survive the Borderlands
You must live sin fronteras
Be a crossroads (Anzaldúa, 1999, p. 217).

Under colonialism Indigenous peoples have struggled against a Western view of history and yet been complicit with that view. We have often allowed our ‘histories’ to be told and have then become outsiders as we heard them being retold. Schooling [and media] is directly implicated in this process (Smith, 1999, p. 33).

The title of this chapter, Crossing Borders: Recurring Themes, encompasses the scope of what Dora the Explorer and her friends do through various episodes and in other media outlets. Nevertheless, the title also encompasses what the viewer may experience by encoding and decoding the program thematically, whether consciously or unconsciously. Methodologically speaking, a borderlands framework is inherent in this study due to the metaphoric references to borderlands, such as “The Big River,” translated to El Río Grande. El Río Grande is a river that flows from southwestern Colorado in the United States to the Gulf of Mexico. As a signifier, El Río Grande, or El Río Bravo de Norte, has represented survival and death of the crossing of the U.S.-Mexico border for many immigrants. We must similarly recall that the Rio Grande also signifies the demarcation of where Border towns exist.

This study is a reflection of how a cultural icon is encoded and decoded through a border consciousness of a—Chicana, working class, first-generation, daughter, mother, and scholar. While my attempt is to highlight different themes across the seasons, I am aware that these themes are interdependent and do not function exclusively from one another. Many times I found myself singing to the songs and smiling at the television screen and other times I shook my head in disapproval to the things that various cartoon characters would say or do. The impact of my
border consciousness on how I made meaning became readily evident in my viewing of the first five seasons aired on television in the United States.

**Data: Dora The Explorer 2000-2010**

In *Dora the Explorer’s Season one (2000-2001)*, the viewer becomes familiarized with *Dora the Explorer* and her friends. The viewer also becomes acquainted with the format of the episodes. Each episode is 24 minutes and interrupted slightly by commercials for a 30-minute television slot. The episodes focus on psychologists Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences. These intelligences are: 1) Linguistic intelligence, 2) Logical-mathematical intelligence, 3) musical intelligence, 4) Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, 5) Spatial intelligence, 6) Interpersonal intelligence, and 7) Intrapersonal intelligence. Education is important to the producers. Valerie Walsh, co-creator of *Dora the Explorer* holds an M.A. in education and considers herself a television producer and a teacher (Kleinert Larsen). *Dora the Explorer* teaches children to be active by asking them to “Stand up! Stand up!” or “Wiggle, Now Wiggle!” or “Jump! Jump!” Repetition is key to learning math, colors, Spanish words, and active words throughout the episodes.

*Dora* teaches children the need for direction and successful arrival to their destination, no room for getting lost or off-track. There is a starting point at the beginning of every episode and a destination you need to arrive to in order to win a race, rescue a princess, arrive to a party, etc. This is only achieved because of *Map*, Dora’s friend that lets them know where to go and how to navigate themselves through jungles, forests, mountains, and in one episode they even traveled to space. James R. Carter (2008) argues that through *Dora the Explorer* preschoolers are of geography and how to use maps. Carter (2008) additionally argues that even “while viewers may
see stereotypical images of Latina/os occasionally, those images should be seen in comparison to the stereotypical images of life in Paris, a village in Tanzania, a winter scene in Russia, and people in China playing beside the Great Wall” (p. 82). While Carter (2008) may have a point, it is important to recognize that stereotypes should not be taken for granted, especially if these are portrayed to children. For example, these stereotypical images can serve to maintain power relations among children and create a sense of “them” and “us”. Thus this study engages such stereotypes through a critical bicultural pedagogy in which these encounters are not overlooked and engaged with.

It is useful to note that, “Cartography has always been about power relations. Cartography facilitated the colonization of the New World” (Guidotti-Hernández, 2007, p. 221). Guidotti-Hernández also argues that “As Dora facilitates a discussion of how to negotiate space within the televisual landscape, she is configured with a fair amount of power that has historically been denied to Latino/as.” As Rosario Sánchez (2006) states, “Demography and geography do not however tell the entire story. The political story of Spanish colonialism would keep population either in a servile position to Spanish and Mexican settlers, despite their growing linguistic and cultural assimilation, or in a hostile position, resisting the incursions of the colonists and the devastation of their way of life” (p. 101). Accordingly, cartography is not limited to geography but also to politics and language (Sánchez, 2006). In the second section geography is discussed further in the theme, Latinidades and in Chapter 6 it is discussed through the in-depth analysis of selected episodes.

In Dora the Explorer’s Season two (2002-2003), there are more episodes with Spanish titles. The producers’ advocacy of bilingualism is evident in the naming of the episodes as well as the use of language within all the episodes.
Dora the Explorer’s Season three (2003-2005), introduced explorer stars that assist Dora and her friends. There are various star explorers. There is a Baker star, Baseball star, Cowgirl star, Disco star, Glowy star, Hero star, Mega star, Movie star, Navy star, Noisy star, Pointer star, Police star, Saltador star, Spy star, Supra star, Switchy star, tool star, Ultra star, and Woo-hoo star. All of these stars have particular functions that assist Dora and her friends accomplish their goals. These stop appearing in the following seasons.

Dora the Explorer’s Season four (2004-2007), introduced more cultural markers (i.e. Daisy’s Quinceñera) and more relevance to bilingualism (i.e. Dora’s First Trip) or at least an introduction to how friendships were made even when the characters were monolingual in their first languages. These episodes are discussed in the theme analysis and later in Chapter 6 in the in-depth of analysis of selected episodes.

In Dora the Explorer’s Season five (2008-2010) all of the episodes introduce a new character from a different part of the world. The places that are mentioned are Guatemala, Denmark, Egypt, Australia, Peru, Mexico, Japan, China, Antarctica, and Russia. While these characters may appear in other episodes, they have a main role in their respective episodes, which is to assist Dora and her friends figure something out. All of these characters are Dora’s age or older. They all show respect to their elders by acknowledging what they have learned from them. These children survive, navigate, and solve problems through the knowledge they have gained from grandparents and parents. This teaches children/viewers to acknowledge what their elders share with them.

For example, Chloe is from Australia and helps Dora and Boots find water for Benny’s car by remembering what her aboriginal grandfather taught her. She told them that they needed to find a tree and near that tree there would be a river underneath. They all start digging; asking
the viewers to “dig, dig” and finally they all see water coming out from the dry outback. In another episode, Yuki, a Japanese friend of Dora’s, helps them make a giant origami swan in order to cross the river. Yuki remembers how her O bāchan (grandma) taught her back in Japan to do origami. I will draw from the many instances where these various types of remembering and acknowledging of elders, place of origin, and indigenous epistemologies surface in this season in the Decolonizing and Empowerment theme below. However, as mentioned earlier these themes are interdependent from one another and feed into each other one way or another. In this season different languages are also introduced. The issue of biculturalism and bilingualism is more evident in these episodes due to the introduction of secondary bicultural and bilingual characters.

Thematic Analysis: Crossing Borders

In this section, I engage the different themes that surfaced after a close examination of the episodes. The politics of difference and the politics of representation are most evident after the textual decoding of the five seasons. These signifiers can be seen as decolonized markers that embody identity, language, literacy, and culture and as hegemonic and colonizing markers of difference and representation. As explained in Chapter 3, borderlands are always in transition, borderlands exist as a dialectical relationship, between those in power and those oppressed. Thus, the following themes are exemplified through a borderlands discourse in which a critical bicultural pedagogy as border pedagogy is encoded. The crossing of borders is literal and theoretical. This section is divided into six themes: Biculturalism, Bilingualism, Gender Relations, Latinidades, Power relations, and Decolonizing/Empowerment.
**Biculturalism (identity issues and cultural values).** Biculturalism in *Dora the Explorer* may be evident through Dora’s second language, her *abuela’s* presence, and her parents’ bilingualism, but biculturalism is more than simply knowing another language. Biculturalism as a marker of Dora’s identity is not evident in the episodes. While the producers argue or claim that she is Latina, there is never an episode in which she states or names herself, Latina or for that fact, bicultural. The producers create instances in which there are signifiers of *Latinidad* (this concept is discussed below as a theme), in which cultural makers may be assumed to be bicultural but these are not named as such or described as bicultural practices. Thus, an encoding of Latinidad, as Guidotti-Hernández (2007) employs in her study, is necessary in order to name Dora’s biculturalism. While Dora does not name herself Latina or bicultural, there are identity markers that lead us to assume she is, such as the episodes where she introduces her cousin Diego (from South America), El Coquí episode, and Te Amo episode.

In this section I focus on Season 5, in which the producers decide to include secondary characters that intentionally refer to their families, more specifically their grandparents in other countries. Their biculturalism is present through the naming of their primary culture. As argued by Darder (1991) “Biculturalism refers to the process wherein individuals learn to function in two distinct sociocultural environments: their primary culture, and that of the dominant mainstream culture of the society in which they live” (p. 48). Thus, biculturalism is a process of navigating, surviving, and a way of living for many who find themselves away from their countries and those whose parents have chosen to migrate to a new place. In the case of *Dora the Explorer,* we do not know the name of the Island these children navigate in but we are aware from where they come from through their references of their origin, using “I’m from” or references such as “She/He is from.”
In Season 5, the producers cleverly mention where the other characters are from or at least the origin of their families. I say cleverly, because they keep Dora’s origin suppressed and invisible, while making the secondary characters’ origin transparent and available to the viewer. The viewer’s know where the secondary characters’ families are from as they describe stories of survival, creation stories, and strategies that they learned in their home country. While these selected segments in the episodes are under the bicultural theme, they are also reflected within the other themes mentioned below.

The following are examples of the naming of countries and the character’s family origin:

In this episode *Super Babies Dream Adventure*, we get introduced to Camila from Guatemala:

Boots: How are we going to fix the blankets, Dora?
Camila: Hola Dora
Dora: Hey that’s my friend Camila. And that’s her mommy’s blanket shop. Hola Camila.
Camila: Hola Dora
Dora: Mira
Camila: Yo te ayudo. Mi mami me enseño a tejer mantas.
Dora: Camila’s mommy taught her how to make blankets in Guatemala. She can help us fix the super babies blankets.
Camila: Hola mami, voy a usar el telar para arreglar las mantitas de mis amigos
Dora and her friends: Hola!
Dora: Camila is going to fix super babies blankies with her mommy’s loom.
Camila to the viewers: Me puedes ayudar a escoger los colores?
Dora: Let’s choose the colors she’ll use to fix the blankets.
(Season 5, Episode 112, *Super Babies Dream Adventure*).

In this particular episode Dora’s twin siblings, Guillermo and Isabella, get their “super” blankets caught in cactuses while flying up Dragon Mountain, which resembles the head of Quetzalcoatl—a Mesoamerican deity, whose name in Nahualt means, feathered serpent. The Indigenous references in this and other episodes are possible through my background knowledge
of the existence of such creation stories and Indigenous practices as seen through the rug weaving Camila and her mom practice.

Dora, Boots and Dora’s siblings need Camila’s assistance in order to fix their blankets and continue their journey. The references to Indigenous practices are undeniable. Camila’s mother weaves blankets for a living. In this particular episode the notion of passing Indigenous traditional practices to your child is what captured my attention. What impressed me the most about this episode was the fact that Camila learned the practice and seemed to be proud of this knowledge. Through a critical bicultural pedagogy lens emancipatory and hegemonial-colonizing practices can be engaged in this episode and others later engaged. The mention of Guatemala is linked to an Indigenous way of survival through the blanket making and the practice of weaving. The ambivalence of the No-name Island makes the viewer wonder why Camila and her family migrated here, or maybe due to the programming in the United States we overlook the fact that they are immigrants. Yet issues of labor are present here, in which immigrants due come looking for better ways to support their families given the poverty, militancy, and other social issues in their countries. We know that Guatemala is not an Island, thus they have migrated to a new place where they are selling their blankets. Immigration and migration are decoded through season five due to the new location where these secondary characters are from. The selling of blankets, for Indigenous communities has become a way of survival but due to the mass fabrication of blankets at a cheaper price we see the increase of price competition, and thus a disrespect to the art form of rug weaving, including creation stories which are tied to the rug weaving practice and to the rug weaver herself/himself. For example, these are art forms are not foreign or extinct.

In this case, I turn to a radio show that Charlotte Wilkinson (Diné, Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara) and I produced in 2008 for Radio Liberación a radio collective. The show’s topic was
on Cultural Memory in which we interviewed different Indigenous community members and scholars. The show titled, *Cultural Memory: Love, Struggle, and Resistance Toward Maintaining Our Humanity* engaged the issue of rug weaving a form of survival and resistance (Radio Liberación, 2008). In regards to the Indigenous practice of rug weaving, Diné rug weaver Sally Wilkinson (Diné, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara), states:

> Whenever I have kids I want them to know where they come from I think it’s really important that they know who they come from because all these old stories and teachings ... it didn’t just start with mom, ... it started way before that and it’s been carried on this long ... and I know that it’s really important to ... keep continuing it on. I wasn’t as experienced as mom but when I did that with my fingers it would rip my skin a little and it would kind of give me a rug burn and it didn’t feel good at first but I was like “Owww” but I would keep going because I wanted to keep going and going because I am determined to learn this art that has been in our family for so long and I really want to be a part of that. So pretty much the whole process of the rug is very, you have to be very patient and be patient and sit at that loom for however long you want to sit there.

In accordance, Sally’s mother Nora Wilkinson, also a Diné rug weaver from Sanders Arizona states,

> The weaving of rugs, I passed it on so far to my daughter, the meanings the stories that go a long with that I’ve passed on whatever that I can remember whatever my grandfather and mother the stories that I can pass on. For me, I would like to see my grandchildren and their children learn those things to pass them on to their grandchildren and children.

These revelations of the art form of rug weaving, their creation stories, and the pain and patience that goes into creating a rug are glossed over and simply invisible in the episode where rug weaving is acknowledged. While mentioning rug weaving as practiced in Guatemala, it is also important to acknowledge that rug weaving is not as simple as it is made in this episode where Camila quickly gets on the loom without thinking twice if she’ll get a rug burn and in no time fixes the blankets for the twins. The rugs here are sold, this is known because Dora states that it is Camila’s mother’s “blanket shop”. In light of a critical bilingual pedagogy this episode does not recognize the cultural invasion that undeniably takes place through the lack of
recognition of creations stories and how this “negatively influence the lives of bicultural students and their families” (Darder, 19991, p. 97).

In the episode, Benny’s Treasure, Yuki refers to her O bāchan (grandma) who taught her how to do origami. Yuki’s origin is Japan.

Dora: Look our friend Yuki! Maybe she can help. Yuki! Yuki!
Yuki: Kon'nichiwa Hi Boots, Hi Benny
Benny and Boots: Hello Yuki
Dora: What are you doing?
Yuki: I’m making origami swans.
Benny: Origami, what’s that?
Yuki: Its making shapes by folding paper. By O bāchan (grandma) taught me how to make these swans in Japan.
Benny: Oh cool, too bad it’s not big enough to ride us across the lake.
Dora: Benny I bet you have some paper in your wagon that is big enough to make a giant Swan.
Benny: I have all sorts of paper.
Benny found a large poster that is perfect for a large swan. Benny gives a rubber ducky to Yuki. The origami swan can fly. The viewers need to put their arms out and flap flap flap.
Dora: Yuki Sayōnara
Asian inspired music plays in the background (Season 5, Episode 114, Benny’s Treasure).

Here Yuki uses her native language, Japanese, to greet her friends and share a teaching from her grandmother. After helping her friends she says good-bye in Japanese. Children learn to respect the stories of their grandparents, a reference to filial piety in Asian culture, through these secondary characters. Their bicultural identity is reflected through the stories they share with the viewers and the respect that they show toward the knowledge that they have received, kept, and practiced from their grandparents, families, and communities from other countries. The issue of generational respect is discussed further in the theme Decolonizing/Empowerment.

In the episode, Dora’s Jack-in-the-box, Helena is from Russia and helps Dora and Boots understand what the Russian doll is saying.

Russian Doll: Matryoshka, Matryoshka!
Helena: Здравствуйте Dora! Здравствуйте Boots!
Dora: Hey that’s my friend Helena. She is from Rusia. She’ll help us.

Здравствуйте Helena. We are trying to get to our house but the Russian doll is blocking our way. And we don’t know what she is saying.

Russian Doll: Matryoshka!

Helena: Oh she is calling for her little dolls. We can help her find them.

Boots: Then she’ll move out of our way.

Dora to the viewers: Do you see the little dolls?

Boots: They can’t all go in at the same time.

Helena: That’s right it. They have to go in largest to smallest.

They place them all in order and the path is clear to continue with their journey.

Dora: Thank you Helena for helping us.

Helena: Your welcome (Season 5, Episode 100, Dora’s Jack-in-the-box).

Helena, as many of the other secondary characters in Season 5, has an accent. Language is discussed in the following theme; however, it is important to make the connections now. As described by bell hooks, “Language reflects the culture from which we emerge. To deny ourselves daily use of speech patterns that are common and familiar, that embody the unique and distinctive aspect of our self is one of the ways we become estranged and alienated from our past” (in Darder, 1991, p. 103). While these episodes with secondary characters encourage the viewers to learn about other cultures and languages, recognize the past, and acknowledge home countries, we also learn that English predominates in these cartoons, and other languages are only used as a pathway to learn English.

Despite the fact that the episode Dora Saves the Three Kings refers to El Dia de Los Reyes Magos, a Catholic religious affiliated event, there is no religious affiliation presented in the episode. The producers evidently erased that part of the story only to make this episode secular and more acceptable for many viewers who hold other religious believes. Those who practice Three Kings Day or El Dia de Los Reyes Magos can easily decode the episode and know who the Three kings are; Rey Melchor from Arabia, Rey Gaspar from Persia, and Rey Baltazar from Ethiopia. However, those who are not religiously affiliated with Catholicism do
not recognize it as a religious event but as a secular celebration. The producers have also chosen to include other episodes such as *Dora’s Christmas Carol* alluding to their own religious affiliations. The reality is that bicultural children are not solely bicultural because of their language and place of origin but also due to their religious affiliations or spiritual formation. In the following excerpts we see how various secondary characters are included in this episode:

Nijim: I can help you find your camel. My name is Nijim. I am from Egypt, where my family has a camel farm.
Dora: I’m Dora.
Boot: And I’m Boots.
Diego: I’m Diego, can you really help us?
Nijim: Sure. Camels like to travel in groups. If your camel sees all these wired camels lit up he’ll come and find us.
Boots: Cool, how do we get lights on Nijim.
Nijim: We have to put all the light bulbs in. The light bulbs need to be added in a pattern.
Dora: A pattern, hey we can play a math game! (song: Green, green, blue, blue, red).
(Season 5, Episode 102, *Dora Saves the Three Kings*).

The Three Kings Men traveled the desert to arrive at the birth of Christ, thus the reference to Egypt and the help from Nijim, is not farfetched. However, the way the desert and camels in this instance is represented is an example of what Edward Said (1978) calls Orientalism. Through the reference to his family’s “Camel Ranch,” a class dynamics is also present. We do not know why Nijim’s family fled or migrated to the No-name Island where he meets Dora and Boots. By knowing limited information of his background we cannot make many assumptions. The producers limited encoding of Dora and these secondary characters’ bicultural identity is limited thus having the viewer wonder how they arrived to this Island. In regards to religion, in Egypt Muslim practices predominate all other religions, however this is not evident or expressed in the cartoon. As discussed in chapter three, the politics of difference are evident here where even when the creators are inserting different cultures in the text of *Dora the Explorer*, we find that the ‘other’ is celebrated and exoticized while simultaneously erasing
the importance of engaging the value of difference, particularly as it exists within
disenfranchised communities.

Despite the fact that I do practice Catholicism, I do not practice *El Día De Los Tres Reyes Magos* like my family in Mexico. It is said that those who find the little baby Jesus (a plastic figurine resembling a baby) in their piece of bread has to host a party February 2\textsuperscript{nd} when Saint Candelaria is celebrated and honored. Although, we try to practice this event, as closely as we perhaps would in Mexico, it is difficult thus we appropriate it and do what we can in Los Angeles.

This religious event is experienced at various and different levels throughout the world where Catholicism is practiced. The following is an excerpt from the same episode in which Nelly, a secondary character, whose family is from Mexico helps Dora and Boots find their horse. The practice that Nelly shares is not limited to Mexico. El Boricua, a monthly bilingual, cultural publication for Puerto Ricans, states that “January 6 is called Epiphany and is traditionally the day in which the Magi arrived bearing gifts for the Christ child. Even to this day in Hispanophone countries throughout the world, January 6 is the day that children receive their Christmas gifts, in commemoration of the Magi’s visit (El Boricua: A monthly Bilingual, Cultural Publication for Puerto Ricans, nd).

The following is the conversation Dora, Diego, and Boots have with Nelly:

Nelly: Hola Dora!  
Dora: That’s our friend Nelly. Maybe she’s seen the horse.  
Nelly: Hola Boots and Diego.  
Boots and Diego: Hola!  
Nelly: Wow you guys look great! ¿*Pero Dora donde esta el caballo?*  
Dora: No se.  
Nelly: Well I think I know how we can find him.  
Boots: How, how, how?!

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10 In Los Angeles, my parents will occasionally buy a *Rosca de Reyes*, and share it with neighbors and friends who are available that evening.
Nelly: In Mexico on three king’s day my family puts straw in shoes as a snack for the elephant, the camel, and the horse.
Dora: Look this shoe is empty.
Diego: The horse must have been here and eaten it already.
Boots: Aww!
Nelly: It’s okay Boots, look! El caballo must have dropped some straw you can follow the straw. You can follow the straw to find him.
Diego: Buena idea Nelly.
Dora: Smart thinking.
Boots: We’ll see you at the party right?!
Nelly: I wouldn’t miss it. Buena suerte.
All of them: Gracias. (Season 5, Episode 102, Dora Saves the Three Kings).

The producers create spaces in which biculturalism is celebrated through these secondary characters and through Dora’s own story. However, given that these episodes are limited to highlighting the differences that are less threatening, such as not mentioning that Nijim might be Muslim, or that perhaps, Camila’s mom immigrated to the No-name Island from Guatemala, the fact that we do not know how or why these bicultural children arrive to the No-name Island is fundamental given the program’s claims of being bicultural and bilingual. All of the themes are interdependent thus giving room for further elaboration of the themes already discussed. The following theme engages the issue of bilingualism.

Bilingualism (language issues). Linked to the notion of biculturalism is the notion of bilingualism. A key theme throughout the seasons is the use of language. Language is key to the popularity of Dora the Explorer. She teaches children Spanish and the appreciation of other languages. As we learn in Season five, other languages are introduced through basic expressions such as the following; Dora says good bye in Japanese to Yuki, “Sayōnara”; Pash says “Nanuk”, which means, Polar Bear in Inuit language, an Indigenous language spoken in the North American Arctic (this information is not provided by Nickelodeon); Dora and Helena say “Здравствуйте” which means Hello in Russia. In this episode, a Russian doll wants to find her other dolls and call out for them “Matryoshka, Matryoshka!” Helena helps Dora by letting her
know what the big doll wants in order for the doll to move out of the path that Dora and Boots are on in order to arrive to their destination. The episode, “Mayan Adventure” introduces a few Mayan words but they are limited to character names, Hunahpu and Xbalanque. These episodes and characters will be thoroughly assessed later in this chapter.

In spite of the different languages spoken, in *Dora the Explorer*, Spanish and English are still the leading languages selected by the producers. Nevertheless English is the dominant language spoken in these cartoons. And not surprisingly, English is kept as the second language when *Dora the Explorer* is dubbed in other languages. As explained by Guidotti-Hernández (2007)

*Neciehp* [an online parent blogger] argues that Dora is a medium that teaches English speakers too much Spanish in an English-only national context where Latino/as are always immigrants who must assimilate linguistically. To have Spanish at once signify the language of the other and a place outside of US borders, over there, reinforces the ways in which Latino/as are perpetually erased from US national narratives except when they are located as an immigration problem or sources of cheap labor (p. 211).

Thus, this issue ties to the theme raised before, in which Dora never calls herself Latina. In any of the first five seasons, consequently rendering her biculturalism to language and other cultural markers that her creators produce to mark her biculturalism. Additionally, this “Latina” travels to other homes teaching children from other countries English rather than Spanish. All 24 different productions use English as the language being taught to children/viewers rather than the intentional Spanish (See Appendix B). Thus, Spanish becomes colonized through the production of these English teaching tools. Dora speaks English and Spanish but in order to make the cartoon more marketable and profitable for other countries, her identity must be altered and reflect more the reality of the child viewing it, at least through language. This is a form of cultural invasion. For example, Darder (1991) states, “The hegemonic forces of class oppression and cultural invasion strongly converge in the dynamics of language domination” (p. 37).
Undeniably, Dora’s character is used to spread the English language whether or not she is seen as Latina in these countries. In this case, a marker that adds to her presumably Latina identity is stripped, or perhaps not, given that many third generation U.S. born Latinas/os eventually speak only English. Yet, by encoding this stripping of language or exchange of language we can propose that Latinas or Latinos do not solely speak Spanish but other languages as well. By encoding the substituting of Spanish for English we clearly see how language via media is filled with power relations that are not controlled by the public but by the corporate media networks.

Corporate media networks function as power brokers that do what is more convenient and marketable for their companies. The language used in this cartoon is attached to a power struggle in which the networks are the ones that choose what language is used over another. This also attributes to the process of colonization and racialization that happens via media outlets in which languages are substituted or sprinkles of languages are used here and there in order to illustrate how committed these networks are to diversity, when in reality what they are invested in is their ratings and popularity that will generate more profit. Thus, the U.S. based *Dora the Explorer* travels around the globe teaching English rather than Spanish to other children. Both languages are tied to colonization in regards to Indigenous languages yet in regards to U.S. Latina/os, English is dominant over Spanish does by erasing and dubbing over the Spanish language in the other translated cartoons we witness a new form of colonization through technology. Yet, we cannot gloss over the fact that this program does attempt to create bilingual programming and bilingual teaching tools on their website. Pedagogically speaking, the network attempts to create spaces where parents who are monolingual Spanish speakers (and are computer savvy) receive the opportunity to print out Spanish handouts to prepare their children for Kindergarten (Viacom International Inc). Thus, this also replicates the standardized testing practiced Nationwide in
classrooms, in which children learn to take and pass tests. This issue will be discussed further later, for now let us continue with the issue of bilingualism in the cartoons.

There are various levels of bilingualism shown throughout the cartoon. For example, Dora is bilingual and assists other characters that are monolingual Spanish speakers (i.e. Tico the squirrel and Sr. Túcan) or English speakers (i.e. Boots the monkey, Benny the bull, and Isa the iguana) in order to navigate the No-name Island and communicate with each other. The children get to repeat different words throughout a particular episode. These words are active words, counting, animals, etc. As explained by Brandi Kleinert Larsen (nd), “The Spanish words spoken in Dora the Explorer are carefully chosen. ‘We have a language consultant who helps us choose preschool-appropriate words,’ Walsh says. ‘These words are repeated over and over in different episodes. They're action verbs that kids use in everyday life, words for counting and colors that they're already using in English” (Kleinert Larsen, nd). For example, episode eleven “The Happy Old Troll,” in season two there is a dialogue where Boots makes it clear that Dora is bilingual and he needs her help in order to know what is going on. But beyond that marker of translator and bilingual character that Dora portrays we have the Fish, who claims that he is learning Spanish and asks, Dora and Boots, if they speak Spanish. Boots immediately turns to Dora, his personal translator and tells her, “Dora, you speak Spanish!” There are three different characters here and different levels of language use.

Boots: Hi Fish! Can you give us a ride across the lake?
Fish: I’m just learning English. ¿Hablan Español?
Boots: Dora you speak Spanish!
Dora: ¿Nos llevas al otro lado?
Fish: Claro que sí.
Dora: He said yes.
Boots: Cool I’ve never ridden on a fish before.
Dora: Me neither. Salvavidas! Life Jackets, so we can be safe!
Culebras! Pass the snakes
Dora: Vamos – say “vamos”
The viewers need to say “vamos” in order to pass the culebras in the lake. Dora and Boots say, “Muchas gracias” to the fish.

Dora is the bilingual character that translates for Fish and Boots. Fish is learning English but prefers to speak Spanish if the other characters, Dora and Boots, can speak Spanish. Making it explicit that he is learning English in his introduction, makes the viewer aware that he acknowledges the English language as an asset but prefers to speak Spanish. Boots understood the question, *¿Hablan Español?* However, Boots immediately made it clear that he does not speak Spanish but Dora does and she will translate for them. This scene signals that bilingualism is a process. There are different levels of bilingualism and arriving to a place where you are comfortable to talk in the other language. We also see how confident Dora is as the bilingual character and how her bilingualism is key to her survival and the survival of others. In order to cross the river they need to say “Vamos” and, in doing so, they are able to cross the river safe and successfully.

In episode sixteen, “Super Map,” also in season two, there is an exchange between Dora, Boots, Tico, and the viewers.

*Tico on his boat*

Dora and Boots: Hola Tico! Tico the Squirrel!
Tico: ¿Qué pasa?
Dora: ¿Nos puedes llevar por el Río?
Tico: Sí
Dora: Tico said he will take us through the river.
Tico: Pero necesitan chalecos, salvavidas!
Dora: But we need life jackets, so we can be safe!

This is not the only time that Tico helps Dora and Boots cross the river or other bodies of water, such as lakes that are mentioned in other episodes. Tico is the constant monolingual Spanish-speaker character in the entire production. Tico is a squirrel that wears what looks like a traditional jacket. Through my research I found out that Tico “is a colloquial term for a native of
Costa Rica. Costa Ricans are usually referred to as Ticos by themselves and persons of other Spanish-speaking countries, instead of using the more-formal Costarricense” (Wikipedia, Tico). Yet, this reference only establishes a relationship with Tico the squirrel and Tico the term used in Costa Rica through my encoding, but the producers never make this link; as a consequence, it continues the trajectory of not naming where some characters are from and maintaining ambivalence and open to interpretation. Such ambiguity serves to maintain difference as apolitical and ahistorical in the text of *Dora the Explorer*. Even when Tico is the character that represents a monolingual Spanish speaker throughout the cartoon, he is rendered invisible when his origin is not valued or recognized. Tico, for me, represents the child who does anything to fit in, to assist, and to be part of the in-group in school because he or she is marked with a linguistic difference. While he is not seen as deviant or mistrusted by Dora and his fellow friends, he is marked by the way he is dressed and in the manner that his language is central to his character and the way he navigates through the *No-name Island*.

Pedagogically, aside from Dora being the main bilingual character, we also have bilingual teachers who speak Spanish and English. There are three teachers throughout season one and season five. They all speak Spanish and English, and not surprisingly, they are all female.

All of *Dora the Explorer’s* episodes engage the issue of language given that this is central to the cartoon. The theme of bilingualism and biculturalism are exemplified in Chapter six where I discuss the episodes “Dora’s First Trip,” “Boots to the Rescue,” and “The First Day of School.”

**Gender relations (Feminism/Patriarchy).**

[Dora] is positioned as a symbol of gender equity rather than of sexuality or gendered oppression because she is a child who is less threatening to traditional gender roles than a woman would be (Guidotti-Hernández, 2007, p. 214).
This section engages the theme of gender relations in *Dora the Explorer*. Nevertheless, Dora’s bilingualism and biculturalism are intertwined with her role as a young “Latina” girl. In regards to gender, *Dora the Explorer’s* creators wanted to represent a strong female lead that did not give up easily. In an interview Valerie Walsh, co-creator of *Dora the Explorer* states, “There are so many shows out there that have characters act in very stereotypical ways. We believed you should see someone on TV who knows that it's important to be smart and work well with others,” Walsh said. ‘This is more important than the *Barbie* image. Chris had daughters and preschoolers at the time and agreed that there was a lack of female role models” (Kleinert Larsen). As described by Mary F. Rogers, *Barbie* is “Adorable; blowy, breathtaking, charming, chic; dazzling, delicate, dramatic; elegant and exquisite; fanciful, fashionable, and fetching; glamorous and glittering; graceful; lovely; radiant, regal, romantic; shimmering, sparkling, stunning” (Rogers, 1999, p. 11). While Dora is not wearing a strapless dress or wearing high heels, she does demonstrate traits or a feminine lady-like personality. As *Barbie* critic states, “Femininity entails not only an appropriate appearance but also a proper demeanor centered on being nice-soft spoken, polite, helpful, and sensitive” (Rogers, 1999, p. 15). Thus, the creators of *Dora the Explorer* maintain the demeanor of a well behaved, helpful, polite, and sensitive characteristics that *Barbie* poses without the high heels and over sexualized clothes and body. *Dora the Explorer*, opposed to *Barbie*, thinks before acting. As seen throughout her episodes Boots, her male counterpart, is impatient and precipitates into action without thinking. Dora asks him politely to “stop and think”.

Whereas in the episode we do not see *Dora the Explorer* as a feminist, womanist, and times even feminine, these labels are still applied to her gender through viewers’ decoding. For example, Rene Martin, a mother of two boys was compelled to write an article on her blog, titled
“Dora the Explorer Matters to Boys” (Martin, 2009). Martin (2009) argues that, “Unlike many of the female targeted cartoons Dora is unique; she goes on adventures, is *not overly sexualized and is of color*. She unabashedly speaks her native language and encourages children to learn and experiment. I must admit the little Spanish that I have picked up in the last few years is a direct result of the hours of Dora I have *had to watch*” (Italics added, Martin, 2009). This affirms that at least some of the well-intended objectives of *Dora the Explorer’s* creators have been met; yet, the following excerpts attest to the ambivalence her gender, femininity, and/or sexuality creates among other parents, community members, or friends of young children;

> When my boys watch and embrace Dora, they learn that masculinity is not the center of the universe even though so many things around them attempt to confirm this as a universal truth. It further becomes apparent to them that girls don’t all want to play dress up and mommy; they want to have adventures as well. If we want boys to grow and believe that girls are their equals, positive images of femininity are extremely important. When feminists write we constantly say that sexism hurts men but often this is just lip service and no real analysis emerges to explore this theme (Martin, 2009).

“Meaghan” replied to Rene’s post by stating,

> I'm really glad that you said this. I think one great failing of feminism is the critical analysis of how we are to reprogram the manner in which we teach and interact with children. *It's as though we haven't yet figured out that a number of issues can be alleviated by starting WITH children. Dora, as she is, provides an example of femininity to young boys that isn't present in a number of other places. So the work we do as feminists is always after kids and young adults have already been negatively, or inaccurately, programmed. Shows like Dora get the process started off with accurate representations of girls and women and will ultimately cultivate better men in the end. At least I think so!* (bold added, Martin, 2009).

Meaghan’s response alludes to the responsibility that popular culture has to children, but should responsibility be placed simply on media? She claims a feminist perspective and yet her analysis of the show as an “accurate representation” makes one believe that Dora as a Latina becomes secondary to gender, thus separating gender and ethnicity as if they are not interdependent. Thus, the respect for language and ethnic differences is secondary to the respect
for women of all races. Furthermore, in regard to her statement of “accurate representations,”
who is to say that these forms of expressions that Dora represents are accurate at all? Given this
study we learn that while the producers attempt to create a new discourse for young children that
challenges the Barbie discourse per se, it still has its slippages in regards to meaning making,
whether these slippages are in regards to language, culture, race, ethnicity, and gender.

Additionally, Meaghan’s statement “It’s as though we haven’t yet figured out that a
number of issues can be alleviated by starting WITH children” only reaffirms the loss of hope
that young adults and adults cannot necessarily learn how to respect difference in regards to
gender. Meghan’s statement also reaffirms that children are blank slates in which we can socially
construct them and raise them up through a worldview of an adult liking. I agree that issues
about race, gender, sexuality, and class should be taught at an early age but I would argue that
these issues should be taught with a conscious effort to liberate and empower all human beings.

So how would Dora or other animated cartoons teach this? Through the analysis of different
episodes, I have highlighted different ways in which these concepts can be engaged through
dialogue with children.

Gender intertwines with issues of home and school through various replies to this blog; as
seen in “Pierce Harlan’s” reply, he states,

Of course it's legitimate to be concerned that female heroes are underrepresented in
cartoons. But sadly, some of the same people bemoaning this underrepresentation seem
not to notice the absence of male role models in lives of too many boys and girls -- at
home and at school -- or worse, seem to think it's a positive trend. If every single cartoon
were populated with male heroes, it wouldn't make up for the absence of a dad. Or a
caring male teacher.

So, yes, Dora is great -- for girls and boys. Far more important -- again, for both boys and
girls -- is to find an end to the epidemic where kids don't have everyday male [role]
models (Martin, 2009).

Pierce Harlan’s mentions the lack of male role models in children’s lives. But more so he
claims that even by having positive male heroes in every cartoon, it would not replace the “absence of a father or a caring male teacher”. In regard to *Dora the Explorer*, the teachers that are found throughout season one and season five are all female and bilingual, thus, replicating what Harlan raises in his blog post. He’s right for pushing this conversation further and placing responsibility back on society rather than media itself. If media is a circular model in which encoding and decoding does take place, not evenly because of what was mentioned earlier in this study, in which networks have power to produce, to leave out, or to fabricate meanings. Thus blogs and studies such as this one offer a response (encoding) towards these productions in which we might change future productions. Many of these parents and respondents place a great responsibility on media as educators of how children should be raised and brought up, such as respecting woman and knowing that “woman can also be adventurous” not passive. They also practice a media literacy that asserts them as “good” parents and that they know what is best for their children. If you are raising your child to be conscious and critical of their surroundings then there should be an element of creating a critical social consciousness for them, where they are able to critically engage with these cartoons.

Most parents express that television programming are pedagogical engines in which their children and themselves learn how to act in society and conform. They also learn how to be consumers by purchasing the merchandise with *Dora the Explorer’s* image on it. Thus, because she is the only ‘positive’ role model for girls and boys, as these parents claim, then the rest of the animated cartoons their children watch are…? As seen through this study this question does not have a clear-cut answer. *Dora the Explorer* is seen as a “healthy role model” and “great-for girls and boys.” For example, Rachel_in_WY states in regards to Rene Martin’s post,

I couldn't agree more. I first discovered Dora when *my best friend and I were searching for a positive female role model for her son*, who's now 9. I didn't have my girls back then, but
having Dora in place as a **healthy role model** waiting for them has been really nice for me. I think we (especially those of us who are only raising girls) often forget that **feminist parenting is equally challenging for parents of boys and girls.** If boys aren't given healthy female role models it's unreasonable for us to expect them to have attitudes toward women that differ from the cultural norm (Italics added, Martin, 2009).

While Rachel_in_WY makes a good point that there is a need for more healthy role models for children, she also makes it clear that she relies on media to teach her children how to function in society or at least she thinks that this is how all parents think. Rachel_in_WY statement “If boys aren't given healthy female role models it's unreasonable for us to expect them to have attitudes toward women that differ from the cultural norm” makes me think of why would it be unreasonable for us to expect more from these young men? Why not expect more of them? Why not challenge their masculinity or engage their masculinity through dialogue and critical engagement of their surroundings? Why not live a life where respect for women, men, and those who do not identify or submit themselves to these gendered norms as human beings? This leads me to another issue parents had in 2005 regarding *Dora the Explorer’s* lack of clothes for boys.

Amey Stone (2005) in her blog post, “Where is the Dora clothing for boys?” states:

My son is pleased as punch. He found a great Dora shirt (on sale) on a recent trip to Kohl's. It pictures his favorite of all possible favorite characters: Dora, Boots and a cool star. **OK, so it has ruffles on all the bottom hems. But at least it's not pink!** ... Why can't the relentless marketers create boy's clothing with Dora's image on it? I get that cousin Diego was added to address just this issue. But it's not Diego that Everett loves: it's Dora. Dora's the hero. *And I see nothing wrong with little boys who think little girls are cool. To present the world otherwise would be terrifically sexist.* Yet, clothing marketers are evidently stuck in the chauvinist past. Every little boy I know loves Dora. *Why can't I buy Dora clothing without having to cut off the ruffles?* We have a woman secretary of state. Women CEOs of some of the biggest tech companies. Woman Supreme Court Justices. This is the 21st century. *Can't our little boys have little girl heroes?* (Italics added, Stone, 2005)

Dora’s gender becomes an issue not because she is a girl but because of how merchandise is labeled and separated for girls and boys and thus, because she is a girl her clothes are “pink with ruffles”. Even though the producers strive to make Dora’s gender as diverse by making her a
soccer player and princess at the same time, the corporate-market still marks her gender as feminine thus having parents’ become enraged by the lack of gender neutral clothing with Dora’s image. “Observing children with their favorite toys, ... shows that a toy can ‘become an identity around which the child organizes his or her actions and concepts of the world’ (Rogers, 1999, p. 91). This suggests that, even when the producers intentionally try to move away from rigid gender practices, they fall back into the trap of reproducing hegemonic gender normative practices through the marketing of children’s merchandise. While normative gendered roles continue to be practiced in the realm of online networking and online blogging, in the following section I address a highly normative practice within Latinas/os, this is the Quinceñera ritual that takes an entire episode in Dora the Explorer.

While patriarchal norms are intentionally challenged in Dora the Explorer, by making the lead character a seven-year-old bicultural and bilingual girl, we still see instances in which these transformative and emancipatory moments slip into traditional patriarchal practices. Moments of patriarchy are subtle in this cartoon in regard to Dora.

The Latin American author Julia Alvarez (2007), states, “A ‘quinceñera’ (the term is used interchangeably for the girl and her party) celebrates a girl’s passage into womanhood with an elaborate, ritualized fiesta on her fifteenth birthday … In the old countries, this was a marker birthday: after she turned fifteen, a girl could attend adult parties; she was allowed to tweeze her eyebrows, use makeup, shave her legs, wear jewelry and heels. In short, she was ready for marriage” (p. 2). It is not unusual to know someone who has practiced this rite of passage.

Fifteen years ago, I practiced this rite of passage and cycle of life—my Quinceñera (Cotillion). At first my parents had asked me if I wanted to do anything and I said that I had heard how much those events cost and I felt that I would only put a burden on my parents’
financial budget. To be conscious of one’s economic status is a daily practice in working class and poor families. I was reluctant to have an expensive party because of money. Yet, networking became the key to organizing this elaborate party. My mother used these skills in order to have much of the party paid for. At the moment I was teaching catechism to first graders and my mom mentioned to the priest that I was going to be fifteen in a couple of months. The priest offered to do the mass for a donation, which saved us money. According to other people, churches charge up to three hundred for a special mass. The lady that made my dress was a family friend and had mentioned to my mom and me she would do my dress when I was very small, which my mom remembered. We called her and she gladly agreed to make it for me at no charge, but we had to purchase the fabric. I worked those months through a school-career program and used the money earned to buy my shoes, the crown of flowers (this replaced the tiara usually worn), and the dresses for the three little girls (my sister and two of her friends) that accompanied me in the ceremony instead of a full blown cohort of chambelanes and damas. I had created my invitations on the computer my padrinos (godparents) had gifted me before entering High School. My parents made the food, hence, this is why they were minutes late to the ceremony. During these years, my brother was “Djing” with a friend so he asked him if he could borrow his equipment to Dj at my party—our party. There are probably more details that I’m missing but this is how people networked in order to secure resources and make things happen.

Two days before my birthday it rained so hard that the streets were flooded, my mom, a devoted catholic, said “Pon todo en las manos de Dios” (Leave everything in God’s hands). I trusted her and I prayed to the Creator that things would work out, because this was it, I was turning fifteen. And everyone had worked hard to secure things, the food was being prepared, and the invitations had been sent. My mom and her fast thinking skills called a friend who
worked at the church and asked if there was any way he could come help set up for the party because there was mud all over. He quickly thought that it would be better to have it at the church’s salon. He asked my mom to call the priest and tell him the situation. My mother did and we were able to borrow the salon. If it were not for my mom’s clever ways to find resources, this story would have had a different outcome. Thus, reflecting on the lessons learned from my quince, they were beyond dressing up in a gown, wearing high heels, and putting on makeup. My mom taught me that anything is possible when you speak, ask, and have an extended network of friends. Friendship is generosity, reciprocity, and respect. My mother was able to ask for help because she had already offered her help to these friends before and their friendship was based on mutual respect and generosity. My mother and father have taught me lessons of giving, loving, and respect through their ways of living.

At the ceremony, my brother accompanied me because my parents were running late, thus my father could not walk me down the aisle to seat me in front of the priest. Everyone told my brother you need to walk her because your father is not here, he said “y por que yo?” (Why me?). Someone answered, “Por que tu eres el hermano mayor” (Because you are the older brother). We did not argue and went along with the ceremony. I wonder now, why couldn’t I just walk in by myself? My dress was white; I wore a crown with flowers, jewelry, and high heels. Reflecting about it now, it did feel as if I were getting married, without the groom though. I remembered comments from my family stating that, “ahora eres una mujercita. Sigue siendo humilde y generosa” (now you're a young women, remain humble and generous). I skipped many of the other rituals, such as the wearing a tiara, wearing flats and changing them to high heels, giving up my last doll that marks “both the end of childhood and [the] symbolic readiness to bear [my] own child”, having the cohort of friends and chambelan, but I guess by default my brother was
my chambelan (Alvarez, 2007, p. 3). I did do a waltz with my father, padrinos, and brother. I recall also dancing with my mother, madrinas, and other women cousins. My family made a speech/toast and I remember thanking everyone for coming and being with me in this “very important day”. Friends, family, and teachers came to the party and the ceremony at church. While the practice of quinceñeras at times are seen as patriarchal practices, the sense of beautifying yourself, dancing the waltz with your father (or another male figure that has been there for you), having your mother give you advice she couldn’t tell you before, being the center of attention for one day is something many young women look forward to. It’s a performance and rite-of-passage of adolescence that has become popular in the United States.

While I was attracted to this episode in regards to my research of Dora, I have become also aware that while naming Quinceñeras as patriarchal and given the legacy or tradition that this was the time to “market” your daughter for marriage, I have also learned through Julia Alvarez’s research on quinceñeras and by reflecting on mine, that some young women have taken this time to make themselves known to their friends and families and that the new generations are transforming the practices, while attempting to keep traditions and ties to their Latina/o communities in the United States. In regards to her book and the hopes she has for future generations of women, Alvarez (2007) states “May this book be part of that imagining of a bright promising future for all our daughters. May they grow up feeling as special as princesses, as empowered as fairy godmothers, and as fiercely committed to the struggle for equality of all people as women warriors” (p. 14). This traditional practice is one of the many Latina/o markers that are in the episodes of Dora the Explorer. The following theme discusses more instances in which Dora the Explorer travels through a borderlands discourse of cultural meanings marked as Latinidades.
Latinidades (Cultural symbols and cultural relevance). *Dora the Explorer* has been repeatedly coded as Latina throughout her televised trajectory. However, as explained by her creators, “Dora wasn't always a bilingual girl. In the original show concept, she was a rabbit. Even after she became a girl, she wasn't envisioned as Latina -- her original name was Tess. Neither Valerie Walsh nor Chris Gifford, the show's creators, is bilingual. But that didn't deter Nickelodeon executives from asking Walsh and Gifford to consider making Dora a Latina character. The idea sprang from an industry conference during which network leaders were challenged to portray positive images of Latinos on TV” (Kleinert Larsen). Thus, her Latina identity surfaced after Viacom-Nickelodeon was challenged to produce positive Latina/o images. Making her a bilingual Spanish speaking child and a person of color through her brown skin, while also introducing “Latina/o” cultural markers, met the objective of the network. This signals to us that the initial attempt was not necessary to have a Latina heroine but simply a heroine. This represents how culture becomes a commodity for profit. Not only did Viacom/Nickelodeon introduce a Latina image but they introduced a new product and commodity—a new profit driven identity. A profit driven identity, certainly is not the image that Nickelodeon and Viacom advertise yet this is what has happened to *Dora the Explorer*. Thus, the production of *Dora the Explorer* was not based on creating an avenue for Latina presence or even challenging the white presence in animated cartoons; it was done to appease the Latino network advocates and by luck the network was successful due to the promising growth of Latina/o communities in the United States and across the globe.

It is fundamental to understand how Latinas/os identity is constructed in the United States in the context of Latinidad due to the constant framing of Dora’s identity as Latina, while there is no episode in which she states “I am Latina” or *Yo soy Latina*. As Isabel Molina Guzman and
Angharad Valdivia (2004) state, “This construction of Latinidad is transmitted primarily, though not exclusively, through the mainstream media and popular culture” (p. 206). Furthermore they explain,

As a demographic category, Latinidad describes any person currently living in the United States of Spanish-speaking heritage from more than 30 Caribbean and Latin America countries. It is an imagined community of recent, established and multigenerational immigrants from diverse cultural, linguistic, racial, and economic backgrounds. (Molina Guzman & Valdivia, 2004, p. 207).

I agree with Guidotti-Hernández (2007) that “Dora represents no particular Latino/a national identity, but her otherness is not far removed from the US context, so most viewers assume she is Mexican or Puerto Rican” (p. 212). I would add that given the production of her episodes in which she renders cultural markers that can be read as Mexican (Season 1, Te Amo) or Puerto Rican (Season 1, El Coqui), given the viewer’s knowledge this encoding assists with naming her “this” or “that”. Through different episodes the creators encode different cultural markers in which the viewer can decode them as this or that, from here, or from there, and eventually from everywhere and nowhere. Dora the Explorer, explorers as much as she is explored by the viewer, or at least a viewer as myself that has invested so much time decoding as well as encoding meaning to this fictional yet crucial cultural icon, that some might assert her as a—Latina cultural icon. However, those that might assert Dora as a Latina cultural icon should take note that the creators have depoliticized US Latinas/os history by making history in these episodes as vague as possible in regards to Dora’s identity and somewhat specific to secondary characters as seen in the bicultural theme presented earlier in this chapter.

The following selected images are decoded as discourses of Latinidad within Dora the Explorer. One of the main images that cannot be disregarded is the one shown at the beginning of this chapter. Dora and Boots look over the borderlands of the No-name Island and see the Big
River, El Río Grande. If you were raised listening to how your parents crossed the US-Mexico border and how many have crossed El Río Grande, this frame only epitomizes those stories. Dora and Boots look happy as perhaps many immigrants look at finally arriving to the river and closer to the promise land and the *American Dream*. However, the crossing of such river is not as harmonious, safe, and colorful as this image represents. The crossing as my mom tells me is something she would never like to relive or wishes for anyone. She recalls crossing the US-Mexico border with a few others, she did not know anyone in the group so the females right away become friends and look out for each other. She recalls that after walking for a long time she wanted to give up; she was thirsty, tired, and had blisters all over her feet. She did not realize the danger and the pain that this crossing would mean, but she continued until she arrived to the United States where she was sent to Downtown Los Angeles where she would meet her uncle. My father, who also crossed the US-Mexico border, recalls the smell of dead corpses, the people who got lost on the way, the praying he and others did, the thirst and the pain he and all those who crossed the border and survived. My border consciousness thus made me relive these stories I grew up with as a child. My parents retell these stories in order to ground our lives in humanity, community, survival, and regard to others.

Thus, this border crossing represents survival of Indigenous principles that have shaped the way I view these media productions and can articulate a critique that is guided by them. The creators of this episode might have unconsciously named this river “The Big River” given that Dora teaches children “big” as *Grande* and “small” as *pequeño* throughout many episodes. However, given that she is consciously called Latina, El Río Grande is a major marker for Latina/o who has migrated to the United States through various generations as well as those who originally occupied formerly U.S. territory annexed by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848.
This is not limited to Mexicanas/os but all those who cross the U.S.-Mexico border looking for a better life to offer their families.

Los Tres Reyes Magos, as discussed in the bicultural theme, is a celebration in which Catholics celebrate the birth of Christ. This can be decoded as a form of Latinidad given that many Latinas/os celebrate this event in their respected countries and in the United States. However in the episode, it is presented as a celebration without the religious component. This thus erases the original intent of Los Tres Reyes Magos making the episode about a party rather than a religious event. Those who are religiously affiliated to Catholicism can decode this episode through their knowledge of the event; however, those that do not practice this religion can simply see it as a party. This practice renders the episode as a religious or non-religious episode given your previous knowledge of the event. This follows the trajectory of the producers when rendering Dora’s affiliations ambiguous for the sole purpose of making it more consumable and palpable.

Quinceñeras are practiced through many Latin American and South American countries including Puerto Rico, Mexico, and now practiced in the United States. Quinceñeras as discussed previously in the gender relations theme is a practice in which young women come of age through an elaborate or modest party given your budget. This event epitomizes what coming of age means for those who choose to have a quinceñera but I wonder what goes on with those who choose not to have one, as my sister did. She said she did not want to have one because she did not want one. My parents did not force her to have one and I wonder if she regrets it or if she still holds the same principles of why she did not want one since the beginning. Dora looks up to her cousin, thus, while she might never have a quinceñera because as we know it’s been ten years and she hasn’t aged, Dora has her cousin Daisy who embodied the coming of age for her.
From the episode of *El Coquí*, one might come to know that Dora does not live in Puerto Rico because she needs to get Coquí to his Island, which we may say is Puerto Rico. As I will discuss further in the selected episodes section, El Coquí has to go back to his *beautiful Island* where he can sing and live. As I learned through research, Los Coquíes can only exist in Puerto Rico. “The Coquí genre is found in all the Caribbean Islands, and in Central and South America […] but] the only one that makes the ‘co-qui’ sound is the Puerto Rican co-qui” (El Boricua 2006, May 3). *Would it have been difficult for the producers to name the Islands?* I argue that for their marketing purposes, apolitical, and ahistorical tendencies—yes. It would have been difficult to maintain their agendas while educating children about these histories. The producers never mention the United States or Puerto Rico in their episodes. Mexico, Guatemala, and Peru are mentioned throughout various episodes as well as other countries, such as Egypt, China, Japan, Russia, and Australia. This lack of naming has to do with trying to remain objective however it only reproduces the division of us-and-them and the erasure of history. I can only wonder how this translates when Dora the Explorer is viewed in other countries and the reception of such. Do we as viewers carelessly assume that Dora is in the U.S or Puerto Rico? For now, the question of why name or why leave places unnamed are on the table and given that we are dealing with a borderlands discourse in this study, we can perhaps see why at times naming is important and at times naming becomes problematic.

As discussed earlier, Camila’s parents are from Guatemala. We do not know the story of how they arrived to the No-name Island but what we do know is that Camila’s mother owns a blanket shop. We also know that Dora speaks to Camila in Spanish rendering her a monolingual Spanish speaker. Camila’s mother teaches her the art of weaving. In this particular episode we see her mother working on a blanket and when she speaks, she speaks Spanish. While in the
bicursal theme I discussed this scene as an attempt to highlight Indigenous practices and bicursal identity, specifically…[say what practices you were highlighting]here I would like to focus on the invisibility of migration processes in the cartoon. Yes, *this is an animated children’s cartoon, and when do we see any form of migration process in any children’s cartoons, anyways?* An example where this has happened is PBS’s *Maya and Miguel’s* cartoons, where we know that Maya and Miguel are Puerto Rican and Mexican, we also know that Christy is Afro-Dominican. The children name themselves Puerto Rican and Mexican, and for Christy she names herself Afro-Dominican. The naming and affirming of one’s identity is crucial to the bicursal experience. The producers of *Maya and Miguel* attempt to show some form of migration process through the Grandmother’s stories as well as homework assignments that these children bring back home. Thus, the naming of origin is possible in animated cartoons, though the producers of *Dora the Explorer* choose not to name Dora’s origins. They make migratory processes hidden, only naming where these secondary characters are from but not acknowledging the process of why or how they go to the No-name Island, thus depoliticizing the migratory process.

Consequently, the way that the discourse of Latinidad is employed throughout *Dora the Explorer* can either serve or hinder the Latinas/os communities; on one hand it can be seen as advocating bilingualism, biculturalism, and respect for differences and on the other hand it depoliticizes migratory processes, erases historical ties to US territory, and renders Latinas/os as homogenous. This leads me to talk about the power relations and hidden discourses of cultural invasion found throughout the episodes.

**Power relations (Cultural invasion, domination, subordination, and conquest).** The various discourse of Latinidades found in *Dora the Explorer* become problematic when they render Dora a representative of a homogenous Latina/o identity rather representing the
heterogeneity of Latinas/os in the United States. As a result, the producers of *Dora the Explorer* introduced secondary characters to season five that reflect the heterogeneity of Latina/o communities. For example, in season five we meet Camila from Guatemala, Luis from Peru, and Nelly from Mexico. Through different stories and interactions with Dora, the viewer can decode that they have migrated to the *No-name Island* and are there to stay. Nevertheless, these characters are not limited to Mexico, Latin American and South American countries. The producers also introduce May from China, Nijim from Egypt, Helena from Russia, Posh from Antarctica, Amelie from France, Yuki from Japan, Chloe from Australia, Diego from South America, and Emma from Denmark.

All of these children know their home language and speak English, except for Nelly, a character that represents Mexico; Luis who represent Peru; and Camila who represents Guatemala. In rendering the Latina/o children/students as Spanish speakers and not bilingual, does this not reproduce the hegemonic ideology that immigrants from Mexico, Latin American and South American resist learning English or that other countries teach English to their children at an early age? Does this slip from the producers own impressions that Latina/o children have a more difficult time learning English in the United States? The No-name Island is the U.S. but as discussed earlier the producers deliberately have chosen not to name the island and leave it as an ambivalent place where everything is possible. Another way of decoding this episode is to focus on the fact that while Dora does speak Spanish, Luis, Camila, and Nelly choose to speak Spanish with her rather than English. While the producers create a space in which home languages are used as a tool for socializing and better integration to society, we still see the rendering of language as a form of cultural invasion. By representing Luis, Camila, and Nelly as monolingual Spanish speakers, as opposed to the other bilingual and bicultural characters from other
countries, the producers create a sense of cultural invasion through the episode. In the images above, phenotypically and linguistically these characters are rendered the same.

The difference is that Nelly is from Mexico, Luis is from Peru, and Camila is from Guatemala. This is an example of how the producers have chosen to portray different communities in Latin America, South America, and Mexico. There is a fixed notion that all those who come from these parts of the world are dark brown and only speak Spanish. The animated cartoon is viewed in the United States where the second language most spoken is Spanish. These markers of identity were found through the approach taken in this study. While I understand that these characters assist Dora’s Spanish speaking and bilingual skills, these characters are not the only ones that do not speak English. It is also understandable that the producers might have thought that these characters represent more closely the Latina and Latino communities in the United States, however this is a generalization and only feeds into the stereotypes that Latinas/os do not want to learn English as already noted. The producers made a deliberate choice to have the other characters from non-Spanish speaking countries bilingual rendering the Spanish speakers monolingual.

As Darder (1991) explains, “Cultural invasion represents an antidialogical action that serves to sustain social, political, and economic oppression of subordinate groups” (p. 36). Thus there are intrinsic contradictions within the episodes of *Dora the Explorer* in relation to language, culture, and identity. While we have the celebration of bilingualism and biculturalism, we also have the erasure and depoliticized stories of the bicultural children presented in these cartoons. In regard to the bilingual and bicultural differences found in the episodes, Darder (1991) reminds us that “important to their development of social consciousness and their process of conscientization is the awareness of how language and power intersect in ways that include or
exclude students of color from particular social relationships” (p. 103). Thus, how is Luis (Peruvian), Camila (Guatemalan), and Nelly (Mexican) included and excluded? They are included by being part of this cartoon and by using their language to express different lived experiences, yet they are marked deliberately as “Other” by having them only speak Spanish as opposed to the other characters who speak their home language and English. Being monolingual is not marked as a deficit in the episodes however, without Dora as the translator; they would not be able to communicate with Boots and other English speaking characters. This idea is challenged later in the section where I engage the relationship between Tico (monolingual Spanish speaker) and Boots (monolingual English speaker) in the episode, *Dora’s First Trip*. Language and culture has been tied to the conquest and liberation of people. In this case I would like to turn to an image regarding school experiences, more specific the indicators that mark differences between Camila and Dora.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) states that “Imperialism … could be tied to a chronology of events related to ‘discovery,’ conquest, exploitation, distribution and appropriation” (p. 21). In the episode, Camila who is from Guatemala is wearing a uniform. Dora tells the viewer that Camila attends another school and she needs to run along to get to her school. I decode Camila’s uniform as a British boarding school uniform. Remember, Camila is from Guatemala whose mother owns a blanket shop and has a father who taught her how to find turtles when they were in Guatemala, perhaps an anthropologist. The producers reproduce a colonial representation of schooling in this instance through Camila’s uniform. *Why did they choose Camila as the character that wears the school uniform? Is Luis and Nelly also attending boarding school?* Thus, alluding that immigrants are acceptable in this No-name Island if they have wealth or can contribute resources such as Camila’s mother’s blanket shop and Camila’s father’s intelligence.
Although the response to these questions are not readily available, it is transparent that the producers, while holding an advocate position toward bilingualism and biculturalism also slip into hegemonic and colonized aspects of schooling by creating a uniformed character rendering her the “other”. “As such, the ‘othering’ of cultures and languages outside of the mainstream has consistently burdened minority languages populations to prove themselves as ‘decent human beings’ worthy and deserving of entrance into the inner sanctum of nation-state citizenship and the opportunities it affords” (Darder, 2004, p. 233). For Chicanas/os and Latinas/os (this includes all Indigenous and immigrant communities that are often not named, but which are encompassed within the use of these labels), ‘difference’ and the process of ‘othering’ is present in everyday practices and embedded in policies that serve to normalize their differences as ‘other’. Thus, the representation of Camila’s uniform only reinforces the differences found in schooling and the colonial traditions still practiced in schools today. Thus issues of power relations in *Dora the Explorer* are decoded through markers, such as the uniform and language use.

**Decolonizing/Empowerment (Social agency).** Decolonization is not separated from power relations as Tuhiwai Smith (1999) argues, “Decolonization is a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels” (p. 20). While the theme of power relations engages examples of how colonialism and cultural invasions are represented in *Dora the Explorer* we also find decolonizing aspects throughout various episodes. There are several principles of decolonization presented in *Dora the Explorer*, such as generosity, respect to non-human relations, and cross generational regard. While I attempt to focus on decolonizing aspects in these next episodes, I will also address any power relations that might challenge the decolonizing aspect. As explained throughout this study all of these themes are intertwined and
thus at times they cannot be separated from each other and because the intent is to be critical and highlight the intrinsic nature of the cartoons we must then engage this dialectic.

In the episode “The Mayan Adventure” the twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, help Boots and Dora travel through the starry jungle after they entered the pyramid of the moon. After they made it through the pyramid they have to cross the starry jungle. They need to go to the starry jungle next. When they arrive to the jungle Dora states, “We made it to the starry jungle”.

Boots: This jungle is so dark. We need more light to see our way through.
The twins: Dora, Mayans use the stars to help us find our way. Our father taught us how to do it. Yea, look. The stars make pictures in the sky called constellations but they aren’t bright enough because they are the little baby constellations. If we find the big mommy constellations they can brighten our way.
Dora to the viewers: Will you help us bring the baby constellations and the mommy constellations together? Pause. Great!
They get through the starry jungle. They go to the ball game. They arrive to the ball game championship (Season 5, Episode, The Mayan Adventure).

This episode represents the Mayan story found in the Popol Vuh about Hunahpu and Xbalanque (Quiché). While I selected to focus on the scene where the twins assist Dora and Boots, let me contextualize a bit of how we know the Popol Vuh story of Hunahpu and Xbalanque (Quiché) and how the producers of Dora the Explorer sanitize the story and turn it into a story of morality and about “no cheating because cheaters never win.”

Hunahpu and Xbalanque played, as we know it now, a mesoamerican ball game. The game consisted of maintaining the ball in game and later, rings were added to have the players have the ball go through the rings. As in soccer, hands were not used thus the hips were often used to move the ball around and insert the ball in through the rings. The game was tied to significant rituals and played casually by children which is seen in Dora the Explorer. However, Hunahpu and Xbalanque’s story was about the contact between the underworld with the Lords of Xibalba and how they outsmarted them. Hunahpu and Xbalanque defeated the Lords of Xibalba
in a ball game. While in *Dora the Explorer* nobody gets killed, we do see how Pash, the leader of the other team (perhaps a Xibalba Lord) uses trickery to win his games, while Hunahpu and Xbalanque practice day and night in order to win the game fairly. *Dora the Explorer* and Boots discover Pash’s trickery while reading a book of the mesoamerican ball game. They quickly jump into the book in order to let the twins know about Pash’s tricks. The jumping of the book and having Indigenous stories can be seen as decolonizing and colonizing. On the one hand, the viewer can appreciate Indigenous creations stories and stories of survival, but on the other hand, we have the producers locating Indigenous people in the past rather than locating them as communities who still live today and practice their languages and customs, despite genocide and colonization. In regard to the quotation above where Hunahpu and Xbalanque teach Dora and Boots how to “see” and navigate through the dark skies, by locating the “mommy constellations,” children learn to appreciate the natural world and learn that we can navigate the natural world without technology (i.e. flash lights). Thus the teachings of natural law is evident in the episode.

Another example in *Dora the Explorer* that respects and acknowledges natural law through an aboriginal survival story is presented in a scene with Chloe, from Australia, in the episode, *Benny’s big race*.

*Dora:* Chloe is from Australia. And lived in the outback where they don’t have a lot of water. Maybe she can help us find water. Hi Chloe!

*Chloe:* Hi Dora.

*Dora:* Chloe these are my friends Boots and Benny. And we really need help.

*Chloe:* Good day Mates. Looks like your go-cart needs water.

*Benny:* But we can’t find any water in the desert.

*Chloe:* My grand dad taught me an old Aboriginal way to find water. First we have to look for a tree.

*Dora to the viewers:* Do you see a tree? Pause. There it is, come on!

*Chloe:* See this tree use to be next to a river that dried up. But if we dig deep enough we will uncover a water hole.

*Benny:* Oh boy, I love to dig.
They all dig with Benny and they found water.
Dora: Thanks for helping Chloe!
Chole: Anytime mates.
Chloe leaves in her doom buggy with a peace sign and Reminding Benny never to give up. (Season 5, Episode 104, Benny’s Big Race).

While one can praise the producers for including an Aboriginal way of finding water, it is disheartening that the only purpose of finding water presented was limited to pouring water to a go-cart that eventually would compete in a race. Thus, rendering this moment of creation story and sharing ways of survival to a competition, which in turn is a form of colonizing and an example of how diversity and multiculturalism are “orientalized,” presented to camouflage history. The Indigenous way of finding water thus becomes a way of cultural invasion and colonization. As well, the protocol to borrow from Mother Earth is disregarded by not mentioning prayer, song, or dance. I am aware that prayer, song, and dance are sacred and not shared through media, literature, or other outlets that can objectify this way of living, however, Indigenous communities do mention that there is a process not necessarily the process/ceremony itself. Thus, there was room for the producers to have Chloe mention that one must ask for permission to borrow from Mother Earth and use what is borrowed for good. This was missed and lost in the cartoon that focused on winning the race and the morality lesson to “never give up”. As Tuhiwai Smith (1999) states, “The past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices – all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope” (p. 4). Thus a moment of decolonization can easily slip into another form of colonization when protocols of ceremony are ignored or suppressed.

While this study recognizes the generosity that is expressed in Dora the Explorer, through her friendships, the gifting that happens from one character to another, the creation and
survival stories told through the secondary characters, the moments of care and respect shown mutually by different characters through various scenes, it is evident that there is still more work to be done in children’s media with regards to the issues of biculturalism and bilingualism.

**At the Crossroads**

One would expect that after viewing various *Dora the Explorer* episodes and critically engaging them, I would become convinced that Dora is in fact a great children’s televised cartoon or on the contrary, that there should be a nationwide boycott against this production, but in fact, I offer neither view. What became transparent is that *Dora the Explorer* embodies a colonized and decolonized entity, that at one moment she may be viewed as emancipatory and a minute later there is a slippage and the decolonized moment becomes oppressed and colonized. Thus, where does this analysis lead me? It leads me to the conceptualization of a dialectical continuum of Ambiguity (Figure 4). The six different themes discussed earlier in this chapter can be placed in this continuum and be evaluated where a scene engages that theme. I gave different examples for each theme and what is evident is that each theme selected move within this continuum never reaching a total colonizing or decolonizing state. The following section discusses the dialectical continuum of ambiguity in depth.
Chapter 6
Identity, Ambiguity, and the Pedagogical Borderlands

The new mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity...She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode—nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else (Anzaldúa, year, p. 210).

One would expect that after a content analysis of *Dora the Explorer* episodes, I would conclude that Dora is, in fact, a great children’s televisual cartoon or on the contrary, that there should be a nationwide boycott against this production, but in fact, I offer neither view. What became transparent is that *Dora the Explorer* embodies a sort of colonized and decolonized entity, that at one moment may be viewed as emancipatory and at the next there is a slippage and the decolonized moment also becomes colonizing. Thus, where does this analysis lead us? It leads me to the conceptualization of a dialectical continuum of ambiguity. The six different themes discussed earlier in this chapter can be placed in the context of this continuum and evaluated with respect to its impact. I provided different examples for each theme and what is evident is that each theme selected moves within this continuum, never reaching a total colonizing or decolonizing state. The following section discusses this dialectical continuum of ambiguity in depth.

**Dialectical Continuum of Ambiguity**

Given the politics of ambiguity, politics of difference, and politics of representation discussed in the earlier chapter a dialectical continuum of ambiguity (see Figure 4) embodies difference and representation via a borderlands discourse. This continuum is employed throughout the following chapter in which the episodes are engaged. My intent here is to create a
lens for educators, media and cultural studies theorists, and others who are invested in learning how to view children’s media and other media representations. The following is my contribution and illustration of the lens that was used given the theoretical and methodological lenses borrowed for this study. In particular this formulation for conceptualizing ambiguity draws on Darder’s bicultural continuum developed in her work on culture and power (2012, 1991).

Figure 4. Dialectical Continuum of Ambiguity.

The themes chosen for this study fall within a dialectical continuum of ambiguity. A dialectical continuum of ambiguity moves from colonizing and hegemonic aspects to decolonizing and emancipatory aspects within the episodes. At times there might be an instance that seems liberating, democratic, and even decolonizing to some viewers; however, there is the possibility that this same marker signifies a colonizing and hegemonic tendency for another viewer. The dialectical continuum of ambiguity assists in naming instances that can be encoded and decoded in various ways. Through this study this dialectical continuum assists with centering the project in a more holistic way that sees all the contradicting aspects of the consumption of this cartoon. The dialectical continuum of ambiguity through a borderlands discourse is also useful when addressing my central questions for this study. This continuum is not solely used on the episodes but also on the other media representations engaged throughout this study. This is not a prescribed method, as it is created from my lived experiences, scholarly work, and the way I came to this study in order to understand and create a new way of viewing, critiquing, and
A rich pedagogical borderland is found throughout the texts of *Dora the Explorer*. These pedagogical borderlands embrace the multiplicity and complexity of identity formations. As discussed earlier in this study, the notion of difference should not serve to reproduce ‘otherness’ but rather to create spaces of transformation and equity for those continuously marginalized and oppressed by those in power. Thus ambiguity here is problematized in light of a politics of cultural difference. The notion of difference is at times celebrated as something that the mainstream culture ‘accepts’ and ‘tolerates’. So, at the same time that difference may be accepted and tolerated, it can also be essentialized and used to preserve a politics of assimilation xenophobia. A dialectical continuum of ambiguity emerged through a careful borderlands discourse analysis of the Dora episodes. The following section is presented with five episodes, which are engaged via a dialectical continuum of ambiguity, to help illustrate the viability of this concept in the analysis of bilingual/bicultural children’s media.

**Data: Selected *Dora the Explorer* Episodes**

The selected episodes discussed in this chapter illustrate the complexities of identity, ambiguity, and the concept of borderlands.

**El Coquí.** “El Coquí” is an episode in which Dora and Boots helps Coquí go back to his ‘beautiful island’. Boots asks Dora, “What sounds does the little frog make?” Dora explains,
“That’s a special kind of frog. This little frog is called a Coquí, just like his song”. While reading their book, a Coquí appears, with a guitar “guitarra”. Boots asks him to sing, but he can’t. Coquí sounds as if he had a cold or sore throat. Dora reads her book, and finds out that if Coquí is removed from his Island and friends, he gets sick and can’t sing. In order to survive he needs to go back to his home. Dora and Boots help return “Coquí” to his beautiful island. Dora, Boots, and Coquí arrive at the Echo bush where they need to strategize to get to the other side. Dora asks children to say “Aaaa” so echo can open his mouth wide in order to get to the other side. Soon they arrive to a shore where Sr. Tucán (monolingual Spanish speaker) offers to help them by taking them on his boat to Coquí Island. Before they can board the boat they need to pay for three tickets, and each ticket costs, “a red coin with five dots”. At this moment, Dora asks the children to call out for Backpack who will help them find these particular coins in her backpack. Once “Back-pack” finds the coin with the help of the children, Dora asks the children to count up to three in Spanish, because as she explains “the machine [only] speaks Spanish”. “Uno, Dos, Tres!” at this moment they all jump on the boat to go to Coquí’s Island. Coquí sees a ship that is coming towards them! Dora exclaims, “Cuidado! Cuidado!” She turns to the viewers and says, “I need your help! Jump and wave your hands back and forth and say with me Cuidado! Cuidado!” They are saved and Dora thanks the viewers by stating “Thanks for saying Cuidado to warn the other ship!” “What’s next?” Dora asks. Jumping across the rocks. Dora asks, “Will you help us? You have to stand up like Coquí. Stand up! Stand up! Bend your knees and crouch down and now jump up high! Jump! Jump! Jump! Good jumping, like Coquí! Now jump like Coquí!” They arrive to Coquí’s Island and Coquí starts singing! Co-qui Co-qui Co-qui qui qui qui! “We did it! We did it! ¡Lo hicimos! ¡Lo hicimos!” song. At the end of every episode Dora, Boots, and friends sing this song as accomplishment and dance to it.
Te Amo. “Do you want to hear a story?” Dora pauses, waits for the viewer to answer, and continues. It is assumed that the viewer says, yes. Boots comes down from a tree to join Dora. Dora’s mom has given her a book named, Te Amo. At this moment we know that Dora is bilingual, meaning she can read in English and Spanish and accordingly translate for Boots. “Te amo?” asks Boots. “In English we say I love you. In Spanish we say ‘Te Amo!’” “Te amo, Te amo,” Boots repeats. Dora (directing herself to the viewer), “Can you say Te Amo?” Bilingualism and biliteracy is advocated through the programming and thus the viewers are asked to repeat and participate in bilingual activities. In order to read the book, Dora asks the children to call for Back-pack. “Back-pack, Back-pack!” Children need to find Te Amo; it’s a blue book with a small heart on it. The interactive arrow points to it as if the child guessed right and Back-pack respond with his “Yummy umm yummy, Delicioso!” Dora starts reading the story: “Once upon a time there lived a king and queen, they were very happy. Queen Maria and King Popo, they loved each other. Every day they told each other “I love you, te amo”. “But one day el Mago came and saw how the king and the queen were happy and didn’t like it. Abracadabra. El Mago cast a spell on them and sent each one to a different side of the world. But King Popo and Queen Maria loved each other so much that they walked until they found each other again. Te Amo”. Dora continues: “El Mago did not like this one bit. Abracadabra. He cast another spell, this time, turning them into mountains. They could not move, they could not speak, and they could not say te amo again.”

The king and queen are still mountains. They can come together if the spell is broken. The spell can only be broken if two true friends, two true heroes march up both mountains and scream, “Te amo!” Dora and Boots decide to go to the mountains and bring King Popo and
Queen María together again. They stop to think and ask the Map for help, “I’m the map, I’m the map” song.

*Come on, ¡Vamonos!, ... Come I know that we can do it!*

In this particular episode Dora and Boots route is as follows: (a) Bridge, (b) Rocks, and (c) Mountains. Throughout their adventure children put puzzles together. In this episode they need to help Dora and Boots build the bridge to cross it.

Once they cross the bridge, they help *Señor Burro* be a donkey again by completing several other puzzles. They come across the *El Mago* who was sleeping. An owl, *lechuza* in Spanish, is singing a Spanish lullaby in order to keep Mago from waking up, “*La lechuza, la lechuza, dice ‘Shh’, dice ‘Shh’, Hagamos silencio, Hagamos Silencio, por favor, por favor*”. Dora translates for Boots (and children) that “*la lechuza* is telling us not to make noise and keep quiet so *El Mago* won’t wake up”. Dora asks the children to help her climb up the mountain to say “*Te Amo*” and break the spell. Both Dora and Boots run up to each mountain and say “*Te Amo*”. The spell is broken and King Popo and Queen María become human again. danced to the “*We did it! We did it! ¡Lo hicimos!*” song.

**Dora’s First Trip.** Dora’s family invited all of Dora’s friends over for dinner. The episode starts by Dora telling the story when she first met Boots and her other friends. She starts her story, by remembering that Mamí and Papí gave her an explorer kit. She went outside to start exploring and using her kit when she runs into Boots.

Dora: Hola me llamo Dora. My name is Dora, what’s your name?

Boots: My name is Boots.

Dora and Boots encounter a fox.

Dora: What’s the fox’s name?

Boots: Swiper. Swiper swipes shiny red boots.
Dora: What should we say to stop Swiper? Swiper no swiping. Swiper no swiping.
Boots: Thanks Dora.
Dora to the viewers: Thank you for helping me stop Swiper. Hey Boots, do you want to
go exploring with me.
Boots: What’s exploring?
Dora: Hola me llamo Dora, yo tambien hablo Español.
Tico: Mucho gusto Dora.
Dora: Mucho gusto Tico
Boots: Wow, she can speak Spanish and English.
“You need a boat!” Iza says that they need a boat to cross the big river. Isa is an iguana.
“Necesitamos un bote!”

Tico turns his car into a boat in order to help Dora, Boots, and Isa cross the Big River.
They all have lifejackets. “Salvavidas” as Tico calls them, “para estar seguros”. There is a scene
in this episode in which they need to out swim nibbly fish. On this journey the audience helps
them by naming the numbers that they need to follow to avoid getting nibbled. Dora tells the
audience to help them because if not the nibbly fish might nibble them. Boots fell off the boat
and everyone tried helping him but they were unsuccessful. Benny the Bull was fishing and
cought Boots. All the characters ask Benny, “Como te llamas?” Benny states, “I’m Benny,
Benny the Bull.” Everyone said, “Sube Benny”. After crossing the Big River they all headed
towards the Tallest Mountain where they would have to find the Fiesta Trio. They all asked Tico
to go faster, “Rapido Tico”. Tico’s car turned into an airplane and arrived with the Fiesta trio
instruments on time. The Queen Bee was happy.

**Boots to the Rescue.** This episode starts off by Boots singing Dora’s bilingual song.
Boots says, “Do you want to hear Dora’s song? I speak Spanish and English too. I like them
both, how about you? Arriba up. Abajo down. Abré open. Cierra close. I speak Spanish and
English too. I like them both, how about you?” Boots needs to recall his Spanish in order to get
Dora’s music notes to her. In order to call on the explorer star he needs to say “Estrella!” Boots
will have to first go up and down the Jungle, then he needs to go to the Robot House, and finally
he will arrive at Dora’s school. Sr. Tucán tells Boots, “Ten cuidado! Con la araña, culebras, cocodrilo. Los Animales estan escondidos”. Sr. Tucán talks to Boots in Spanish and Boots listens to words that are up or down. Boots does not understand everything that Sr. Tucán tells him. Boots listens and hears an “araña,” a spider. Boots turns to the viewer and asks, “Is la araña, arriba or abajo?” The viewers need to say arriba or abajo in order to help Boots cross the jungle.

This is the first time that Boots navigates by himself through the No-name Island without Dora. In order to arrive to his final destination he needs to practice his limited Spanish. Boots tells the viewers, “You are good at speaking Spanish!” Dora and Boots communicate through their cell phones. Dora tells him that he needs to hurry and bring her the music notes. She also tells him where he needs to go first. Boots hears Swiper and tells him “Swiper no swiping, Swiper no swiping, Swiper no swiping!” Roberto the Robot is bilingual and tells Boots that “Para que la puerta habrá tienes que decir ‘habré’ to open the gate.” Boots says “Gracias” to Roberto the Robot. Boots says “Cierra” to close the gate. Roberto the Robot and Boots say, “Come on, vamonos.” By using the words “habré” and “cierra” they were able to fix the washing machine. After the jungle and Roberto’s house Boots needs to go to Dora’s school. Once Boots arrives to the school where Dora was patiently waiting for him, he exclaims, “You should have seen Dora, I was speaking Spanish all over the place”.

Language is used to navigate the No-name Island and arrive to the destination. At the end of the episode we meet one of the bilingual educators. All of the teachers in Dora the Explorer are bilingual and female. However, bilingualism is not taught by the educator but through the practice of Boots’ speech. The producers chose Boots to be the protagonist of this adventure in order to illustrate that another language can be learned. Dora’s bilingualism was not needed to navigate the Island in this episode. Boots was able to navigate the Island by listening to clues.
from Sr. Tucán and the help of Roberto’s bilingualism. The song that Dora taught Boots assisted him even when Dora was not visible and present.

**First Day of School.** In this episode, Dora is taking Boots and Tico to their first day of school. Bilingualism is key in this episode because both Boots and Tico are learning each other’s language. They are both attending a bilingual school in which English and Spanish are taught.

Boots: It’s our first day of school. And at our school we get to learn Spanish and English.  
Tico: Yo voy a ayudar a Boots con su Español.  
Boots: Tico is helping me with my Spanish and I am helping him with English.

We are helping each other learn because we are friends. Learning each other’s language is important for them. This illustrates the producers’ commitment to bilingualism. Dora illustrates her bilingualism by speaking to Tico in Spanish and English to Boots.

Dora to the viewers: Are you ready to go to school with us? (Pause) Great!  
Tico and Boots: Yeah, vamos vamos a la escuela. Let’s go to school.

Tico and Boots practice their English and Spanish while finding the way to their school. They need to first cross the river, then go through the forest, and finally they will arrive to their school. They sing a bilingual song to school (shown below). This is a fun song that viewers can easily sing. The viewers are able to learn a couple of words in Spanish by visually seeing what is being named.

```
It's our first day of school
Vamos a la escuela
Learning English and Spanish too
Vamos a la escuela
I know a game to play
Let's learn some words to say
As we go along our way
What's that, flying in the sky?
Right those are birds.
In English we say, birds.
Sing, hello birds.
Hello birds.
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En Español se dice, pájaro.
Canten, hola pájaros
Hola pájaros
What is jumping on that log?
Right, that’s a frog.
In English we say, frog.
Sing, hello frog
Hello frog
En Español se dice, rana.
Canten, hola rana.
Hola rana.
It’s our first day of school
Vamos a la escuela
Learning English and Spanish too
Vamos a la escuela

Dora tells the viewers, “Great job speaking English and Spanish. Look the river”. Boots: We’ve got to get across the river Dora.
Tico: Como lo cruzamos?
Dora: The sign has a picture of the animal that can take us across the river. What animal can take us across the river? Pause. A turtle, right. A river turtle.
Tico: Donde estan las Tortugas?
Camila: Hola Dora, yo te puedo ayudar.

Dora’s friend Camila, helps them find turtles. Camila’s father taught her how to find turtles. As explained by Camila, her papi taught her how to find turtles in Guatemala. Camila successfully helps them find the turtles behind the bushes and hurries to school. The turtles keep falling asleep,

Tico: Se durmio.
Dora: Tico’s turtle fell asleep so say “Good morning”. The viewer must say “Good morning” in order to assist Tico.
Boots turtle and Dora’s turtle fell asleep so they need to say “Buenos Dias”
Dora to the viewers: You woke up the turtles you are great at speaking English and Spanish.

Throughout the episode, Tico and Boots occasionally assist each other in speaking English or Spanish. After crossing the river they need to go through the forest, el bosque! They go on singing the bilingual song. They arrive to a gate that is heavy. They push the gate to get it opened. They needed to say “empuja” in order to make the door open. Swiper arrives to the
scene to swipe Boots and Tico’s lunches. Swiper takes Boots bananas and Tico’s nueces, walnuts.

Dora: We have to find Boots and Tico’s lunches. Do you see bananas and walnuts? Pause. Si alli estan!

The viewers must help Boots and Tico rescue their lunch by saying the appropriate name “nuez” for Tico and “banana” for Boots.

Dora: Oh oh we better tell Tico when a nut is falling so he can catch it. In English we say nut. In Spanish we say “nuez”. If you see another nut fall say “nuez”! “Nuez!”…x4 Yey we caught the bananas and nuts. To the viewers: Que bien hablas Ingles y Espanol.

Throughout the episode, Dora reinforces the language learning process by acknowledging the speaker’s acquired language knowledge. Dora helps Boots and Tico count their lunch. The viewer practices math and language skills by counting in English and Spanish. Boots packed five bananas and Tico packed “cinco nueces”, five walnuts. The viewer helps count up to five in English and Spanish in order to make sure they have their lunch.

Dora: Yea we have five bananas and cinco nueces. Great counting! Come on! We made it through the forest!
Tico: Ahora donde vamos Dora?!
Dora: We crossed the river; we went through the forest, where do we go next? Pause. Right, la escuela! Donde esta la escuela? Pause. Si alli esta!

Tico, Boots, and Dora arrive to school.

Señorita Perez: Dora you’ve brought Tico and Boots for their first day of school. Gracias, will you stay for the Me Llamo song?
Dora: Oooh, I love that song. I can stay.
Señorita Pérez: Bien. Good morning students. Say Good morning!
Students: Good morning!
Señorita Pérez: En Espanol por favor, di, Buenos Dias!!
Students: Buenos Dias!
Señorita Pérez: Fantástico! Its Boots and Tico first day of school. So let’s sing the Me Llamo song. Remember I’m going to ask your name and you say “My name is” and then say your name.
Song: What is your name?
My name is Dora.
Song: What is your name?
My name is Boots.
Song: What is your name?
My name is Tico.
Song: What is your name?
My name is VIEWER’s Name.
Ya lo cantamos en español.
Canción: ¿Como te llamas?
Me llamo Dora.
Canción: ¿Como te llamas?
Me llamo Tico.
Canción: ¿Como te llamas?
Me llamo Boots.
Canción: ¿Como te llamas?
Me llamo VIEWER.
Señorita: Fantástico. Que bien hablas Ingles y español.
Tico: A mi me encanta la escuela.
Boots whispers to Tico: I love school.
Tico: A sí gracias Boots. I love school. They giggle.
Dora: I love school too. We helped Boots and Tico get to their first day of school.

Textual Analysis: Pedagogical Borderlands

*El Coquí.* In Dora’s “El Coquí” episode, there is never any mention that the island’s name is Puerto Rico. The only reference to an island is when Dora explains that Coquí is from a beautiful island and that if removed the Coquí gets sick (and dies). Additionally, in this episode the only one that knew how to pronounce Co-quí was Dora and Coquí himself. This sets Dora apart from the other characters. *Boots*, with an Anglicized accent, repeats Co-quí. At this moment the acceptance of the ‘other’ non-Spanish speaker is recognized. Boots becomes the accepting friend or ambivalent friend that resembles the audience who is not from a Spanish-speaking background. This is problematic since it is often noticeable in a positive manner when a person from the dominant culture holds two languages, while the person born practicing two or more languages is marginalized and ultimately linguistically racialized. Addressing this point, Salvador Vidal-Ortiz (2004) quoting Angela Davis, states “multiculturalism can easily become a way to guarantee that these differences and diversities [i.e., language differences] are retained
superficially while becoming homogenized and harmonized politically, especially along axes of
class, gender, and sexuality” (p. 254).

The ambiguous identity of Dora is established through this episode because she knows
how to communicate to Coquí and the reasons why he needs to go back to his beautiful Island.
But if the producers would have chosen to address the issue that this story is from Puerto Rico, it
would have taught the viewer an important cultural symbol for Puerto Ricans. And perhaps it
would have acknowledged the Puerto Rican child watching this episode. But I do wonder if it’s
even necessary to name the island Puerto Rico for Puerto Ricans, given that El Coquí is widely
known story and cultural symbol. The lack of naming what happens through the entire Dora the
Explorer production becomes problematic when, as discussed above, multiculturalism becomes a
superficial apparatus rendering difference as falsely celebratory and depoliticizing the
experiences of those who live their lives with difference.

Now one must remember, as I discussed in chapter two, that difference in the context of
media, education, policy, and social practices are employed in order to naturalize the privilege or
it can be used to interrogate and disrupt the status quo. Having a seven year old, Latina girl,
wander through the borderlands of the No-name Island marks her differences as assets that allow
her to navigate and survive freely this space. Through research on el Coquí, I do assert that the
Island he needs to get back to is Puerto Rico, leaving the No-name Island where Dora leaves
nameless, again. Through the decoding of this episode, I also regard el Coquí as a migrant who
needs to go home in order to be happy and survive. Would this episode produce nostalgia for the
Puerto Rican wanting to go home if he or she is residing in Chicago, Los Angeles, or somewhere
in the East Coast? Or would it make them happy to see that el coquí finally goes home? I wonder
and will keep these questions in mind for future research because I cannot take for granted that
the bicultural child reads these cartoons through a difference lens. I would argue that these cartoons can be platforms for conversation and lessons plans regarding the places named and not named with children. While having the media production as a tool to be analyzed by children, other stories might emerge, children’s critiques, and even children’s disregard to the media production can take place. Consequently, before that research can be done, I argue through this study that there should be some principles and preliminary protocol that should be set in order to conduct that kind of qualitative research.

In the following episode Dora helps King Popo and Queen Maria become human again after being enchanted by El Mago.

*Te Amo*. In Dora’s version, “Te Amo” is a love story and a story of victory. In the Aztec legend, they are volcanoes that can actually be found in Puebla, Mexico. There are a lot of contradictions even with the Aztec legend that have been also written about in poems. Poems have been created to critique the sleeping woman waiting for her prince as well as feminist critiques on the depiction of women in these illustrations. In Dora’s episode what we find is that no one waits for no one. Both are first sent to opposite ends of the world and then turned into stone. Though apparently patriarchy is not visible in this particular episode, it is evident that there is a sense of gender normative practices as well as patriarchy that can be read here. I cannot help but notice that when seen together, Figures 25 and 26 are so similar yet so different. In the first image, the woman lies on her back while her prince bends on one of his knees, waiting for her to awaken. Dora’s image is more subtle; both fair-skinned king and queen look at each other as equals. Yet, one is left to wonder if Nickelodeon thought a King and Queen with fair skin were more desirable, than as in the actual myth—an indigenous dark skinned prince
and princess. While Jesus de la Helguera’s painting is one of the most popular illustrations of this Aztec legend, we still find that he creates the woman in his painting with fair skin while making the man darker in complexion and with defined Indigenous features. Thus rendering women who are fair skinned and thin more desirable and palatable. Yet, through biographical information, I learned that Jesus de la Helguera’s depictions of women resembled his wife who was from Spain, thus rendering this decoding more complicated. The focus here is the legend itself and the patriarchy found even in the Aztec story which the father of Itza denied love to his daughter and how Popo felt the need to rescue her. The original story is not better than the one presented in *Dora the Explorer* but the origin is oblivious to the child or viewer who has no sense of reference to the legend of Popo and Itza. It becomes a fairy tale version such as the ones found in Disney’s productions: where the story of conquest, genocide, and violence toward women, children, and disenfranchised communities are removed and hidden in order to present a sanitized version of the story. This same removal of traumatic experiences, that various communities have survived, are displaced and removed from schools textbooks in order to create a neutral and apolitical sense of history, thus, creating the illusion of innocence and harmony through history.

Innocence is something that is present and admired about Dora’s episodes. But this innocence is actually fabricated through silence and distortion, generating episodes devoid of history and politics. Instead, these cartoons should present a critical multiculturalism that, for example, actually educate the audience about these legends, their history, and where these cultural symbols are drawn from. Another issue found in these cartoons is the utopian sense that everyone can get along and be friends regardless the obvious linguistic and cultural differences.
While this is a great way to introduce tolerance to children we find that contradictions are evident in these episodes. 

**Dora’s First Trip.** Through a Chicana consciousness and borderlands discourse one cannot avoid thinking of la Malinche, a Nahua woman and Hernán Cortés, a Spanish conqueror and explorer. While in la Malinche’s story, la Malinche was viewed as a traitor because of her translations to Cortés, which was seen as an active role for the fall of the Aztec empire, yet she was also seen as a diplomat who helped maintained the Nahualt language and customs that remain being practiced until today. *Dora the Explorer* acts as a translator and the explorer through her episodes embodying both, la Malinche (Malinali or Malintzin, as she was also called) and Hernan Cortés’ roles. Chicana feminists (Alcalá, 2001; Alarcón, 1989) have argued that la Malinche or *La Chingada* was an earlier representation of the Chicana. Through the birth of her child with Cortés, she has also been called the mother of Mestizos, those from Indigenous and Spanish mixed heritage. Consequently, *Dora the Explorer* can embody a Malinchista identity through her bilingualism (translator), explorer (helping Boots a monolingual English speaking character navigate the No-name Island) and her biculturalism (the phonotypical signifiers, such as her brown skin, her dark brown eyes, and her dark hair). *Dora the Explorer* challenges la Malinche’s translating and traitor identity markers while also embodying them through her bilingualism and exploring experiences. Evidently a dialectical continuum of ambiguity is reached because through a bicultural identity marker one can see both Dora and la Malinche as decolonizers and using their language to assist and maintain close to their home languages and customs however these same skills can see as colonizing when in la Malinche’s experience she has been seen as a traitor because she helped Cortes’ conquest and in Dora’s we have seen her bilingualism veil new colonial tendencies such as the homogenization of
difference Mexican, South and Central American communities through the *No-name Island* and lack of origin. Though here the differences are obvious, La Malinche was a human being while Dora is a fictional children’s animated character. Yet, at times, her fictional character is talked about as if she were real.

While Dora is explaining what exploring is, Fiesta Trio (a frog, a grasshopper, and a snail) pass them and let them know that they are going to play their instruments for the Queen Bee and that they cannot be late. They leave in a hurry and drop their instruments without knowing. Dora and Boots take on the responsibility of returning the instruments and saving the day. They strategize a plan in order to arrive at the Tallest Mountain. They need to go through the Nutty forest, cross the big river, and arrive to the Tallest Mountain. In this episode Dora does not have her trust worthy Map and Backpack. When they are crossing the Nutty forest, nuts start falling from the trees and they need to run. While they are running they see Tico, the squirrel. In this episode, Dora does not know Tico yet. Boots screams “Tico!” Tico and Boots are friends regardless of their linguistic differences: Tico only speaks Spanish and Boots only speaks English. “Suban!” exclaims Tico.

Dora had already spoken to Boots in Spanish when she introduced herself to him but not until she had a Spanish language exchange with Tico did he acknowledge her bilingualism. Boots's admiration towards Dora grew after hearing her talk. It is also evident that the producers want to affirm their advocacy for bilingualism here. Having Boots, the monolingual English speaker, affirm her bilingualism while praising her by the “Wow,” we see that the producers want the bilingual child feel affirmed. But how often does a monolingual English speaker have to praise the person of color for speaking two languages? I am not saying that there is no need for affirmation, but it is also important to examine why there is the need to praise and to a certain
point patronizes the bilingual child. By watching the five seasons chronologically, I found that there were many times where Boots patronized Dora constantly, thus this instance is not the first or last time that Boots would be coded as patronizing Dora. They continue their journey through the Nutty forest. Tico helps them by driving fast and not getting hit by nuts. They arrive to the river they need to cross, the Big River. “The Big River, El Rio Grande!!” exclaims Dora.

To my surprise, Tico turned his car into a boat! As I wrote in my field notes, *Is this really happening? Dora and Boots are being crossed over El Rio Grande. And the one who is crossing them is Tico the monolingual Spanish speaking character!*

While the producers name it “The Big River” they also name it “El Rio Grande,” by Dora’s spoken translation. I cannot help but think of the US Mexico border. How could the producers not realize that this could be associated with El Rio Bravo or El Rio Grande and the US Mexico border? While this is easily decoded by my border consciousness, it is important to take note of this and not take the signifier of “El Rio Grande” for granted. Remember, Dora resides in the *No-name Island*. This *No-name Island* is nation-less and thus, by default has no legal or undocumented humans or non-humans residing in it. Yet, by decoding it through the approach employed in this study and grounding it in the United States and the timeline of 2000 to 2010, it is evident that the producers embed ideas of nationhood and citizenship here, consciously or unconsciously.

Tico turns his car into a boat in order to help Dora, Boots, and Isa cross the Big River. They all have lifejackets. “Salvavidas” as Tico calls them, “para estar seguros”. There is a scene in this episode in which they need to out swim nibbly fish. On this journey the audience helps them by naming the numbers that they need to follow to avoid getting nibbled. Dora tells the audience to help them because, if not, the nibbly fish might nibble them. I quickly think of the
piranhas that the Minutemen had suggested dropping into the Rio Grande. This episode was aired in 2006, the same year that the Minutemen suggested to put piranhas in the Rio Grande in order to scare undocumented people from crossing the border. I am conscious that there is also a Rio Grande in Brazil that has piranhas; however, Brazil is never mentioned in other episodes much less this one.

Boots fell off the boat and everyone tried helping him but they were unsuccessful. Benny the Bull was fishing and caught Boots. “Cómo te llamas?” everyone asked Benny.

“I’m Benny, Benny the Bull,” said Benny. Everyone said, “Sube Benny”.

After crossing the Big River they all headed towards the Tallest Mountain where they would have to find the Fiesta Trio. They all asked Tico to go faster, “Rapido Tico” Tico’s car turned into an airplane and arrived with the Fiesta trio instruments on time. The Queen Bee was happy.

Overall, this episode exemplified the hidden literacies that can only be read with a border consciousness. Within this episode there were scenes that glossed over the power relations between the U.S.-Mexico’s border. For example, by keeping the No-name Island nameless it is easier to leave out any political, cultural, and national discourses. However, they are not completely out when the televisual cartoon is being viewed by millions of children who can read these scenes through their bicultural experiences, specifically those who grow up listening to their parents retelling their border crossing experiences, such as mine. For those that are younger these scenes might be foreign even when they live close to the border, listen to their grandparents, and parents’ stories. This is where a critical bicultural pedagogy is needed in order to critically engage these so called bilingual and bicultural televisual cartoons. As Darder (1991) states, “if bicultural students are to succeed in American schools, critical bicultural educators
must accept a commitment to work in transforming the traditionally oppressive structures of educational institutions and to struggle with bicultural students so they may truly become beings for themselves” (p. 97). Educational institutions do not only include school structures but also media outlets such as children’s televisual cartoons. Thus, if these networks and producers are dedicated to bilingualism and biculturalism, a critical bicultural pedagogy should be considered. Accordingly, Boots and Tico linguistic differences are an attempt to show how language differences should be tolerated. The tolerance comes from Boots and Tico being friends before Dora could translate for them. This illustrates that there are other forms of communication and among kids this can happen however; it can be read as the politics of cultural differences in practice (Giroux, 1991).

However, to fully be considered a practice of politics of cultural differences a raising of questions should happen, in which gender, race, sexuality, and class issues could be raised in order to provide a new way of reading history. These last concerns are not raised in the cartoon itself. The linguistic differences are depoliticized in these episodes because rather than questioning their differences, they go about as if their differences do not matter. While I agree that differences should be accepted I do not agree that uncritical tolerance should be practiced. For example, tolerance is practiced in an uncritical way where there is lack of critique and engagement among asymmetrical power relations. For critical bicultural educators these episodes can be used as pedagogical sites in which the friends of Boots, Tico, and Dora are engaged in regards to their differences. Questions that may open up a discussion of language with children, such as: Do you have friends that speak other languages? What languages do you speak? This kind of conversation can lead to sociological questions such as, what types of languages are spoken at home and your community? These questions can lead to additional questions such as,
what other languages would you like to speak and why? There are several questions that can be
posed to children in which language is the central point of discussion in the classroom. Thus
critical media literacy, critical bicultural pedagogy, and border pedagogy can be practiced in the
same vein. In the following analysis I illustrate how Boots, the monolingual English speaker
goes on an adventure to rescue the day by using Spanish. Politics of cultural difference and
linguistic differences are brought to light, engaged, and critiqued in the following episode.

Boots To The Rescue. This episode starts of by Boots singing Dora’s bilingual song.
Boots says, “Do you want to hear Dora’s song? I speak Spanish and English too. I like them
both, how about you? Arriba up. Abajo down. Habré open. Cierra close. I speak Spanish and
English too. I like them both, how about you?” Boots needs to recall his Spanish in order to get
Dora’s music notes to her. In order to call on the explorer star he needs to say “Estrella!” Boots
will have to fist go up and down the Jungle, then he needs to go to the Robot House, and finally
he will arrive at Dora’s school.

Sr. Tucán tells Boots, “Ten cuidado! Con la araña, culebras, cocodrilo. Los Animales
estan escondidos”. Sr. Tucán talks to Boots in Spanish and Boots listens to words that are up or
down. Boots does not understand everything that Sr. Tucán tells him. Boots listens and hears an
“araña,” a spider. Boots turns to the viewer and asks, “Is la araña, arriba or abajo?” The viewers
need to say arriba or abajo in order to help Boots cross the jungle. At this moment the producers
have created a moment in which language is being taught through participatory practices. The
viewers need to know some Spanish in order to participate. However, if they do not know any
Spanish they will get to learn some words through watching this episode. Those that are bilingual
or monolingual Spanish speakers will be able to participate more and in a way feel there
knowledge is useful through this episode. This episode is important because this is the first time
that Boots navigates by himself through the Island without Dora. In order to arrive to his final
destination he needs to practice his limited Spanish. Boots tells the viewers, “You are good at
speaking Spanish!”

Dora and Boots communicate through their cell phones. Dora tells him that he needs to hurry and bring her the music notes. She also tells him where he needs to go first. Boots hears Swiper and tells him “Swiper no swiping, Swiper no swiping, Swiper no swiping!” Roberto the Robot is bilingual and tells Boots that “Para que la puerta habrá tienes que decir ‘habré’ to open the gate.” Boots says “Gracias” to Roberto the Robot. Boots says “Cierra” to close the gate. Roberto the Robot and Boots say, “Come on, vamonos.” By using the words “habré” and “cierra” they were able to fix the washing machine. After the jungle and Roberto’s house Boots needs to go to Dora’s school. Once Boots arrives to the school where Dora was patiently waiting for him, he exclaims, “You should have seen Dora, I was speaking Spanish all over the place”.

Bilingualism is highlighted in this episode through Boots’ adventure. Through this episode Boots encourages monolingual English speakers to speak Spanish. Language is used to navigate the Island and arrive to the destination. At the end of the episode we meet one of the bilingual educators. All of the teachers in Dora the Explorer are bilingual and female. However, bilingualism is not taught by the educator but through the practice of Boots’ speech. The producers chose Boots to be the protagonist of this adventure in order to illustrate that another language can be learned. Dora’s bilingualism was not needed to navigate the Island in this episode. Boots was able to navigate the Island by listening to clues from Sr. Tucán and the help of Roberto’s bilingualism. The song that Dora taught Boots assisted him even when Dora was not visible and present.
First Day of School. This episode exemplifies the notion of bilingualism and the producers’ advocacy towards a bicultural pedagogy and bilingual schooling process. As Darder (1991) states,

Embodied in this emancipatory spirit of hope is also a faith in the capacity of human beings to transform the oppressive and dehumanizing conditions that disconnect, fragment, and alienate us from one another. Grounded in this struggle by a collective vision of liberation, critical educators search out creative ways to expand the opportunities for students of color to become authentic beings for themselves, in spite of the limitations of traditional curricula and prevailing social conditions (p. 128).

Bilingualism is not simply demonstrated through the languages spoken by the characters but it is institutionalized through a class and a bilingual teacher. Spanish and English are the only languages spoken in this episode and are the ones taught in school. As explained earlier, students who have a first language other than English, develop formative cognitive, social, cultural, spiritual, and political knowledge in their own language before they even enter schools.

Bilingualism is viewed as a valuable asset and engaged in the learning process in this episode; rather than as a negative practice. The rhetoric of anti-bilingual laws do not directly speak against immigrant populations or their languages; but, instead, insist that all children have the right to learn English, as if they were not doing this before the propositions. In regards to the secondary characters in season five, we do see that there is an advocacy for bilingualism and a link between immigration and bilingualism. Thus, these episodes do illustrate an advocacy for bilingualism through a migratory process from one country to the other. Home languages are what foster the bilingualism process in these episodes. Politically, we are not made aware why these children migrate to the No-name Island but we do know that they come from somewhere else and that they practice a home language. English though predominates in this cartoon whether it is shown in an English channel, Spanish channel, or any other channel. This might be because of the predominant advocacy for English only programs in the United States. As
Crawford explains, “English for the Children … established a false choice in voters’ minds: either teach students the language of the country or give them bilingual education. Perhaps most important, it focused the debate on practical issues English-only campaigns and thereby broadening the initiative’s appeal” (Crawford, 2000, p. 106). California’s proposition 227 and Arizona’s proposition 203 are examples of the dismissal of children’s language and additionally the dismissal of their identity. However because of the way these propositions were rhetorically presented to the broader population, the initiatives were passed. Yet in this particular episode, in which bilingual schooling and a bilingual educator are present we clearly see how the producers are advocates for bilingual education, which is one of the main goals the producers convey. Pedagogical borderlands, thus, are embedded within all of these episodes, which contribute to an understanding of how multiple identity markers are intertwined and make Dora the Explorer a complex form of analysis.

**Discussion**

*Dora the Explorer’s* identity is the center of analysis throughout this dissertation; however, her identity is not exclusive from the rest of the characters. *Dora the Explorer* is very much linked to the land in which she navigates with her friends. The title calls for a pedagogical borderlands understanding which embodies, all the characters, the landscape, language, culture, and history described within the production of *Dora the Explorer*.

Identity, ambiguity, and pedagogical borderlands are at the center of this discussion. These three important concepts are found within the five different episodes discussed in this chapter. In the episodes, *El Coquí* and *Te Amo*, identity and ambiguity are intertwined. While in the episode, El Coquí the viewer can render *Dora the Explorer* Puerto Rican, in the following
episode, Te Amo, the viewer can assume she is Mexican. These assumptions though can only be done with prior knowledge of cultural markers. Within the concept of pedagogical borderlands, a border consciousness must be evoked. Consequently, these identity markers are engaged critically. What we learn from these two episodes is that there are many slippages throughout *Dora the Explorer* that renders her from here or there, “this or that”. This is problematic due to the lack of Latina/o animated characters within (tele)visual children’s media. *Dora the Explorer* becomes the spokes (animated) person for all Latina/o communities, which at the end can be detrimental to the acknowledgment of difference among Latina/o communities. Nonetheless, as experienced through the analysis of the first five seasons of *Dora the Explorer*, we also find that Dora becomes a global representative of “girl power” and “bilingualism”. These two identity markers are undeniably important and cannot be disregarded when discussing *Dora the Explorer* and her attributes, but one must not deliberately disregard her identity as encompassing all Latina/o communities. Ambiguity and identity lead us to a pedagogical borderlands lens where all these concepts encompass what *Dora the Explorer* represent.

In the episodes, Dora’s First Trip, Boots to the Rescue, and First Day of School, power relations are at play. For example, in Dora’s First Trip, Boots praise towards Dora’s Spanish language speaking skills can be viewed as condescending or affirming. In the episode, Boots To The Rescue, Boots language skills are put to the test, and he is an example of how language can be learned even when you are a monolingual English speaker. In the third episode, The First Day of School, we experience the way two monolingual speakers in their respected languages can learn from each other and accept their differences and create a friendship. Tico and Boots both attend a bilingual school in which both languages are valued and seen mutually as important. In this instance the producers create a special bond between Boots and Tico because they need each
other to arrive to school and they are both excited to learn from each other throughout the episode. Dora, as the translator, assists them when they need a translation but for the most part they only need each other. This is an example of how the politics of difference can be exercised in a respectful way in media as well as in a classroom. The politics of cultural differences as discussed in chapter 2 is the attempt to live within difference in a respectful and critical way. Thus the episode, The First day of School, is a great example of how children can be enthusiastic about learning through a different language. The acknowledgment of a bilingual classroom is admirable in this episode because it shows how a bilingual classroom can be experienced and accepted as a practical pedagogical space.

A dialectical continuum of ambiguity is inherently useful to the analysis of these five episodes. For example, these episodes all have slippages in which at times they are perfect examples of colonizing or decolonizing practices. I am aware that through this dissertation, I am the one who sets what is and what is not decolonizing or colonizing. However, this is why it is a dialectic in which there is always tension and new meanings that can be created. The pedagogical possibility of a dialectical continuum allows us to move back and from deciding where an episode fits best on the continuum never really embodying a full emancipation or a full colonizing moment. The dialectical continuum of ambiguity assists educators and media producers to critically engage what needs to be done to make it a decolonizing episode, thus providing principles with respect to what it takes for it to become a decolonizing episode. It also gives the opportunity to critically engage why an episode is closer to the colonizing end and how it can move towards an emancipation end, and vice versa. At the end a dialectical continuum of ambiguity assists the analysis of *Dora the Explorer* episodes and the possibility to become a methodological tool to analyze other media outlets.
Chapter 7

A Critical Bicultural Media Literacy Possibility

In this investigation, the aim was to assess the acclaimed children’s animated cartoon *Dora the Explorer* and how it contributes to the fabrication of identities in children. My initial research questions situated *Dora the Explorer* as a distorted representation of a so-called, Latina identity. Through this investigation *Dora the Explorer’s* representation, as a distorted identity, was the element of analysis. Nevertheless, through the viewing of 115 episodes it is evident that *Dora the Explorer’s* encoded and decoded identity is more complex than one may initially imagine.

At the moment of developing a lens of analysis to view such complexity, I borrowed from three different methodological lenses: critical media literacy, cultural studies criticisms, and critical bicultural pedagogy. In developing a theoretical lens, I borrowed from different theories, which come from a critical theory and critical pedagogy tradition, these are: cultural studies, Chicana and Chicano cultural studies, border theory, and critical media literacy. These theoretical lenses, mentioned in chapter two and chapter three complement each other and set a foundation for research such as this one. Due to the lack of a media literacy lens that focuses on bilingual and bicultural media, and particularly bilingual children’s televisual cartoons, a critical bicultural pedagogy was employed in order to both challenge and strengthen the theoretical and methodological perspectives presented in this study. Critical bicultural pedagogy challenges and strengthens the theory and methodology employed in this study by acknowledging the need to focus on bilingual and bicultural populations and media.

It is necessary to focus on bilingual and bicultural populations, as these communities continue to grow in the United States. In particular, this study focused on Latina and Latino
communities, which at the moment are confronted with various educational, economic, and political battles that are built on xenophobia against them. In congress, under President Barack Obama’s administration we witness the immigration reform being debated over and over again. We also witness students advocating for the DREAM Act. “The DREAM Act is [a] common-sense legislation drafted by both Republicans and Democrats that would give students who grew up in the United States a chance to contribute to our country’s well-being by serving in the U.S. armed forces or pursuing a higher education”\textsuperscript{11}. At the same time that students and youth demand to be treated as citizens and not be deported to a country they are unfamiliar with, there are educational threats against programs that have proven to assist students in disadvantaged standpoints of life, which include their race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, citizenship and economic status.

For example, the attack on the Mexican American Studies program in Tucson, Arizona is an illustration of how pedagogically, a curriculum that shows any counter narrative to what is thought to be as the official U.S. history, is un-American. This then translates into the ideology that assumes that those who are rendered Latina/o, specifically Mexican, do not fit within what is thought of as “American” and seen as a threat. The decision of taking away $14 billion dollars from the Tucson’s School District’s Mexican American Studies program is a direct attack to the history of disadvantaged and oppressed groups within the United States. While the debate is still on going, we see how the teaching of Mexican American history is seen as a biased curriculum and unconstitutional. What is then at stake is the value of difference and the way it is taught within schools. The Tucson’s School District made it clear that there is no room for other histories to be taught, especially if they question the United States.

\textsuperscript{11} http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/12/01/get-facts-dream-act
The implication that Dora the Explorer has on these important issues is crucial. Dora the Explorer is an example of how Latina/o communities are accepted to be part of the media, more specifically children’s media, yet according to anti-immigrant and anti-bilingual legislations, Latina/o communities are ultimately not accepted to be part of the Nation. For example, anybody who is perceived to be Latina/o in the states of Georgia and Arizona is under attack. Georgia’s House Bill 87, Illegal Immigration Reform and Enforcement Act mimics Arizona’s State Bill 1070 which “makes it a crime to knowingly harbor or transport undocumented immigrants, imposes harsh penalties for providing false papers to an undocumented immigrant, and empowers law enforcement to check the immigration status of anyone they reasonably suspect to be in the country illegally.”12 These anti-immigrant bills foster hostility and xenophobia, both of which allow citizens to punish vulnerable individuals like immigrants and their children.

The current study has only examined Dora the Explorer and its significance toward the development of a critical bicultural media literacy lens. The specificity of the study made it possible to go further in the analysis in order to offer a deeper understanding of the issues discussed in chapter 5 and chapter 6. Yet, it is undeniable that a study such as this is needed to assess other bilingual and bicultural cartoons. Other than my niece’s reflections, an issue that was not addressed in this study was concrete reflections from children on Dora the Explorer. Before interviewing children, it is necessary to focus on the content of the cartoon and understand its complexities.

This study has shown that children’s televisual cartoons are worthy of scholarly research. Through thematic analysis, I show that there are layers of concepts and issues embedded in these productions. These issues include: a) identity and cultural values, b) language, c) feminism and

12 http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2011/10/georgia_immigration.html
patriarchy embedded messages, d) cultural symbols and relevance, e) cultural invasion, domination, subordination, and conquest; and finally, g) decolonizing and social agency. These findings suggest that children’s media productions are saturated with messages and are far from the simplicity of innocence. One of the most significant findings to emerge from this study is that *Dora the Explorer* is complex, and her complexity lies within a pedagogical borderland where a *new mestiza consciousness* is found. Her ambiguity, contradiction, and complexity drew me to her. These three layers of identity are found within the *new mestiza consciousness* that Gloria Anzaldúa advocates for. Thus, the move to use a dialectical continuum of ambiguity in order to create a critical bicultural media literacy is a fundamental contribution that was possible through the findings. This is a border consciousness.

The results of this study indicate that there is a need to engage with children’s media and other media productions geared toward children, specifically media that is directed to underrepresented communities within the United States. The results of this research support the idea that there is a need to create culturally sensitive media productions that not only attempt to create accurate portrayals of communities but that also attempts to understand the communities’ cultural complexities and address them in multiple segments of the production. At first glance, the literacy component of *Dora the Explorer* indicates that culture is transmitted through media in ways that are fun and enjoyable, and less threatening.

Yet the empirical findings in this study provide a new understanding of *Dora the Explorer* and the complexity of televisual cartoon characters that tend to become embodiments of culture and power. This research serves as a base for future studies and as an example of how interdisciplinary work is much needed and important within educational policy, media studies, Latina/o studies, and Chicana and Chicano studies. The current findings add substantially to our
understanding of children’s media, identity formation, border theory, pedagogical borderlands, and language issues. The current findings also add to a growing body of literature on children’s media, decolonizing and borderlands epistemologies, and finally, bilingual and bicultural education. This dissertation also makes several noteworthy contributions to other fields that engage the issues of bilingualism, biculturalism, gender relations, Latinidades, power relations, decolonizing and colonizing aspects. These other fields include; Native American studies, Asian American studies, African American studies, ethnic studies, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) studies, anthropology, cultural studies.

Chapter 5, Crossing Borders: Recurring Themes and Chapter 6, Identity, Ambiguity, and the Pedagogical Borderlands, both combine an in-depth analysis, which leads us to a methodological process called, a dialectical continuum of ambiguity. A dialectical continuum of ambiguity embodies both a theoretical and methodological process in which the creation of a critical bicultural media literacy is possible. A critical bicultural media literacy evokes a borderlands consciousness, a critical bicultural pedagogy, and a critical media literacy, in which the potential to engage and critique bilingual and bicultural media is promising. Educators could apply a dialectical continuum of ambiguity when engaging bilingual and bicultural media with their students and have different point of views. Critical bicultural media literacy is indeed needed due to the lack of a formal tool of analysis for bilingual and bicultural children’s media. The different episodes mentioned and examined in this study carry different messages that need special attention and a special tool of analysis. Educators and media practitioners will find the dialectical continuum of ambiguity useful in creating and improving media for children.

It is recommended that further research be undertaken in the following areas: children’s media, border theory, critical bicultural pedagogy, decolonization, postcolonial studies. Further
research in this field regarding the role of bilingual and bicultural children’s media would be of great help in the formation of qualitative research that engage children’s reflections on the media they consume.

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for future practice. There is a definite need for more televisual children’s cartoons that engage language, literacy, and culture. There is also a need for more children’s media productions that include better Latina/o representation and that engage the variety of identities found among Latina/o communities. The multiplicity of Latina/o identities are rich in their cultural, historical, and political dimensions and cannot be limited to the portrayal of one cartoon character. Latina and Latino children, as well as their peers, need media representations that speak accurately to the complexity and ambiguity that is part of their everyday existence in the United States. To fail in this effort is to participate, willingly or unwillingly, in the perpetuation of children’s bilingual programming and multicultural curriculum that betrays at the heart the empowerment of Latina and Latino children.
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Appendix A: Dora the Explorer
Appendix B: Dora the Explorer Translated in Other Languages

1. Arabic In the Arabic language version broadcast on the "Nickelodeon on MBC3" block of MBC3, the bilingualism is Arabic-English.

2. Chinese In the Chinese language version Dora the characters speak mainly Mandarin with limited English. It is broadcast on Yo-yo TV in Taiwan (Channel 25).

3. Danish In the Danish language version Dora is similarly to Swedish listed by Nickelodeon as Dora- utforskaren although this title is actually incorrect use of Danish. Translated it would be Udforskeren Dora (or, Udforskerinden Dora to emphasize the female gender). There are commands and expressions in English. It is broadcast on Nick Jr. in the subscription of Canal Digital and Viasat.


5. French. In the French language version, Dora l'exploratrice, broadcast on TF1 in France and Télé-Québec in Canada, the bilingualism is French-English, with Dora and Boots (called Babouche) speaking French and other protagonists speaking and answering in English.

6. Filipino In the Filipino language version broadcast on ABS-CBN entitled as its English title "Dora, the Explorer". The characters speak Filipino and some English, Dora teaches English in this version.

7. German. In the German language version, broadcast on the recently restarted German branch of Nickelodeon, the bilingualism is German-English.

8. Greek. In the Greek version called "Ντόρα η μικρή εξερευνήτρια" (or Dora the Little Explorer), broadcast on Nickelodeon and Star Channel, the bilingualism is Greek-English. Dora and Boots (called Botas) speak Greek and other protagonists speak and answer in English.

9. Hebrew. In the Hebrew version, broadcast on HOP channel, the bilingualism is Hebrew-English. The series is calledMeglim Im Dora (or Megalim Im Dora--English: Discovering with Dora).

10. Indonesian. The Indonesian language version, formerly broadcast on Lativi, is now broadcast on Global TV. The bilingualism is Indonesian-English.

11. Irish. In the Irish language version, broadcast on the Irish station TG4, the bilingualism is Irish-Spanish, with Dora and Boots speaking in Irish and some other characters speaking Spanish as in the original.

12. Italian. In the Italian language version, broadcast on Italia 1 and on Nickelodeon in the subscription of Sky, the bilingualism is Italian-English. The series is called Dora l'esploratrice ("Dora the Explorer"). Most characters speak Italian, but some characters and especially Dora's parents and backpack speak English together with Italian.


14. Korean. The Korean language version is broadcast on Nick Jr in Korea. The title is different it is called "Hi Dora" and is introduced by a real person whose name is Dami.
- she introduces key English vocabulary for each episode. The episode is primarily in Korean with some English.

15. Malay. The Malay language version is broadcast on TV9. The bilingualism is Malay-English. Dora speaks primarily in Malay instead of English, and the secondary language is English instead of Spanish. The original English-Spanish version, however, is also available on Nickelodeon South East Asia via the Nick Jr. programming slot to subscribers of the ASTRO satellite TV service.

16. Norwegian. In the Norwegian language version, the bilingualism is Norwegian-English.

17. Polish. In the Polish language version, broadcast on Nickelodeon in Poland, the bilingualism is Polish-English. The series is called *Dora poznaje świat* ("Dora explores the world").

18. Portuguese. In the Portuguese language versions, *Dora a Exploradora*, broadcast on RTP2 and Nickelodeon Portugal. At Nickelodeon Brazil, Dora and Boots (called *Botas* in the Portuguese version and called *Botas* in the Brazilian version) speak Portuguese and the other protagonists speak and answer in English. Some Portuguese episodes are available on DVD.

19. Russian. In the Russian language version, broadcast on TNT and Nickelodeon, the bilingualism is Russian-English. The series is called *Dasha-sledopyt* ("Dasha the Pathfinder"). Dasha is the children's name of Daria (Darya).

20. Serbian. In the Serbian language version, broadcast on B92, the bilingualism is Serbian-Spanish. The series is called *Dora istražuje* (Dora is exploring).

21. Spanish. There are different Spanish language versions for Latin America and Spain. *Dora la Exploradora*, broadcast on Nickelodeon in Latin America (and until September 2006 on Telemundo in the USA; since April 2008 on Univisión), Dora and Boots (called *Botas*) speak Spanish and the other protagonists speak and answer in English. Some Spanish episodes are available to US viewers on VHS, and some DVDs have a Spanish track (including Dora’s Egg Hunt). This version is entirely the reverse of the original English version; Tico & Señor Tucan (called Mr. Toucan) only speak English. Additionally, Univision has added on-screen captions of the Spanish words spoken in English. In Spain, *Dora la exploradora* is aired on TVE 1, Clan TVE and Nickelodeon; the characters speak mainly Spanish but will have commands and expressions in English.

22. Swedish In the Swedish language version *Dora- utforskaren* the characters speak mainly Swedish but will have commands and expressions in English. It is broadcast on Nickelodeon and TV4.

23. Tamil In the Tamil language version *Dora the Explorer*, the characters all speak Tamil, with some English interspersed. It is broadcast on a local kids programming channel Chutti TV, a channel run by the Sun Network

24. Turkish In the Turkish language version *Dora* the characters speak mainly Turkish, Spanish and English but will have commands and expressions in Turkish. It is broadcast on Nickelodeon and CNBC-e (Wikipedia, 2011).