
DEFINITIONS

The topic that I was asked to discuss here this morning is very important—to you, obviously, because you’re including it in your conference; and to me, because I’ve spent over 20 years trying to make some sense of how the bridging between cultures can be done via children’s literature. Before I even begin, let me talk about the basics—the power of naming. Why do we say Latino and not Hispanic? Why do we say Chicano and not Latino or Hispanic or Latin American? I know this is confusing, but there may be experiences in your own life where you have been in touch with the same phenomenon. We are talking about the power of self-naming. Naming is very important because it identifies, it creates, a certain aspect of the personality. Different ethnic groups in this country and all over the world are in the process of empowering themselves, and naming, self-naming, is part of that process.

For the purpose of this presentation, I will use the word *Latino*, meaning anybody of Latin American descent, born either there or here. There’s another definition I need to work with, and that is the word *Chicano*. The term *Chicano* was taken, in the process of renaming, by a certain part of the population of Hispanics in this country during the 1960s civil rights movement. The term *Chicano* really refers to a political philosophy of re-empowerment, of digging for roots and
looking into history and re-creating myths, such as those of Aztlan. Persons who have designated themselves Chicanos say, "We've been here a long, long time, we're not newcomers, we're not invaders, we're not illegals, and yes, we are Chicanos." Many times, I use the terms Latino and Chicano interchangeably. Often, people ask me if I consider myself a Chicana, and I have come to understand that because I've spent over 20 years in this country, even though I was born and raised in Uruguay, I feel a very strong kinship to the political philosophy that the Chicano movement expresses. So, I will claim to be a Chicana, though for today, I will use the more inclusive term Latino.

In any language, literature must be defined before we can proceed with a discussion of its criticism. Of course, literature can be defined in many ways, but I would like to use Rebecca Lukens' (1990) definition of literature as "reading that, by means of imaginative and artistic qualities, provides pleasure and understanding" (p. 5). Then we get into what is the subject of criticism. Again, Lukens puts it in very simple terms: "it is the function of the writer to make sense out of life, but the function of the critic is to evaluate the writer's efforts to make sense out of life" (p. 4). That's why we're here, trying to evaluate the writer's efforts to make sense out of life. And, of course, this definition fits my topic very well because, while life is understood by all of us in human terms all over the world, life is manifested culturally in many different ways. That's where our problems in evaluating children's books on Latino issues, whether in Spanish or English, come from; even though we share a humanity, many times we don't share the way humanity is manifested.

CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

I find two main areas of difficulty: One is lack of familiarity with the culture a book is portraying, and in the case of books in Spanish, ignorance of the language. If the book is written in Spanish and you don't speak Spanish, we've got a problem.

Many books, fortunately, are now being published bilingually, with a text in English and Spanish, and I could cite all kinds of educational research on both sides of the argument as to whether bilingual books are good or bad. Provided they are well laid out and designed, and that they're not confusing—as you turn the page (if you're following the Spanish) you're not groping for where the Spanish text is—bilingual books work very well for children and adults who want to share them with children.

Again, there's the issue of language. Language and culture cannot be separated. We separate them in order to make it easier to look at
these constructs in a linear form, but they cannot be separated. If you think for a moment, our language is us. Our language is our culture and our culture is our language. The way we speak represents us as much as does the way we look. Groups may share many other elements besides language, but language is a powerful way for people to feel ethnic kinship.

I use, in my multicultural classes, a book by James Banks (1991), who defines ethnic groups as groups whose members share a unique social and cultural heritage, passed on from one generation to the next. Ethnic groups are frequently identified by distinctive patterns of family life—recreation, religion, and other customs—that differentiate them from others. Above all else, members of such groups feel a consciousness of kind, an interdependence of fate, with those who share the same ethnic tradition. An individual is ethnic to the extent that he or she shares the language, values, behavioral patterns, cultural traits, and identification with a specific ethnic group. Many individuals have multiple ethnic group attachments.

According to Banks (1991), the three major groups of Latinos in the United States are Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cuban-Americans. In addition, a substantial number of immigrants from Central and South America have entered the United States since 1970, and I could spend a whole hour just discussing why that happened. I belong to this last group, a South American who entered after the 1970s because our continent was in enormous political upheaval, and many of us had to leave for the sake of our own lives.

The Latino population is growing about five times faster than the rest of the U.S. population, and it is misleading to conceptualize these diverse groups of immigrants as one people; they have wide cultural, racial, and ethnic differences. I want to stop here for a minute and qualify this. I say we are different, we are diverse, and it is misleading to bunch us all together, particularly as the term Hispanic tends to do. Yet we do have a culture in common because we shared a conquest that was quite strong; Spanish was superimposed on many, many rich Indian languages that were there. As you know, conquest standardizes. So we do have a culture in common.

The beauty about the Latin American continent and Latinos who have been in this country even for generations, as in the case of New Mexico, is that we hold on to what was there before, in some places more than others. That’s what creates the problem: There was richness of culture and language to begin with; then there was the superimposition of the culture and language of the Spaniards or the Europeans (in the case of Brazil, it was mostly Portuguese); and then there’s a syncretism that happens on the American continent, which isn’t over—we’re still in the midst of this.
We understand, or are beginning to understand, that we are mestizos, we are mixed. We have three major strands present in all of our cultures: the indigenous, the European, and the African. You will find many Latin Americans not wanting to acknowledge that, and I do believe it is a question of color—the darker is the more difficult to accept.

Not all countries readily accept their indigenous backgrounds and the presence of indigenous peoples there. Don’t forget that when we talk about a national culture, we’re really talking about the dominant class culture, which for the most part in Latin America still remains a very small percentage—4% to 8% of the population, mostly claiming European backgrounds, in control of 90% of the resources, and all of the media, and supposedly the national culture. So we have a lot of variables here.

Our language changes, even though we understand each other. (This is a great misconception that people have here, that we speak such different Spanish that we don’t understand each other. We do—if we want to. That’s the trick.) Sometimes you find, when there is a group of Latin Americans together and particularly when there is a non-Latin American involved, that we like to play this game: “That’s not the right way to say that.” “No, we don’t say it that way; that’s wrong.” Well, there are standard rules for the language, and Spanish is much more standardized than English, in spelling and grammar. As in any language, however, the local color and variation of the vocabulary is not right or wrong. So you must guard against Latin Americans ego-tripping with, “This is the correct way to say it.” There are many stories and legends about why certain countries claim the most proper Spanish.

When I refer to the Latino culture, you will understand that as we get closer to each other, and as we have more children’s books coming from the Latino culture, we will have to become much more cognizant of all these variations. However, speaking generally about a Latino culture makes sense because we need to be roughly tuned to bridge non-Latinos to Latinos.

CHILDREN’S BOOKS IN SPANISH AND ENGLISH

The avoidance of stereotyped images of characters, plot, setting, theme, point of view, and style in text and illustrations is paramount if children of all ethnicities are to be presented with literature that makes sense out of life rather than distorts and confuses it. Characters are revealed in different ways to varying degrees of complexity according to the genre of the story and to the level of importance within the story. Whatever the role of a particular character within the story,
consistency of personality and actions is always required. Here, I would like to turn to specific books to develop my argument because I don't want to continue speaking in the abstract. I want to begin with a book called El Sombrero de Tio Nacho/Uncle Nacho's Hat (Rohmer, 1989). In this book, published by Children's Book Press, Uncle Nacho's dilemma and actions are consistent with the cultural context of many countries in Latin America. Basically, his dilemma is that he has this old hat that he practically swears at every morning because it is of no use any more, and on one of their morning visits his niece comes and gives him a new hat. Then the whole book is about how he cannot get rid of his old hat because he's too attached to it. This is consistent with Latin American or Latino values because in most of our culture, and in most of our social classes, it is not conceivable to throw things away because there is always someone else who might need them. And this includes throwing away values!

To a person familiar with Latin American culture, the actions in this book make sense; they are familiar. They depict an aspect of the culture that *feels* authentic. I realize that's not a very scientific way of defining it, of helping you, but that is the truth. You pick up a book, and if you are familiar with this culture, you say, yes, this resonates. And if it doesn't, then you start looking for why it doesn't. But the initial reaction is a gut-level feeling that this is going in the right direction.

Uncle Nacho gets up in the morning and says "good morning" to his parrot, to his monkey, to his dog, to his cat. I grew up seeing my grandmother doing the same thing, seeing my mother do the same thing. A sentence on the first page, "Uncle Nacho lit the fire," is very important in defining the setting. We know he is in rural Latin America. I didn't grow up with a wood stove inside the house, but in summers when I went to visit my mother's family in the interior of the country, that's how they did it. They had charcoal or wood, and before you had morning coffee, you had to light the fire. It makes sense, in rural Latin America, to have this happening today. You may have people who say that's not the *only* thing that happens in Latin America. True, we have urban centers, enormous cities, very modern and technified in many ways, but one thing doesn't exclude the other.

Then Ambrosia, his niece, comes in: "She always stopped in for a little visit on her way to school." That's the way it happens. Family members live near each other, and they visit each other several times during a day, to check on each other. I used to go to piano lessons twice a week, and my two grandmothers lived on the way from my house to my piano lesson so they knew which days I had piano lessons, and they were waiting for me with little snacks, and they knew what time I came and what time I left. There is a whole network of extended
family that works in this manner. The person who was writing this book knows. It's not an outsider's view.

By "outsider" I don't necessarily mean somebody who was not born in the culture. It may be somebody from within the culture who has chosen to look at it as an outsider, or it may be somebody who was not born within the culture who has taken the time and energy and sincerity to explore within the culture, to look as an insider. I do not think that one has to be of a particular ethnic group to write a book about that group; I do think one has to have integrity in the task one has undertaken and to be, or become, familiar with the culture so that the book does not portray stereotypes of any kind.

The setting in Uncle Nacho's Hat, a tropical island somewhere in Latin America, is practically never described; yet the illustrator, Veg Reisberg, has done an excellent job of developing a sense of place. Since I travel in Latin America, I can identify this as Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, some place in Central America. South America might look like this in the summer, but even so, our color schemes are a bit different because the pampas are different from the equatorial countries. Somebody who has traveled can pick up the difference right away.

The illustrator has a lot to do with how all these elements, particularly setting and tone, are developed. The illustrator has a wonderful opportunity to enrich a story, to fill it with detail without detracting from it, if he or she integrates the illustrations with the text.

The bilingual design of the text—English on the top and Spanish on the bottom, with a little hat in front of each paragraph of each different language—is a little too crowded for my taste, but I've read this book out loud many times, and it works. I don't have to be going all over the place looking for the text.

One word of caution about the linguistic process: This particular tale was collected by Harriet Rohmer in Latin America, in Nicaragua. Of course, it was originally told in Spanish, but her text is originally in English. So there's already been a translation, and then someone else, Rosalma Zubizaretta [and Alma Ada] took the English text and translated it into Spanish. You can see the many stages this goes through. I personally find that by the time we get to the Spanish text here, it's correct but has lost some of its color.

There's a conscious attempt on the part of many of us who translate and edit and review the Spanish text to go for safely neutral language. When I get in my assertive mood, I say, "Show me somebody who speaks that language! In what country do they speak this neutral Spanish? Whose national anthem is sung in this neutral Spanish? Whose folk songs are sung in this neutral Spanish?"

Living in New York for 10 years, I participated in plays with all kinds of Latin Americans, and we always had weeks before we started
rehearsing trying to figure out whose Spanish we were going to use, what accent, how we were going to pronounce the S’s. It’s really complicated, and at the same time, we make it more complicated than it is.

_El Sombrero de Tio Nacho_ is a story from Nicaragua; I wouldn’t see anything wrong if this text had some local color or vocabulary from Nicaragua that could have been explained at the back of the book or somewhere in notes, in a proper way. This neutrality results from trying to bridge to another culture whose native language is not Spanish. We are always concerned that if we put words in there that are a little bit off the mainstream path, people will say, “Well, you see these people don’t understand each other; they all speak different kinds of Spanish. How are we supposed to buy it?”

The second book I’d like to share with you is called _My Aunt Otilia’s Spirits/Los Espiritus de Mi Tia Otilia_ (Garcia, 1987). It’s also from Children’s Book Press, and in this particular case, the author is Richard Garcia, and he is of Mexican descent—Mexican mother and Puerto Rican father. He was familiar with the Mexican side of his family but wanted to explore the Puerto Rican and came up with this story about _La Tia Otilia_, who is actually from Puerto Rico. The story is about how she comes to visit a boy and his family in San Francisco.

Garcia, in a very humorous way, explains that Tia Otilia was accompanied by bed shakings and wall knockings wherever she went. Now, in every Latin American family, and maybe in some of yours too, there is always an aunt, an uncle, a grandfather, a grandmother who is accompanied by late bed shakings and strange noises wherever they go. I’m talking about that one person in the family who is a bit strange. The difference may be that in Latin American culture we find them colorful and accept them in a way that not all cultures do.

Richard Garcia is using childhood memories of the strange one coming to visit: “Because there was little room in our house, Aunt Otilia used to share my bed.” I read that and, immediately, the feeling of authenticity comes back to me. This guy knows what he is talking about. And it’s not always because there’s no room in the house. I lived in a very big house, and I slept with my grandmother until I was six years old. It was considered appropriate; there was closeness; and it’s true—she taught me all kinds of things in bed at night, from praying, to discussing the day’s events, to dealing with my mother and my father. There was bonding between my grandmother and me because we were sharing a bed. Later on, we shared a room, and then she remarried and I had to mourn her loss for I don’t know how long. This is very common. This rings true.

The extended family encourages children and adults to share things, not only beds and rooms, but time together, and I see that present in
García's book. Because Aunt Otilia did not live with them, this boy is particularly afraid of what happens when he goes to sleep because there are rapping sounds and other goings-on. He decides he's going to put chewing gum in his ears, a very childlike thing to do, in order to stay awake, to see where these sounds are coming from. She tells him to go to sleep, but he doesn't. He stays awake, and soon enough the bed rattles, and there's all this noise, and he sees her bones leaving her body, going through the window and out into the night. He's terrified, absolutely terrified, and in his shaking with fear, he stumbles out of bed, and in the process, her body falls all over the floor.

He hurries to put it back together on the bed, but he is so afraid that he puts the arms where the legs should be and the head where the feet should be, and at that point, she comes back, or her bones come back, and she says, "Oh, you bad boy. Put my pieces back right," and her bones are floating outside the window and he is too frightened to move. Of course, the next morning, the sun comes up and her bones fade away, her voice gets farther away, her pieces fade away, her suitcases fade away, and she is gone like a bad dream.

The ending does not explain the events because the events do not need explanation. They are part of what we call magical reality. Latin American literary production in this century has been prolific, and I attribute this to the fact that we are a continent with so many conflicts. We are forced to deal with them whether we want to or not, and writing is certainly one way to deal with conflicts.

We have produced some of the most interesting literature written anywhere in the world during the 20th century. Some of it is starting to be translated, and it is called magical realism; in Spanish we call it realismo mágico. It has provided a way for us to understand our own reality, which borders constantly on the magical in the sense that our delineations between the real world and the spirit world are not as clear-cut as in other cultures. We live with healers, we live with people who rap on the bed and who have bad dreams, and we pay attention to them and tell each other our dreams and try to explain life events by our dreams. We weave dreams into our own clothing.

We also live with a lot of violence. In countries where revolution after revolution is constantly taking place, you are constantly losing people. In order not to go crazy, you stay connected to those who have died, to those who have gone away to other countries to survive or to learn another language or to travel. It is an incredible syncretism of many cultures that allows magical realism to make sense—within the culture and as a product of the culture—when you start reading the work of authors such as García Marquez in One Hundred Years of Solitude, or Octavio Paz, who won the Nobel Prize last year for The Labyrinth of Solitude. The Nobel Peace Prize was just given to
Rigoberta Menchu, a Guatemalan Indian whose need to communicate her people's ordeal was such that she wrote an incredible book, via a ghostwriter, when she barely had learned to speak Spanish. The person who did the actual writing, after many sessions of interviewing Rigoberta Menchu, stayed very true to Menchu's linguistic use of Spanish, which of course is imbued with her Indian language.

When you start reading these books—and I hope you do because there's no better way to evaluate Latino children's books than to become familiar with Latino culture—your immediate reaction, in many cases, will be, "Oh, how imaginative!" What I want to convey to you right now is that these authors are only recording reality in a memorable way. They use a lot of their own skills, but our Latin American reality is very much as these books present it. The writers are not imagining a new, fantasy reality but are drawing from their own experiences and their own families, as well as from a rich oral tradition full of magic folklore. This is why I feel Los Espiritus de Mi Tia Otilia is important to share with children. After I read aloud a couple of books dealing with this magical aspect of our reality, I can't tell you the kinds of stories that flow in the room. We go into storytelling and writing with both children and adults.

The review editors' panel discussion addressed how we sometimes prop up a book that we may not be so crazy about in certain aspects because the subject is so much in demand. I am not particularly crazy about the illustration in Los Espiritus, to be honest with you, but because of the thematic elements I have just considered, sometimes I let go of my critical analysis of certain aspects of a book. I'm not justifying, or saying that's the way to do it, but for me it's a reality. There are so few of these books that I feel are authentic, that I often overlook flaws. I hope, if I have a chance to talk with the author or the illustrator or the editor, to make my point, but I nurture the books because they need nurturing.

I want to examine a different kind of book that picks up the magical element very well. This is the book Abuela by Arthur Dorros (1991), illustrated by Elisa Kleven. Many more of you have seen Abuela than have seen Uncle Nacho or Aunt Otilia, and I'll tell you why. Because it's in English. It was also reviewed. It has been more of a mainstream book from the beginning. I happened to meet the editor of this book, and if we have time I'll tell you some of the stories of her ordeal with finding an illustrator for Abuela.

What Dorros has done so masterfully here is to intertwine two languages. The book is in English, but it has sentences like "Abuela is my grandma. She is my mother's mother. Abuela means 'grandma' in Spanish. Abuela speaks mostly Spanish because that's what people spoke where she grew up. . . . 'El parque es lindo,' says Abuela. I know
what she means. I think the park is beautiful too." It flows. He is not translating literally from English to Spanish but is taking you along, as he tells you the story, in two languages. That's how most of us who are bilingual think, and speak, when we are among other bilinguals. This requires a certain familiarity with both languages and therefore both cultures. He's done it so that people who are not bilingual can appreciate this. That is what I find so unique about the book.

We always say, if you're going to speak English, speak English; if you're going to speak Spanish, speak Spanish. But it's not so when you're really interested in communicating with someone else who you know is also bilingual and has lived in this country. There are words in English that, in order to explain them in Spanish, you have to go through a 10-minute explanation. So you're speaking in Spanish and boom—here comes a concept in English or vice versa. Speaking bilingually implies intimacy, cultural intimacy, ethnic intimacy. A shared experience of life. And I think this book captures that very well. The magical element? The whole adventure is about flying. You find that flying is a recurring theme in magical realism, symbolizing the flight of the spirit in imagination. Many names come to me: Isabel Allende, from Chile, has just published a trilogy, in which several characters float around several times. *The House of the Spirits* is the first book. The second one is *De Amor y de Sombra*/Of Love and Shadows. The third one is *Eva Luna*. In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Rosaura Buendia one day is taking a bath and just floats into outer space and we never hear of that character again; everybody just assumes she has floated away forever.

In Dorros' book, Abuela and the narrator fly all over New York City and have the most wonderful adventures as they speak in both languages. "'Come, Abuela,' I'd say. 'Si, quiero volar,' Abuela would reply as she leaped into the sky with her skirt flapping in the wind."

Of course we have the flying theme in English-speaking traditions, too, and this is where the story of the editor comes in. Donna Brooks, at Dutton, looked more than two years for somebody who was Latino to illustrate this book. Elisa Kleven, who is not Latino, nevertheless did an excellent job of illustrating *Abuela*. She has a folk art style that fits the story very well, as do the bright colors. Many of these books, including *Uncle Nacho* and *Aunt Otilia*, have bright colors. You are not going to find many pastels in Latin American culture. The children are used to bright colors; our houses are decorated with them. If you've been even as close as Mexico, you immediately know there's a different perception of color in our culture. It comes from an Indian tradition of colors that reflect the natural world of brilliant flowers and bird feathers. It also comes from the African presence in Latin America.
Kleven has also captured the feeling of shared intimacy between this grandmother and grandchild. In several places, the text refers to an extended family: As Abuela and the narrator fly by, they notice Tio Daniel working in the docks; then they come down and visit Tio Pablo and Tia Elisa's little store somewhere.

At a conference that I organized recently, Dorros spoke on how the multicultural experience relates to the universal experience. He has traveled extensively through Latin America, backpacking; we had a lot of stories to share, he and I, of backpacking through the Andes, Bolivia, and Peru on trucks with Indians who did not speak Spanish, of how we eventually were taken in and able to spend time with them. His wife is from Colombia, and Spanish is spoken in the house, along with English. In other words, he is not Latin American. Big deal. He understands. And he has portrayed us in a very authentic way.

The last book I want to discuss is one with which I had some trouble. *Diego* is illustrated by Jeannette Winter, written by Jonah Winter (1992), and published by Knopf. Let me start with the reason I had trouble. I loved the book and felt its authenticity immediately. Yet I had trouble, as a critic, with the lack of plot, antagonism, conflict. I always have a committee in my head, and they fight very hard. My training in children's literature came from the American side of my schooling, and I taught children's literature before I ever got into trying to look at children's literature in Spanish. Some of the elements are very difficult to bridge.

In this particular case, I kept thinking, well, where is the plot children will expect? I finally said that I have to go with my positive response; if I'm going to talk about a feeling, then I just have to be able to follow my own advice, and I included *Diego* in this presentation because it's a very well-tuned book. Even though neither author nor illustrator is Latino, the tone of Jeanette Winter's illustrations are so loving to the Mexican culture that you can't help feeling it immediately in the first picture. She has done the illustrations as if they are framed paintings that you are viewing in an exhibit. A magical element is introduced immediately. When the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera is born, his twin brother dies, and the doctor recommends that the parents get a nurse. They get una curandera, an Indian healer, and send Diego to her little hut in the mountains. In one illustration, you see the curandera on a burro, going up a hill covered with maguey, which is the cacti from which tequila is made. She takes little Diego to her hut in the mountains. "Inside there were magical things. There was an altar with candles and little dolls. There were all sorts of herbs and dried fruits. Antonia used these in her healing."

Let me read a little bit of the Spanish because I feel this book, even though it doesn't use local vocabulary, is a good example of poetic
language in Spanish. "Adentro había cosas mágicas. Había un altar con velas y muñecas pequeñas. Había todo tipo de hierbas y frutas secas. Antonia las usaba en sus curaciones." The Spanish text flows beautifully. "While he slept, Diego breathed the vapors of her medicinal herbs." Here, we strongly feel her connection with his unconscious world. Even while he slept, her healing was going on. Even while he was totally unaware, she had the enormous power of bringing him back to life, of nurturing him.

I've lived in this country for a long time—New York, Los Angeles, the Midwest; many of our children here are being raised by Latin American healers. A lot of baby-sitters are nurturing our children from the way they learned in their own culture, which, even in Latin America, we don't appreciate as much as we could, or should, or must, in order to become a healthier continent.

"During the day he played in the jungle. The animals were his friends." Again, Diego is being harmonized with nature. As he's playing in the jungle, there's a snake, a symbol of healing in many cultures, overseeing him, not hurting him. This illustration is never referred to in the text, but you see it immediately. The snake is not a fierce animal threatening Diego's life; it is the symbol of healing, of Antonia's healing.

In the rest of the book, many references are made to Mexican life and history, such as El Dia de Los Muertos, which is very close to ancestor worship. Mexicans have a different perception of death than—I would dare say—the rest of Latin Americans. Mexicans have made a very interesting synthesis of the indigenous culture and the Christian values that were superimposed.

The book's illustrations also show the different social strata within the Mexican culture. Diego's family is rich. When he comes back, we no longer see a little hut in the mountains but a huge house where the furniture is bigger than he is. Diego writes all over the walls, so his father decides to give him a room full of blackboards where he can paint at his leisure. Does that happen to any little Mexican boy? In a subtle way, the book is showing you the economic extremes of the culture. Diego loved Mexico, he loved everything about it, and he painted everything, including soldiers killing workers on strike in the city streets. His travels to Europe leave him bored and nostalgic to come back to Mexico. Eventually the book ends, "Diego Rivera became a famous artist. His paintings made people proud to be Mexican. They still do."

CONCLUSION

I leave you with that as a last little hint on how to evaluate books about the Latino experience. Could this book make children feel proud
to be part of the culture? I know this comes dangerously close to didacticism. I don’t mean that we need only positive role models from a culture. More than anything, we need authenticity. This culture is full of extremes—we don’t need sentimentality, we don’t need romanticism, but we do need a view from somebody who has gone beyond the surface of the culture and can give children a sense that even in the midst of difficult life conditions, this is a good culture to be part of.

Latino children in schools all over our country are growing up in a dual reality, home and society, of which school is a part. These two realities are very different from each other, oftentimes presenting contradictory values which, if unresolved, remain in conflict throughout an individual’s life. We as librarians and as teachers can assist children in starting to bridge the gap between contradictory values that growing up bicultural/bilingual often—I would say always—involves. In my experience, if such contradictions are dealt with and worked with, and if children are assisted and supported with understanding and caring by knowledgeable adults on both sides, a bicultural heritage enriches and enlarges life.

Authenticity in Latino children’s literature is an important concept, which more often than not can only be initially identified as a feeling. Developing one’s sensitivity to cultivate such a feeling can be difficult, but it’s not impossible with the help of adult Latino and Chicano literature (and here I have to say that I include the word Chicano because now we have a body of Chicano literature, that is, literature produced in English, in this country, by people who are culturally Latinos). Children’s literature specialists may be familiar with names such as Gary Soto, but they should also read adult literature such as Gloria Anzaldúa’s The Borderlands/La Frontera, a fantastic book that cuts across gender and ethnicity into just the pure passion of words. She also has edited Making Face, Making Soul, a book of essays by women of varied ethnicities. We have Sandra Cisneros with My Wicked, Wicked Ways and The House on Mango Street. We have Rudolfo Anaya writing The Heart of Aztlan and Bless Me, Ultima, another story of a little boy and a healer. There is a body of Chicano literature which transcends the linguistic question because we now have a population in this country of English-dominant Latinos, people who have been born here and educated in American schools before bilingual education took hold. Many of them were never taught how to read or write in Spanish, which was the language of the home, so they speak English, just like you and me. And they are producing very interesting books, at all levels, that I think would be one way for non-Latinos to access the Latino culture.
Developing one's sensitivity can be difficult, but it's not always impossible. Assisted by adult Latino and Chicano literature, along with folklore that reflects widely varied oral traditions, non-Latinos may begin the process of connection with the culture in more real terms, or should I say in more magically real terms.

REFERENCES


