

2001

Qualitative Textual Analysis of the Portrayal of Mexican Americans in Children's Picture Books

Victoria Quijas Navarro

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Qualitative Textual Analysis of the Portrayal of Mexican Americans
in Children's Picture Books

This Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Division of School Library Media Studies

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Northern Iowa

by
Victoria Quijas Navarro

August 11, 2001

This Research Paper by: Victoria Quijas Navarro

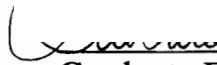
Titled: Qualitative Textural Analysis of the Portrayal of Mexican Americans in Children's Picture Books

Has been approved as meeting the research paper requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Barbara Safford

8/29/01

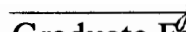
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Graduate Faculty Reader

Mingshui Cai


8/29/2001

Date Approved


Graduate Faculty Reader

Rick Traw

Sept. 3, 2001
Date Approved


Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Abstract

The Latino population is predicted to be the largest minority in the United States by the year 2005. The largest group in the Latino population is Mexican Americans. Children's picture books portraying Mexican Americans can provide Mexican American children a means of connecting with their culture. Picture books are also a way for non-Mexican Americans to learn about the culture. This research investigated three questions. What are the characteristics of Mexican American culture? What qualifies children's books as being representative of a culture? How do children's picture books about Mexican Americans reflect their culture? The researcher used qualitative, textual analysis with interpretive narrative of the findings. Librarians, teachers, and authors need to be made aware that literature with Mexican American themes or characters should be a true reflection of the culture. This will help educate all children and help them gain an understanding of people of diverse backgrounds and culture.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

In 1992 there was an event that foreshadowed the cultural future of the United States. Salsa outsold ketchup for the first time as the best selling condiment. Newsweek predicts that by 2005, Latinos will be the largest minority in the United States (Larmer, July 1999). Latino culture has blended into the American scene. Mexican food is almost a staple and Latin music, made popular by such performers as Gloria Estafan, Ricky Martin, and Marc Anthony, tops the record charts. But then, Latinos were some of the original inhabitants of the United States. Parts of the Southwest were part of Mexico. Spanish was spoken before English. Such names as Los Angeles, Colorado and Rio Grande are evidence of this. The Latino population is comprised of many different groups, Mexican Americans being one of them. Today's Mexican American children are growing up in a world that reflects their culture. Or are they? This research will investigate the portrayal of Mexican Americans in contemporary children's picture books.

Today it is hip to be Latino. Growing up Mexican in Iowa during the 1950s was a different story. This researcher's parents, all too aware of their being different, did not want their children to suffer the same injustices and humiliations they had endured after immigrating to this country. They suppressed their own identities and cultural heritage in order to raise their family as American. Pasadas was not celebrated, pinatas were not broken at birthday parties, and a girl's 15th birthday was treated with no special fanfare. Our meals did include rice and beans and homemade tortillas on the table along with jello salads and hamburger casseroles. The family was an American family, growing up with

Dick and Jane, Wally and the Beaver, Donna Reed and Andy and Opie. In spite of their efforts to fit in, the pride for where they came from and their beautiful culture seeped through, and this researcher learned to slip back and forth between two worlds; however, it was always with the discomfort that one world, the American one, was superior to the Mexican one.

Today the United States is no longer thought of as a melting pot of cultures and ethnicities. There has been a change in attitudes. The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s brought about legal changes that would move the country to more equity for its people. Assimilation is being replaced with pluralism (Latrobe, 1992).

Assimilation is a process by which a group or groups adopt the dominant culture. Cultural patterns either disappear or become part of the dominant culture or a combination of both can occur. When the less dominant group changes its cultural patterns to those of the dominant group, then acculturation has occurred (Galens, Sheets, & Young, 1995). Although some groups have tried to maintain their original culture as their children attend school and mix with the dominant culture, it is difficult to maintain the original cultural patterns.

Pluralism is the condition in which members of diverse cultural groups (a) have equal access to the resources needed for realizing their full potential; (b) obtain equal social and economic benefits; (c) have equal rights to express and nurture their cultural and linguistic heritage; and (d) are supported by official policies that express value for the diversity they contribute to the society (California Department of Education, 2000). Some immigrant groups which have not been permitted to assimilate into the dominant American culture have maintained their own ethnic identities by living in enclaves or

communities. A true pluralistic society would allow these different communities to flourish and coexist, and all would be equal in regards to politics, education, and economy (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994, p. 20).

Schools are institutions that respond to and reflect the larger society. Racism and discrimination find their ways into schools in much the same way that they find their way into other institutions such as housing, employment, and the criminal justice system (Nieto, 1992). Tracking and ability grouping are most commonly found in large, racially diverse, and poor communities (Persell, 1977). When the emphasis of cultural pluralism is on culture rather than just ethnicity, it comes closer to recognizing the interaction of race, gender, age, geographic region, and physical and mental abilities on one's participation in society's benefits (Gollnick & Chinn, 1990, p. 20).

Diversity and Education

How can educational institutions, particularly schools and libraries, overcome the inequalities that pervade the society? By itself, school improvement in the area of multicultural education cannot be expected to raise the income level of Mexican Americans or other minorities, but Gintis (1989) believes that "education can play an important role in attacking the roots of inequality" (p. 57). Education does help people "affirm their dignity as human beings and develop the skills and resources to control their lives in the larger society" (Gintis, 1989, p. 57). It is also important that resources for providing quality instruction in environments that are conducive to learning be expended equally (Gollnick & Chinn, 1990, p. 25).

Educators need to be made aware that children come from diverse backgrounds. The awareness of ethnic differences begins before a child is school age and becomes

established before adolescence (Ramsey, 1987). If one's ethnic group is not accepted -- either by direct rejection, or little or no representation -- then the individual will have a limited capacity to develop self-esteem in his or her ethnic identity (Conard, 1994; Miller-Lachman, 1992). Reading many books about diverse experiences and seeing different peoples presented in the illustrations provide children with opportunities to learn about the similarities and differences among people. They learn about the world around them and they learn about themselves. This idea of a multicultural education is not new, although it has changed its focus. In the 1920s, educators were encouraged to make their disciplines more relevant by adopting an international point of view (Montalto, 1978). This new issue -- focussed emphasis had a goal of making the dominant majority populations more tolerant and accepting toward first-and second-generation immigrants in order to maintain national unity and social control (Montalto, 1978).

The 1960s brought desegregation, and at the same time, students of color were being described as culturally deprived of the background required to attend schools, based on the cultural content of the dominant society. Soon programs such as Head Start and special education were developed to compensate for these shortcomings. Students of color, in poverty, and with disabilities soon filled those classes. By the 1970s, these groups were described as culturally different but were recognized as cultures that were not deficient (Sleeter & Grant, 1988, p. 37). The goal now was to teach the exceptional and culturally different to "fit into the mainstream of American society" (Sleeter and Grant, 1988, p. 37).

The Civil Rights movement brought a renewed interest in ethnic pride. Across the country colleges and universities established ethnic studies programs. These classes

focused on a particular ethnic group and its relationship with the dominant majority group. Soon the schools realized that these types of classes were not reaching the dominant group, and that was the group that needed to learn about the contributions of all ethnic groups. Textbooks were rewritten, and students were to be exposed to perspectives of oppressed groups through literature, history, music, and other disciplines integrated throughout the regular school program (Gollnick & Chinn, 1990, p. 28).

Still, after seven decades of concern over civil and human rights in the classroom, educators struggle with the management of cultural diversity (O'Connor, 1988, p. 2). Educators are given the responsibility of teaching all children regardless of their cultural backgrounds. These educators need the appropriate knowledge and tools to provide a multicultural environment that reflects an understanding and affirming of cultural diversity.

Diversity and Children's Literature

Rebecca Lukens describes literature as “reading that, by means of imaginative and artistic qualities, provides pleasure and understanding” (p.5). She also explains that “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). While life is understood by all of us in human terms all over the world, life is manifested culturally in many different ways (Lukens, 1999). Literature has existed in all cultures throughout history. Oral traditions preceded literature. Storytellers chronicled the stories of different native groups telling tales of their gods, the struggles between good and evil, heroic deeds, the foolishness of men, and their kindness, the building of empires and their collapse. Mothers and fathers taught children songs, nursery rhymes, prayers, and family stories.

Folk and fairy tales were not originally intended for children, but children have adopted them as their own (Norton, 1987). Children's literature is a product of modern times. Even though the printing press was invented in the middle of the 1400s, children's literature would not be recognized as viable until the 19th and 20th centuries (Norton, 1987).

In the 1980s, local, state, and national reports on education pushed for excellence in the schools (Gollnick & Chinn, 1990, p. 2). Teachers were faced with a more rigorous curriculum and a more diverse population to teach it to. Learning about other cultures involves more than the obligatory Cinco de Mayo celebration or listening to a Martin Luther King speech in February. Some schools tied their multicultural programs with their social studies curriculum. The pressure to have more multicultural literature, especially racial and ethnic, available to students saw an increase in the biography section in school libraries (Smith, 1993). The challenge to teachers, librarians, and administrators is to provide an environment that reflects a commitment to multicultural education. Educators need to understand the influence of negative attitudes about different cultural groups and provide the knowledge and support to promote cultural diversity (Gollnick & Chinn, 1994).

One of the goals of a multicultural curriculum is to provide information about diverse populations which will produce students who realize that all peoples have histories, have produced artistic and scientific thought, and are capable of making the same accomplishments (Conard, 1994). Literature is a powerful tool used in the attainment of that goal. Literature is used in the process of giving and receiving cultural awareness. Readers, particularly impressionable children, are affected through the power

of literature (Purves, Rogers & Soter, 1990). Multicultural literature should not be thought of as some exotic form of storytelling. To the children from the cultural group that the literature is representing the story reflects their world and gives them characters to connect with. To the children who are not from the cultural group that the literature is representing the story empowers them to identify and think about social and cultural issues. (Cai, 1998). The art of reading comes alive when the reader enters the story and becomes a part of it. The interaction between the author's written work and the reader or listener creates the synergy that makes a book become literature (Palacio, 1993). Teachers and librarians need to be made aware of multicultural literature and how accurately it represents the culture that it is depicting.

Description of Problem

The 2000 census indicates that there are approximately 32.8 million Latinos residing in the United States. (U.S. Census, 2000). Mexican Americans form the largest group of Latinos, at over 66%. The rapid increase and projected increase in the Mexican American population in the United States gives importance to the availability of quality children's literature which reflects the Mexican American culture with accuracy. The educational awareness of multicultural diversity lends itself to a plan in which the Mexican American culture is represented in educational materials, especially books. Mexican American children need to see role models from their own culture in the literature they read.

Research Questions

The study was designed to investigate three research questions.

1. What are the characteristics of Mexican American culture?

2. How do children's picture books about Mexican Americans reflect that culture?
3. Are the existing Children's books about Mexican Americans good representatives of that culture?

Purpose Statement

It is the purpose of this study to investigate children's literature in respect to its depiction of Mexican Americans. An evaluative measure for books is used to identify quality children's literature. The researcher will search children's picture books containing Mexican American characters or themes in an attempt to discover recurring patterns. This will enable the researcher to look at the books from different perspectives. The patterns that emerge from this process will give the researcher evidence to evaluate the books in regards to their representation of the Mexican American culture.

Definitions

acculturation: Cultural change that occurs when members of a minority group adopt characteristics of the dominant culture (they "become acculturated"). The term "acculturation" is sometimes used interchangeable with "assimilation", but technically the former is only one dimension of the latter. One may be acculturated without being fully socially, economically, or politically assimilated into American life (Galens, Sheets & Young, 1994, p. 17).

anglo: Ethnic designation used primarily by Latinos. Anglo is a general term used by Latinos to describe non-Latino persons of European ancestry. The term as most often used is descriptive and not derogatory. It probably originated in the middle to late 1800's in the southwestern United States, where the term differentiated people of European

ancestry from those of Mexican or other Latino ancestry. (Chabran and Chabran, 1996, p. 62).

culture: The sum of attitudes, customs, and beliefs that distinguish one group of people from another. Culture is transmitted through languages, material objects, ritual, institutions, and art, from one generation to the next. (Hirsch, Kett, and Trefil, 1988, p. 396).

diversity: Random House Dictionary defines as the state or fact of being diverse; difference; unlikeness. (p.574). Most often a reference to diversity means the varied national, ethnic, and racial backgrounds of U.S. citizens and immigrants but it is also used for categories of class, gender, and sexual orientation. Its meanings and uses depend to a great extent on the social, economic, or political view of the user (Herbst, 1997).

ethnicity: Cultural distinctiveness of a social group sharing common heritage, values, language, and behavior. A sense of common descent and history underlie this distinctiveness, which in turn, forms part of an individual's perception of self-identity. Ethnicity is present in both stratified and unstratified societies and has often been examined in conjunction with race, minority group status, and nationalism, as concepts used in discussing the status and role of groups within society (Encyclopedia of Multiculturalism, 1994, p. 632).

Hispanic: "First used by Spanish colonists in New Mexico. It is the current designation in the Federal Register to identify people in the United States whose familial origins were in a Spanish or Portuguese speaking country of Latin America or the Caribbean" (Melville, 1994, p. 91).

la familia: The family is considered the single most important institution in the social organization of Hispanics. It is through the family and its activities that all people relate to significant others in their lives and it is through the family that people communicate with the larger society. The family incorporates the idea of *la familia*, which includes in addition to the immediate nuclear household, relatives that are traced on both the female and male sides. This includes parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, cousins, and to a certain extent any blood relation that can be identified through the hierarchy of family surname. (Kanellos, 1993, p. 151 and 154).

Latino: "This is probably the preferred generalized self-identifier used by people of Latin American origins when they speak of themselves as a generalized group. It includes peoples who are indigenous to Latin America and excludes those whose ancestors came to the United States directly from Spain or Portugal. In California, it is frequently the label of choice due to the diversity of its Latin American population" (Melville, 1994, p. 92).

Mexican American: This term is commonly used to recognize United States citizens who are descendants of Mexicans, following the pattern sometimes used to identify the extraction of other ethnic Americans (e.g. African American). This term is acceptable to many Mexican descendants, but for those who do not identify with a Mexican heritage, but rather with a Spanish heritage, it is unacceptable (Melville, 1994).

multicultural: embraces every inhabited region of the world, Multicultural works of literature, nonfiction, and biography reveal what happens when cultures meet and clash, or when people from one culture try to survive within another (Miller-Lachman, 1995).

nationality: the status of belonging to a particular nation, whether by birth or naturalization. (Random House Unabridged Dictionary, 1993).

nuclear family: a social unit composed of father, mother, and children. (Random House Unabridged Dictionary, 1993).

picture book: a merger of two distinctive kinds of expression, the literary and the visual, requiring a harmonious relationship between picture and text. (MacCann, 1997).

stereotype: an oversimplified or exaggerated description of a person or thing. Stereotypes influence the perception of reality and can be positive or negative; most stereotyping is negative, or uncomplimentary and degrading. Stereotypes generally derive from prejudices. A prejudice is an opinion or feeling formed without knowledge, thought, or reason. Stereotyping can lead to discrimination, or a deliberate, conscious act based on prejudice (Encyclopedia of Multiculturalism, 1994, p. 1561).

Assumptions

The researcher assumes that there will be children's picture books available which have a Mexican American theme or characters.

Limitation

The study is limited to only picture books and does not consider other children's literature, such as young adult novels, which might have considerably more representation. This study is limited to Mexican Americans and does not take into account other groups from the Latino culture.

Significance

In order for children to identify with the world around them, to appreciate and value the differences and similarities of other people to themselves, it is important for them to first

discover their own identities (Sutherland & Arbuthnot, 1991, p. 31). It has been acknowledged that perceptions of people and events are often formed during childhood and adolescence. Sharing the cultures of others through the medium of literature can serve as a means toward creating a better understanding among all individuals. (Smith, 1993, p. 336). This analysis will help parents, authors, teachers, students, and librarians in their evaluation of children's picture books and help them see a need for the connection between understanding a culture and using its literature. This will hopefully lead to an understanding and respect for the Mexican American culture.

Chapter 2

Related Literature

This review of related research literature examined three aspects of how Mexican Americans are portrayed in children's literature. The first aspect focused on defining who Mexican Americans are. The second aspect presented information on what qualifies a children's book as being a good representative of a culture. The third part reflected on how books about Mexican Americans portray that culture.

Mexican Americans in Relation to Latinos

According to Current Population Survey of the United States Census for 2000, there were 32.8 million Latinos in the United States, roughly 12 percent of the entire U.S. population (U.S. Census, 2000). People claiming Mexican descent make up approximately 66.1 percent of this Latino population, followed by Puerto Ricans (9%), Cubans (4%), Central Americans and South Americans (14.5%), and Dominicans, Spanish, and other Hispanics (6.4%) (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2000). Other sources indicated that if the present growth rates continue, Latinos will comprise the largest minority in the country by the year 2005, with an estimated 13.3% of the population of the U.S. (U. S. Census, 2000). Latino is the term used to refer to people originating from, or having a heritage related to Latin America, in recognition of the fact that this set of people is actually a superset of many nationalities (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/iasa/diversity.html>). Since the term *Latin* comes into use as the least common denominator for all peoples of Latin America, in recognition of the fact that some romance language (Spanish, Portuguese, French) is the native tongue of the majority of

Latin Americans, this term is widely accepted by most (<http://www.cde.ca.gov/iasa/diversity.html>).

The Latino culture is ever changing. Even though Latino is a blanket term that is applied to a large number of people, Latinos do not share a singular culture or identity. But a study comparing cultural traditions by Cintron de Esteves (1981) investigated four groups of Latinos and found some similarities. The four groups were Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Venezuelans, all living in the United States. The study was undertaken to investigate and collect information about five areas; oral tradition, social tradition, education, play, and television habits among the four groups. Eighty-five families together with their children ranging in age from 4 to 60 months and their extended family living in the home were interviewed (Cintron de Esteves, 1981). The 85 families were comprised of 25 Mexican, 23 Puerto Rican, 20 Cuban, and 17 Venezuelan. The results of the study indicated that there is a continuity of Spanish traditions held among the four groups involved in the study, and that they are proud of their Cultural heritage, and most of all their language (Cintron de Esteves, 1981). The oral tradition is important to the Latino. The study went on to verify that the four groups use lullabies, traditional songs, nursery rhymes, stories, poems, riddles, and oral games. It was found in this study that Mexicans are the group that has been adapting to the current American lifestyle in ways such as women working outside the home, fathers taking on more of the childrearing responsibilities, and multi-generations of family members no longer living as one household. Mexicans are also the group that has been living in the United States for the longest period of time (Cintron de Esteves, 1981).

Characteristics of Mexican Americans

The California Department of Education (2000) defines culture as the conscious and unconscious ways of life of a people, including attitudes, values, behaviors, and material things. As culture is discussed, one must remember that the Mexican American population is heterogeneous, made up of numerous subgroups “manifesting different experiences and different adaptations and strategies to life in the United States” (Matute-Bianchi, 1990, p.210).

The research on Mexican American culture and ethnicity conducted by Keefe and Padilla (1987) provided a valuable insight. The data collection phase of the Keefe and Padilla (1987) study was conducted over a period of twenty-eight months in three California cities: Santa Barbara, Oxnard, and Santa Paula. These sites were selected because of the “variation in history of settlement, economic base, and population size” (p. 3). The first phase of the study involved administering a questionnaire with 123 variables to 666 Mexican Americans and 425 non-Spanish surname individuals (p. 28). The questionnaire related to ethnic differences in family structure, social support, and cultural background. Phase two of the study involved an in-depth interview of 372 Mexican Americans and 163 Anglos (p. 33). These interviews focused on the themes of family and ethnicity. The third phase of the research included in-depth case studies of 24 Mexican Americans and 22 Anglos Americans (Keefe & Padilla, 1987, p. 34). The findings of the Keefe and Padilla study indicated that native-born Mexican Americans acculturate, to some extent; and some ethnic traits, especially the maintenance of family ties, are sustained and surprisingly even strengthened from generation to generation (Keefe & Padilla, 1987).

In the study, five defined homogeneous clusters were identified. Group I comprised 25% of the sample (p. 54). They were first generation and decidedly unacculturated. They identified as Mexicans and with Mexican culture. They were less educated and less social-economically mobile. Group II constituted 14% of the population (p. 54). Although, also less educated and from the lower classes (48% laborers) this group had a more positive attitude toward American culture and people (p. 121). Group III represented 35% of the population sample and tended to be second generation, better educated and of higher socioeconomic status (20% head of household with white collar occupation) (p. 122). They retain their ethnic identity and are conscious of their Mexican heritage. Members of this *Cultural Blend* group, Keefe and Padilla noted,

Participate selectively in both cultural orientations, but are not equally proficient in both cultures. They recognize that they are not Mexicans, and they do not identify as Mexican, noting, for example, their lack of fluency in Spanish or their non acceptance of some Mexican cultural practices. At the same time, *Cultural Blends* draw a clear distinction between themselves and Anglos, and although they appear comfortable in many aspects of American life, they have many ethnically based preferences that keep them separated from Anglos (p.96).

Group IV represented 21% of the population sample and tended to be second generation with higher education and occupational status (30% white-collar professions) (p. 54). Of this group 18% were Protestant (p. 38). Group V was comprised of 5 % of the sample and, according to Keefe and Padilla (1987, p. 54), members of this group are “highly Anglicized and possess little knowledge of or identity with Mexican culture” (p. 55).

Although slightly higher educated, their occupations did not reflect any higher occupational status (26% white-collar professions), income levels or socioeconomic mobility. This group identifies themselves exclusively with Anglos and has no ethnically based preferences that separate them from Anglos (Keefe & Padilla p.55).

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000) data collected in 2000, large households were the norm in almost one third of the Mexican American's surveyed. In 2000, 30.6 percent of family households in which a Mexican American person was the householder consisted of five or more people (Bureau of the Census). The importance of family is a cultural feature of the Mexican American population. The ideal of *la familia* is that it is the central and most important institution in life (Alvarez, 1994, p. 149). *La familia* is not limited to immediate family. It includes extended family members such as aunts and uncles, grandparents, godparents, and even close family friends. Many times the extended family live in one house. But the idea of *la familia* is changing, as second and third generation Mexican Americans prefer the nuclear family and separate households, thus creating stress as the older generations press them to conform to the traditional ways. (Alvarez, p.150).

Balzano (1993) did a study focusing on the Mexican American family's value of education. She studied 16 children and their families from 1989 to 1993 (Balzano, abstract). Through interviews and observation Balzano found that education was commonly understood to mean development of moral character in a child. A common parent belief about this cultural education model was that children would become competent participants in social groups and that they would be good persons if they received proper education. Parents whom Balzano interviewed considered themselves,

not the schools, primarily responsible for education. *Estudios*: formal study in school, was recognized by these same parents as a worthwhile endeavor that would help their child advance socially and economically (Balzano, 1993).

The U.S. Bureau of the Census reflected that the educational success of Mexican Americans falls behind non-Hispanics. High school graduation was attained by 51% of Mexican Americans, while 88.4% of non-Hispanics graduated (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Higher educational attainment such as bachelor's degree, masters, or Ph.D. was reached by 6.9% Mexican Americans as compared to 28.1% non-Hispanic. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). The explanations for this disparity in educational attainment have been documented in Balzano's study, which indicated that Mexican American children are faced with many factors that influence their ability to learn. Some of these factors are: segregation, language/cultural exclusion, lack of positive teacher-student interaction, ability grouping, and lack of Mexican American role models in education (Balzano, p. 14).

According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, the median earnings for Mexican American males in 1992 were \$22,355, compared to \$36,672 for non-Hispanics (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1993a). Zinn (1993) studied the status of Mexican Americans and observed two trends. The first was that few Mexican Americans have sufficient training for high wage jobs in newly created industries. The second trend was an increase of Mexican American women in the work force, even though their wages were lower than non-Hispanics; Mexican American females median income was \$18,880 and non-Hispanic females was \$24,313 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994). The last trend

identified by Zinn was the increase of female-headed households below the poverty level (Zinn, 1993, p 171).

Multicultural Literature

Multicultural literature has been defined many ways. Rasmussen (1996) used a broad definition. For his research he used the definition that multicultural literature is "literature that represents any distinct cultural group through accurate portrayal and rich detail" (p.12). Under this umbrella are different types of multicultural books. Rasmussen accepted that one type is culturally specific, meaning that the book is written from an inside perspective - that of a person growing up in a particular cultural group. The details of everyday life would be recognizable to a member of that group. A second type of book features characters who are members of a minority, but contain few, if any, specific details that might serve to define these characters culturally. The last type of book is generally a picture book that features people of color but are about some unrelated story (Rasmussen, p.12). Recommendations for setting up criteria for the evaluation of multicultural books Rasmussen suggested the following: (a) accuracy in terms of errors and omissions, (b) non-stereotyping of characters, plot development, theme, setting, language, and illustrations, (c) appropriateness of language according to age group, terminology, and dialect, (d) author's perspective in creating the work, (e) currency of information and interpretations, (f) sensitivity to the emotional, intellectual, and developmental levels of the reader, (g) integration of cultural information into the story, (h) balance and multidimensional presentation of issues, and (i) accuracy and currency of illustrations. (Rasmussen, 1996, p.17)

Civil Rights legislation in the 1960s awakened an interest in multicultural literature (p. 20). The conservative mood of the country in the 1980s set back many gains made in the previous decade (p. 21). Currently there is a renewed interest in multicultural literature with a focus on greater depth and breadth (Rochman, 1993).

Mexican American Children's Literature

Recognized authority on multicultural children's books, Isabel Schon (1991) noted that from 1988 to 1991 there were only eleven Mexican American titles that she found noteworthy (Schon, 1991). Noteworthy was defined by Schon as books that, contain recent information, as well as being entertaining and possessing high potential for interest or involvement of the reader (p.viii). Rasmussen stated that Mexican American children's books started to appear in the 1940s and did not represent a positive image (p.20). Mexican American literary characters were developed largely by European American writers who often portrayed Mexican Americans in rural settings and with stereotypical images (Harris, 1993). Even though today picture books depicting Mexican Americans are more available, of the approximately 5,000 children's books published annually by major publishers in the United States, only about one tenth of 1% are books about Mexican Americans (Murray and Velazquez, 1999). Mexican American children rarely see themselves in contemporary settings. Many of the books are limited to the genres of folklore, legends, and protest pieces (Barrera, Liguori, & Salas, 1993). What continues to dominate the market are stories about handicraft-makers Abuela's Weave (Castaneda, 1993), shrewd barterers Saturday Sancocho (Torres, 1995), or children who rescue an otherwise botched Christmas ceremony Carlos, Light the Farolita (Ciavonne, 1995) (MacCann, p. 65). A study done by Barrera, Quiroa and West-Williams (1999),

looked at Mexican American children's literature written between 1995-1998. Of the books written during that time, they found most were in English, but some featured a bilingual format with parallel texts in English and Spanish. Some of the English language books would incorporate Spanish phrases or single words, often with a brief explanation. Some books had glossaries with translations (Barrera, Quiroa, & West-Williams, 1999, p. 318).

Two themes that were repeated through many picture books were the importance of family and intergenerational connections. Some examples were: In My Family (Garza, 1996), Going Home (Bunting, 1996), Abuelita's Heart (Cordova, 1997) and A Gift from Papa Diego (Saenz, 1998) (Barrera et al, 1999). Childhood memories were topics explored in some of the literature. Chave's Memories (Delgado, 1996) and Where Fireflies Dance (Corpi, 1997) were two titles incorporating that theme (Barrera et al, 1999). The books studied by Barrera et al were described in the paper as a "mixed bag" with some well crafted picture books representative of Mexican Americans, having strong plots, interesting characters, and engaging artwork. Others were described as having "weak cast of characters, a tiresome plot, and unexciting art" (Barrera et al, 1999).

Summary

The Mexican American experience can be examined by looking at the social context of the culture, educational statistics, family importance, and employment statistics. Keefe and Padilla (1987) documented five types of Mexican Americans, each group varied in cultural understanding and ethnic loyalty. Although Mexican Americans represent the largest minority in the United States, with a substantial growth in population in the last decade, they have been underrepresented and misrepresented in children's

literature. The quantity and quality of children's books about the Mexican American experience has not kept pace with the change in the country's demography. Good books can help children develop ethnic pride, provide positive role models, and build self-esteem. Previous research showed that Mexican American children have not had enough literature that reflected their world and their faces. Previous researchers have found that although there are some good books, stereotypes still exist in the form of literary characters who are portrayed as one-dimensional or passive, stories set in rural settings, undeveloped plots, and illustrations that fail to reflect the diversity of the people being represented. This researcher did a textual analysis without focusing on those particular issues, but looked for patterns that occurred in those books involving the characters, setting, illustrations, themes or other elements. The researcher approached the study with an open mind and looked for any patterns that emerged. The researcher interpreted the findings in relationship to the previous research and found new issues to ponder and examine.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

This research study investigated how Mexican Americans were portrayed in children's picture books. This analysis involved picture books that have Mexican Americans as their main or secondary characters. The researcher attempted to make no assumptions about the books being studied. The intent was to reach an understanding of the books being studied and reflect this understanding in a narrative description.

Research Design

The research employed a qualitative method. Creswell, (1994) in *Research Design*, defines qualitative study "...as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting" (p. 1-2). Qualitative research is based on four paradigms: qualitative research is rooted in a phenomenological paradigm, which holds that reality is socially constructed through individual or collective definitions of the situation (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984); qualitative research is more concerned with understanding the social phenomenon from the actors' perspective through participation in the life of those actors (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984); the prototypical qualitative study is the ethnography which helps the reader understand the definitions of the situation of those studied (Goodenough, 1971); and the qualitative researcher becomes immersed in the phenomenon of interest (Powdermaker, 1966).

Some of the characteristics of qualitative research according to McMillan are inductive data analysis; generalizations induced from synthesizing gathered information and participant perspectives; focus on participants' understanding and meaning (McMillan, 2000, p. 252). The researcher was open to whatever patterns emerged from the sorting of the picture books, but also looked for incidents of stereotyping and inaccuracies. The textual analysis allowed the researcher to collect data not with the intent of getting facts on a topic, but to serve as an interpreter of the data (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 153). The researcher approached the data with no set categories in mind; no preconceptions about what would be found (p. 285). This approach is described by Glaser and Strauss as “looking for emergent categories” (p. 72) and noting relationships or concepts. The researcher sorted and coded the data paying attention to any themes, issues, or recurring motifs that could be isolated, counted, and interpreted (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 43). Coding is a systematic way of developing and refining the interpretation of data using colors, letters, or numbers (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 136). Coding need not be viewed as simply reducing data to some general, common denominators. Rather, it can be used to expand and transform data, opening up more diverse possibilities. This opening up enabled the researcher to expand the conceptual framework and dimensions for analysis. The researcher, in order to form theories and create meanings, used ideas, concepts, and categories discovered in the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Another characteristic McMillan points out is emergent research design; research design evolves and changes as the study takes place. As the qualitative study progresses the researcher may find other patterns to report (McMillan, 2000, p. 252). Both text and illustrations were analyzed.

Justification

Qualitative researchers attempt to make generalizations. Their study is a holistic approach. They attempt to look at different dimensions of the population being studied without changing the population itself (Johnson & Christiansen, 2000). The researcher wanted to look at the Mexican American picture books without any preconception of the patterns that might emerge. The narrative final report suggests themes that recur in the books and what those themes imply.

Procedures and Population

The major purpose of this study was to investigate the portrayals of Mexican Americans in children's picture books. Specifically the purpose was to determine what characteristics were revealed in the books and what, if any, stereotypes of the Mexican American culture existed in the books. The researcher did not select the books. The researcher had become familiar with books other researchers had discussed in their studies. So as not to show bias in the selecting of the books for the study, the researcher contacted several libraries and asked the librarians to select 25-30 picture books that had Mexican American characters or Mexican American themes. Some librarians had included books about Mexicans in Mexico or other Latinos, not Mexican Americans. Thus, the researcher filtered those books to identify only those with Mexican American characters, no folktales or legends, and the setting of someplace in the United States. Thirty books were identified for the study, as a minimum of 25 is required for a valid sample. The books had been published in the last 25 years in order for the data to be current. The researcher did sorting with no particular objective other than to find a commonality or theme among the books. The first step in the process was to read each

book. Notes were written on index cards. These notes included a summary of the story, characters and their traits, illustration style, and any other observations. Each book was assigned a number to identify it during the sort. The data from the first sort was coded and recorded on a grid sheet that contained themes found during the search. This list of themes expanded and changed during the sorting process as is typical in a textual research design. When a theme or motif presented itself the researcher did a sort, writing down on the grid the number of the book that contained that theme. The researcher continued sorting and recording the data. The researcher looked for relationships and patterns that suggested generalizations. Further sorting was done as warranted. The sorting stopped after the researcher failed to detect any more patterns or themes emerging that would benefit the value of the research. The researcher interpreted the findings and drew inferences, some of which correlated with the findings of the related literature. The researcher recorded the findings in the form of a narrative report to be interpreted by the reader. Although in qualitative research one never knows quite when to stop, this researcher found that there was enough information in the sorting to justify the interpretation and give credibility to the findings.

Chapter 4

Analysis of Data

The process of collecting data, mainly the books to be used in the study, turned out to be a daunting task. Not wanting to show bias, the researcher had decided to allow librarians to make the book selection for the sorting. The Davenport Iowa Children's Librarian was asked to provide 25-30 picture books that had Mexican Americans as characters. She was able to supply 25 titles. Of the 25 she had selected, only 13 met the criteria for the study. Some were too dated (having a copyright date prior to 1975), some were stories of Mexico, some had animals as characters and others were about Latinos who were not Mexican American. The public library in Bettendorf, Iowa was contacted and the librarian could only provide one book, which was from 1973. The book did not fit the criteria. The next source was the local Area Education Agency where the computer search yielded one book. St. Ambrose University was the next source, where three books were located. The last source was the Resource Learning Center at the University of Iowa, which provided 13 more books for a total of 30 books eligible for the sort. The researcher decided to use all 30 instead of the original 25 proposed. The books in the sort were not chosen by the researcher, but appeared to be a good mix of stories, although some authors have more than one contribution. The process of sorting entailed the taking of notes and observations, while maintaining an objective point of view. The researcher did at times try to read the story from the perspective of a Mexican American child to see if any themes would emerge from that perspective. During the process of doing the sorting, categories were starting to come forth even before the first sort was done. The researcher noted these on the grid and continued the sort.

Some of the themes were obvious, while others were subtle and were arrived at after numerous sorts. Some of the themes overlapped. The researcher found she was focusing too much on the illustrations and decided to include as two of her sorts reading only the text and not looking at the illustrations and vice versa. The original list of themes and motifs changed and expanded as the sorting continued. The list was narrowed and refined to provide a view of Mexican Americans as portrayed in picture books.

Importance of the Family

Two interrelated themes, the importance of the family and intergenerational relationships, were found in over half of the books. In some stories, such as Butterfly Boy (Kroll, 1997) and The Farolitos of Christmas (Anaya, 1987), the grandfather appears to live with the family and forms a special bond with the grandchild. In A Handful of Seeds (Hughes, 1993) and Three Stalks of Corn (Politi, 1976), the child lives with the grandparent and no mention is made of the child's parents. In all the books where the grandparent is interacting with the grandchild, the depiction is one of a loving relationship with mutual respect. Lessons are learned from grandparents who teach by example. Honesty is the best policy is portrayed in A Day's Work (Bunting, 1994). The importance of planting and saving seeds is taught in A Handful of Seeds (Hughes, 1993). The whimsical Abuela (Kleven, 1991) has a granddaughter and grandmother on their way to the park take off into the air on a magical ride around New York City. The relationship between grandchild and grandparent may be due to the fact that Mexicans traditionally have taken care of their elderly parents in their own homes. The respect for elders is passed down within the culture. While extended family households are less common today, the respect for elders is still taught in Mexican American families. Also, with both

parents often working outside the home, care taking may be left to one or more grandparent. A Mexican American child would be able to relate to a picture book showing the close bond between grandparent and grandchild. A non-Mexican American child would be able to relate also and they would see that the special bond between child and grandparent is not exclusive to any one culture or social class.

Other family members, such as aunts, uncles and cousins, also play an important part in the lives of the characters. Three books depict aunts as special. A great aunt is the recipient of attention in *A Birthday Basket for Tia* (Mora, 1992). Both a cousin and an uncle are involved in saving Monchi from becoming a gang member in *It Doesn't Have to be this Way* (Rodriguez, 1999). In *Family, Familia* (Bertrand, 1999), Daniel reluctantly attends his father's family reunion, only to bond with a cousin his own age that he didn't know he had. The researcher couldn't help but think of her own family reunions where name tags are worn, just like in the story, and friendships are formed with cousins you didn't know about. Aunts, uncles, and cousins are always on the scene when there is a celebration. These family gatherings help form a bond that enables them to support each other in good times and bad.

The researcher was surprised at the absence of siblings in the stories. The only story in which they have an active role is in *The Birthday Swap* (Lopez, 1997). An older teenage sister swaps her birthday with her five-year-old sister so that the little sister could have a summer birthday party. In 18 of the books there is no mention of siblings and the main character appears to be an only child. In the other books they are mentioned in passing and the main character does not interact with them. This may be due to the fact that picture books need to tell a story in a limited number of pages, usually 32. Perhaps

the authors felt that introducing extra characters would not add to the story and in most cases the researcher would agree.

The Role of the Father

The nuclear family as mother, father, and child (children) is represented in 18 of the books. As mentioned earlier, the families were small, no more than three children, and often only one. The census figures for Mexican Americans indicate household average at 4.1 persons. There is no explanation if this includes two parents or one.

The father is absent in nine of the books and both parents are absent in three of the stories. Where there is an absent father there is usually a mother, but in the case of the absent parents, a grandmother is the parent figure. In only two stories is the absence of the father explained. In The Farolitos of Christmas (Anaya, 1987), the father is away fighting in WWII. In I Speak English for my Mother (Stanek, 1989), the reader is told that the father died, but no further explanation is given. In both of these stories the father is remembered with fondness.

The fathers who are in the stories are, for the most part, portrayed as having strength, courage and a good relationship with their children. Being a migrant farmer is difficult work. When the stories involved migrant farming the father kept alive the family's hope of a better life. The migrant families worked together to attain their goals. Illustrations in Gathering the Sun (Ada, 1997), show a father reading to his children, helping them with their homework, and lovingly carrying a sleeping child home after working in the fields. The illustrations are strong and bold and send a message to the reader that here is a man who loves his family. The fathers depicted in the stories were not the macho, authoritarian types as is the stereotype. Women have taken on jobs and

the dynamics of the Mexican American family have changed. The household chores are now shared in some families. Making tamales is labor intensive and it is not unusual for an entire family to help make them. In Too Many Tamales (Martinez, 1993), the father is shown wearing an apron and helping prepare the tamales. He is also wearing a dress shirt and tie, a detail not missed by the researcher.

Celebrations

Celebration is a way for Mexican Americans to connect with family and friends, much like many other cultures. Some sort of celebration is part of the story in 14 of the books in the sort. Three of the books were about birthdays, four were about Christmas, two were about the Day of the Dead, and two were fiestas. The remainders included a May Day parade, a family reunion, and a wedding. The researcher found that some of the plots were similar. Carlos, Light the Farolitos (Ciavonne, 1995) and The Farolitos of Christmas (Anaya, 1987), both involve a child who saves the Christmas nativity pageant. The birthday stories are about special gifts given to the birthday person. Lights on the River (Thomas, 1994) and Maria Molina and the Days of the Dead (Krull, 1994), are about remembering those who have died and the customs of Mexico. The main characters in each story are remembering a grandmother. Although these books give insight into the Mexican American culture, it is important to explain that not all Mexican Americans have these customs. The researcher grew up in an Iowa Mexican community whose members never celebrated the Days of the Dead and the nativity pageant was done at the Catholic Church during the mass, not going house to house. It is important to remember that although many Mexican Americans are Catholic, not all of them are. The point that should be stressed when reading these books to children is that not all people celebrate in

the same way, even people from a shared ethnic background. Another explanation might be needed to explain why in all but 3 of the books with celebrations there appears to be no non-Mexican Americans at the celebrations. It appears that Mexican Americans live in a type of closed society, which is not true.

Food

The cuisine of Mexico is varied, but most Americans are familiar with only some basic dishes such as tortillas, tacos, enchiladas, rice and beans. This Mexican food is popular in the United States. Food enables one to make connections with a culture. It is something that can be shared and enjoyed. Food was used in 10 of the books sorted, with recipes offered in four. Four of the books had food as the main element in the story. Two stories, Too Many Tamales (Soto, 1993) and Carlos Digs to China (Stevens, 2001) used humor along with food. In the latter title, Carlos, who is about ten years old, is introduced to Chinese food when his teacher takes his class to a Chinese restaurant at the end of the school year. Carlos spends his summer trying to dig his way to China so that he can enjoy another cuisine because he is tired of always eating Mexican food. Carlos appears to live in a middle class suburban neighborhood in current time. It was hard for the researcher to believe that any contemporary child had never tasted Chinese food and that he only ate Mexican food. This subtly reiterates the stereotypical message that Mexican Americans live in a closed society, with little contact with people of other cultures or ethnicity.

Despite the fact that there was much focus on food the researcher did not see any illustrations of overweight characters in any of the books. Again, it is important that children reading these books learn that the food in the books is not the only food eaten by Mexican Americans. Many times good intentioned teachers think they are teaching their

students about the Mexican culture by fixing tacos and breaking a piñata on the Cinco de Mayo. Food is a good way to introduce a study of a culture, but the cuisine of Mexico goes so much deeper than just tacos. The culture is more than that and deserves better treatment.

Gardening and Migrant Farming

The recurring motif of gardening was a surprise to the researcher. Mexican Americans as gardeners is a new stereotype the researcher was not expecting to see in picture books. Gardens or gardening was present in 10 of the books. The researcher noted that as a stereotype it could be worse. The gardening was always presented in a positive way, with the characters taking great pride in their ability to grow flowers and vegetables. Care must be taken so that all children understand that Mexican Americans are good at skills other than gardening. Also, a misconception may occur if children get the impression that Mexican Americans don't go to grocery stores; they grow all their own food.

Migrant farming was a theme found in six of the books. These books usually began with a tone of despair, describing the struggles and poverty of the migrant farm family, and ended with a sense of hope for a better life. The children in these stories often helped with the farming and recognized that they must make sacrifices for the good of the family. Young children are able to learn compassion at an early age and the reading and discussing of these books would bring a greater understanding of the life that some Mexican American children live. But again, one must be careful that the stereotype of the Mexican American as only being able to do migrant farm work must not be perpetuated.

Illustrations

Just as German Americans don't all have blond hair and blue eyes, Mexican Americans don't all have black hair and dark eyes. Only seven of the thirty books showed characters with different skin tones and hair color other than black. The other 23 books showed people with black hair, dark eyes and the same shade of skin color. A study of Mexico's history indicates that Europeans came to Mexico and married. Today's Mexican American could have descended from several European ancestors, such as the Spanish, French, Germans, or Jews. The researcher recognizes that while many Mexican Americans do have black hair and dark eyes, it would be nice to see illustrations that are truer representations of the diversity within the Mexican American people.

Another look at the illustrations revealed that in 17 of the books the females wore dresses or skirts. This is understandable when the story was about a celebration and dressing up was expected, but some books showed women in dresses working in fields. In others, everyone in the story would be in modern dress, such as jeans and tee shirts and women would be wearing dresses. This depiction may have been true in earlier times, but in today's world Mexican American women wear pants when doing field work and are not limited to wearing dresses for their everyday attire. The researcher can only explain this as the illustrator's perception of Mexican American's traditional values. Mothers in dresses evoke feelings of home and family.

Too often the men in the picture books are depicted as non-professionals. Only three books have the father dressed in such a way that he might be perceived as a white-collar worker. Otherwise the dress is simple and often that of a farm worker. Also, in 17 of the books the men have mustaches. Sometimes there are only one or two men shown

with mustaches, while in some books the stereotype was overwhelming. In A Day's Work (Bunting, 1994), all 11 of the men in the book have mustaches. Another book, Gathering the Sun (Ada, 1997), all the males, except Cesar Chavez, have mustaches. The researcher found this almost amusing since in her family of Mexican Americans her father, 3 uncles, two brothers, and 14 boy cousins never had mustaches, although her grandfather from Mexico had one. Maybe men having mustaches is cultural and my family wanting to acculturate chose not to continue with that aspect of their culture. Gary Soto glorifies the mustache and the idea of a son wanting to be like his father in Big Bushy Mustache (Soto, 1998). Still, this researcher found this type of portrayal bothersome, as if the reader of picture books couldn't tell men were Mexican American unless they had mustaches.

While doing the sort that involved focusing only on the illustrations, no one style of illustration was found to be dominant. The book's illustrations varied in mediums which included oil painting, line drawing, pencil drawing, water color and collage. The researcher did notice the use of warm colors in many of the books, especially in the books having to do with migrant farming. Different shades of brown, yellow and red were used and gave these books an earthy look. The researcher saw no glaring examples in which the illustrations did not compliment the text.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

This research examined how Mexican Americans are portrayed in children's picture books. First, it was necessary to clearly define Mexican Americans, since they are often grouped with the larger population of Latinos. Then, children's picture books were assessed as to how they reflected Mexican Americans and their culture. Lastly, the research looked at current children's picture books about Mexican Americans to determine if they were good representatives of the culture. The final research was done by sorting and coding 30 picture books chosen by librarians from five different libraries. The books had to be published within the last 25 years and had to contain humans as characters as opposed to folktales containing animals. The setting had to be the United States as opposed to Mexico. The librarians were asked to assemble picture books containing Mexican Americans as characters. The researcher then screened these books to be sure they met the criteria mentioned above. Once the books were gathered, the researcher started sorting the books looking for themes and motifs that emerged from the sort. This involved note taking and tallying a grid marked with themes as they emerged. By looking at the themes the researcher attempted to interpret the information and draw inferences. The research yielded some surprising results as to how Mexican Americans are portrayed.

Conclusions

First, the issue of the lack of books must be addressed. Libraries need to have more picture books containing Mexican Americans. The older books received from the Davenport Library were not used in the sort. They had copyright dates earlier than 1975.

The researcher feels that those books needed weeding for obvious stereotyping, such as a story about a bare-footed little boy in a sombrero struggling with a stubborn mule. The embarrassed librarian from the Bettendorf Library could not explain how her library could only have one title. She was going to look into it. These two examples indicate that there is a need to educate librarians as to the importance of having books available that are good representatives of a culture. One should not have to travel 56 miles to find good children's books. Of the books used in this study, the representation of Mexican Americans was varied but still needs close monitoring so as not to proliferate negative stereotyping. Librarians and teachers using picture books need to become educated about what represents a culture and people. Once they are educated they need to have these books available in their libraries. Except for the University of Iowa Resource Learning Center, the librarians were unsuccessful in locating enough usable titles for this study. The Davenport Library needs to buy more current books. The Bettendorf Library and the Area Education Agency need to buy books. The Mexican American culture is so prevalent in our society it is important to be sensitive to the representation of the culture in books.

The researcher's results supported some of the related literature but not all. The relationship of grandparents and grandchild was the focus in many of the books. Although the dynamics of the extended family has changed in the Mexican American family, the respect and love for elders is still a strong value. Aunts, uncles and cousins are also represented as being an important part of a Mexican American child's life. This closeness of the family is valued in the Mexican American culture.

A surprising result found was although the Mexican American population is growing, according to recent census statistics, many of the stories involved a single child with no siblings. This is not a criticism, just an observation. The role of immigration may explain the population growth. The researcher noted that no stories about immigration were found for the sort. Maybe it is too political. The researcher was pleased that the books did not portray Mexican Americans as having only large families. The researcher would like to see more stories where the characters interact with their siblings. There was only one story where two sisters were the main characters. Maybe the relationship between siblings is taken for granted and authors don't recognize it as an interesting topic for a story.

The strength of the nuclear family made up of a mother, father and child (children) was apparent in 18 of the books. The father and mother often shared household duties. Migrant farmer families shared in their struggles to attain a better life. Fathers were portrayed as strong and caring.

The heritage of working with the soil and appreciation of growing flowers and crops carries over into stories with gardening as a theme. The use of warm colors lent an earthy appeal to some of these books. Ten books depicted Mexican Americans tending to a garden. This might be perceived by some as a positive stereotyping. The problem occurs when gardening is the only skill at which Mexican Americans are shown excelling. If gardening must be the theme, then the researcher would like to see Mexican Americans portrayed as owners of large ranches or homes with landscaped yards. Instead, they are portrayed as migrant farmers or living in small adobe style houses with small garden plots.

Food plays an important role in 10 of the picture books. The all too familiar tortillas, tacos, enchiladas, beans and rice are offered. Although many Mexican Americans eat these foods, it is not exclusively what they eat. The books could show Mexican Americans eating other foods.

The relationship between the text and illustrations seemed appropriate in most instances. The illustrations supported and enhanced the text. Too many illustrations showed some disturbing stereotyping. Men with mustaches were prevalent throughout most of the books. Dresses or skirts were the predominant mode of dress for females. Mexican Americans don't come in different shades of skin and hair according to most of the picture books. Mexican Americans all have black hair according to most of the picture books. Interaction between Mexican Americans and non-Mexican Americans is rare according to most of the picture books.

Mexican Americans have a variety of physical features that need to be shown in picture books. Mexican Americans should be shown not only interacting with non-Mexican Americans, but also as authority figures. The image of the docile Mexican American who happily works as a field hand or gardener needs to be changed so that children see an image of a Mexican American who happily works as a doctor or CEO or the President of the United States.

The researcher was happy to see parity as far as female and male main characters. A girl was the main character in 16 of the books and a boy was the main character in 12. The main characters in 14 of the books solved a problem either alone or with help. This positive portrayal of Mexican American children would serve as a good example for all children.

The authors of the children's picture books used in this study tried to tell stories that would not only appeal to children, but would also give an insight into the Mexican American culture. A few told stories that could have been about any child but used a Mexican American child. This type of story reflected the goodness of the character, but offered no insights about the culture. Not every book with a Mexican American character has to involve the culture. These books add to the diversity of Mexican Americans.

Regarding stereotyping, one author may not see the harm of putting mustaches on his male characters, but if all the authors put mustaches on their male characters, there is a problem. Authors need to be made aware of stereotyping and how to avoid it.

Recommendations

Both Mexican American and non-Mexican American children learn numerous lessons from picture books about Mexican Americans. These books should be the best possible representation of the culture. Further studies need to be done to expand upon this research. An analysis studying the latest census figures and their relationship to the images portrayed in picture books is suggested. Another study looking at the role of Mexican American women in children's picture books may derive useful data. How other Latino cultures are depicted in picture books would be helpful in the understanding of different cultures. An analysis of the portrayal of Mexican Americans in books for older children or young adults would compliment the findings of this study. A look at the numbers of books with Latino themes or Mexican American themes found in libraries would yield some telling data. A survey of librarians and how they select their multicultural books may be in order. These suggestions for research would also lend themselves to studies of other cultures.

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