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Censorship in Early Childhood: A Critical Content Analysis of Banned and Challenged Latine Picture Books

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Introduction

Book bans have historically been used to limit the types of books students have access to, especially for communities of color and historically marginalized groups. The last few years have given rise to book challenges and book bans. *The New York Times* reported in January of 2022 that “parents, activists, school board officials, and lawmakers around the country are challenging books at a pace not seen in decades” (Harris & Alter). Historically, book banning has been used to limit what people can read, particularly in the banning of topics that portray experiences outside of white, straight, middle-class narratives. Literacy has been used as a political tool to prevent access to knowledge. One example of this is the literacy laws that were leveraged against African Americans. Anti-literacy laws were also passed in mostly Confederate states that made it illegal for enslaved or free Black people to learn to read and write. These restrictions in access to literacy were one way that white plantation owners prevented rebellion from enslaved African Americans (Maddox).

Organizations, such as the American Library Association, that have documented book bans and challenges reported receiving an unprecedented number of reports in 2021 (Hlywak). These challenges are not only coming from parents but also from well-organized activist groups and politicians. Books on this list include LGBTQIA+ characters or topics, books that address race/racism, and books related to sex education (Friedman & Johnson). The banning and challenges against picture books curtail texts that affirm, celebrate, and empower children in their learning, especially children of color and those that are multilingual. The banned book campaigns have blocked them from having access to books that offer cultural and linguistic affirmation to Latine students.

We chose to look at how Latine individuals and experiences are portrayed in banned/challenged picture books to better understand how books that are banned or overly

challenged limit children's literary experiences. By literary experiences, we mean the books that children have access to and are able to engage with through dialogue. To analyze, we identified ten Latine picture book titles that had been banned or challenged and were also award winners.

We use Latine to refer to individuals with a Latin American cultural background who identify as Latino/a/x. We use the term Latine, a gender-inclusive term, instead of the term Latinx because it is more linguistically accessible (Galvez 50). This term is widely used in Spanish-speaking Latin American countries. We also recognize that some readers may self-identify using other terms.

Literature Review

Our analysis of banned Latine children's literature draws upon literature in two different areas. First, we examine literature that studies the current trends in censorship and book banning. This is crucial to situating our study and providing a rationale for the impetus in analyzing books that are being banned. Next, we draw on the work of scholars that have conducted critical analyses of books. These studies inform our work as we analyze Latine picture books that have been challenged or banned in schools.

Censoring of Books

Although most books that have traditionally been and are currently being censored in different ways are young adult books, there are a growing number of picture books that are being outright banned in schools and school districts or are being red-flagged for content. PEN America created an Index of School Book Bans to capture the trend in the rise of book bans across the United States between July 2021—June 2022. They continue to track these attempts by adding books that have been banned or red-flagged.

The Index of School Book Bans for July 2021—June 2022 indicates that there are 209 picture books, 123 middle grades, 150-chapter books, 537 young adults, and 126 books for adults that have been challenged or banned. PEN America has also documented the subject matter of books that have been banned. Of these documented book bans and challenges, 41% of the books include LGBTQIA+ content, and 40% include protagonists or prominent secondary characters of color. Additionally, 21% of the books address issues with race and racism (Friedman & Johnson). Many of the books on this list are being banned simply for including diverse characters or storylines. Others are being banned for including topics that are deemed inappropriate for children to read. In a description of the reason for contemporary book bans on children's books, Katy Waldman shares:

In their vision of childhood—a green, sweet-smelling land invented by Victorians and untouched by violence, or discrimination, or death—white, straight, and cisgender characters are G-rated. All other characters, meanwhile, come with warning labels. When childhood is racialized, cisgendered, and de-queered, insisting on ‘age-appropriate material’ becomes a way to instill doctrine and foreclose options for some readers, and to evict other readers from childhood entirely.

Such book bans and challenges threaten students' intellectual freedom and right to read. The common thread with books that are being banned or challenged is the motive to protect readers from topics that are viewed as being harmful to children (Leland and Bangert).

Professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the American Library Association (ALA) have historically advocated for a child's right to read. In NCTE's position statement, “The Students' Right to Read,” authors explain the prevalence of banning books that feature characters from minoritized racial groups, “[a]s long as

groups such as African Americans, Pacific Islanders, American Indians, Asian Americans, and Latinxs ‘kept their proper place’—awarded them by a white society—censors rarely raised their voices. But attacks have increased in frequency as minoritized groups have refused to observe their assigned ‘place.’” Similarly, ALA has drafted position statements such as the “Freedom to Read Statement” and the “Library Bill of Rights.” Both focus on intellectual freedom and advocate for a reader’s right to choose what to read. In her argument that children should read the books that they choose, Susan Fanetti argues that we should allow readers the opportunity to read challenging texts while engaging them in dialogue about what they are reading. She argues that without a discussion about texts, learning opportunities may be limited.

Benefits of Children’s Literature Reflective of Black and Latine Children

There are many benefits to including children’s literature that is representative of Latine and Black experiences in today’s classrooms, including positive racial identity development, development of critical consciousness, and counteracting single stories (Adichie) and stereotypes depiction of groups and cultures.

In her study about the impacts of using interactive read-alouds with Black students, Rebekah E. Piper concludes that reading texts related to civil rights literature supported the racial identity of students. The books that were chosen allowed the children to see Black people positively. Children were “afforded opportunities to dialogue about critical topics, critically understand historical periods, and critically explore their own Black identity development” (Piper 8). The instructional decisions that took place as a part of this study, including the reading of the texts and the critical conversations, supported participants in developing critical thinking skills and seeing themselves as a part of the civil rights movement.

Another study that demonstrates the power of engaging children in a discussion of what may be considered sensitive topics is Sandra Osorio's study, in which she engaged her own second-grade bilingual classroom in the reading of Latine children's literature. Osorio engaged young students in critical conversations about immigration, bilingualism, and family. She demonstrated how, through the use of Latine children's literature that was reflective of children's experiences in her classroom, students could deepen their critical consciousness.

Sonia Alejandra Rodríguez offers a perspective of possibility as she analyzed three Latine children's literature. In the texts, the three Latina protagonists demonstrate how they navigate traditional, gendered expectations and deal with the implications of their racial and ethnic identities. The protagonists develop their identities while disrupting and challenging various systems of oppression. The young Latinas' creativity in each text forges a path toward healing that impacts them and their communities. These three texts offer Latine children the possibility to imagine new realities.

Critical Analysis of Picture Books

Content analysis is an approach for analyzing and interpreting texts based on social, cultural, and political contexts (Beach et al. 134). Multiple studies have engaged in critical content analysis of picture books (Braden and Rodriguez; Skrlac Lo 18; Pérez Huber et al. 15; Schall et al. 298; Rodriguez and Braden). These critical content analysis studies rely on critical theories to inform the analysis of picture books. Several of these studies have used Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the primary framework that informs their analysis of the books by focusing on how the tenets of Critical Race Theory can inform the analysis of picture books, particularly focusing on race and racism and how these ideas are depicted in the texts (see e.g., Braden and Rodriguez; Osorio; Schall et al. 298).

Judith K. Franzak conducted a content analysis using CRT tenets with two young adult novels. Similarly, Sandra Hughes-Hassell et al. studied transitional books using the tenets of Critical Race Theory. For our study, we rely on the conceptualization of Critical Race Theory Content Analysis developed by Lindsay Pérez Huber et al., which describes the use of this type of analysis as focusing on “how raced and intersectional identities are assigned, how dominant ideologies operate, how people of color’s experiences are represented, whether a broader context is provided to situate those experiences, and the racialized meanings created from how the story is crafted itself” (18). Pérez Huber et al. contend that this type of analysis can provide a framework for analyzing books or parts of books to gain insights into how stories and characters are racialized.

Methods

We began our search broadly by looking at banned books or challenged books lists online from organizations such as *The Office for Intellectual Freedom of the American Library Association*, PEN American Index of School Book Bans, and public lists such as Texas House Bill 3979. House Bill 3979 is known as the Critical Race Theory law that was created to limit how race-related subjects are taught in public schools (Lopez). Next, we completed a web search to ensure no book titles were missed. We searched for the following terms: banned, challenged, controversial, picture book, Latinx/Latine/Latino.

Upon reviewing these banned/challenged book lists, we noticed that the majority of the texts cited were young adult or adult literature used in middle school and high school. Since we are both early childhood educators, we wanted to look specifically at picture books that were being banned or challenged. We felt strongly that early childhood students from culturally and

linguistically diverse backgrounds needed to see themselves reflected in the literature used in classrooms. The fact that we are both Latinas and have a passion for working with multilingual speakers made us hone in on Latine picture books. To narrow our focus even further, we decided to concentrate on Latine-banned picture books that were also award winners because we knew these were well-known books available in many classrooms. This gave an interesting juxtaposition that we wanted to explore further. This juxtaposition was that a group of individuals had found the book worthy of an award, but at the same time, another group of individuals had found it inappropriate for use with children.

We identified ten Latine picture book titles (see Table 1) that had been banned or challenged that were also award winners. One interesting thing we noticed was that several of these texts had English and Spanish versions, but only the English version appeared on the banned/challenged book lists.

Table 1. Selected Books

Book/ Author	Awards
<i>Islandborn</i> by Junot Díaz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2019 Pura Belpré Award Nominee, Illustrator ● 2018 Goodreads Choice Award Nominee, Picture Books
<i>Drum Dream Girl: How One Girl's Courage Changed Music</i> by Margarita Engle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2016 Charlotte Zolotow Award ● 2016 Pura Belpré Award, Illustration ● 2015 Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature, Picture Book Honor

<p><i>Mango, Abuela, and Me</i> by Meg Medina</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2018 Monarch Award Nominee ● 2016 Pura Belpré Award Nominee, Narrative and Illustration
<p><i>Where are You From?</i> by Yamile Saied Méndez</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2019 Nerdies Fiction Picture Book Award Winner ● 2019 Silver Medalist for Bank Street College of Education’s Best Spanish Language Picture Books of the Year ● 2019 A Mighty Girl’s Book of the Year
<p><i>Dreamers</i> by Yuyi Morales</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2019 Charlotte Zolotow Award Nominee, Highly Commended ● 2019 Boston Globe-Horn Book Award Nominee, Picture Book ● 2019 Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children’s Book Award ● 2019 Pura Belpré Award, Illustrator
<p><i>Niño Wrestles the World</i> by Yuyi Morales</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2014 Charlotte Zolotow Award Nominee, Highly Commended Title ● 2014 Pura Belpré Award, Illustration ● 2014 CLEL Bell Picture Book Awards, Play
<p><i>My Papi Has a Motorcycle</i> by Isabel Quintero</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2020 Ezra Jack Keats Illustrator Award Honor ● 2020 Pura Belpré Illustration Honor Award ● 2020 Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children’s Book Award ● 2020 American Library Association Notable Children's Book
<p><i>Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2015 Sibert Medal Nominee ● 2015 Américas Award

<p><i>Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation</i> by Duncan Tonatiuh</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2015 Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award ● 2015 Pura Belpré Award Nominee, Illustration ● 2015 NCTE Orbis Pictus Honor Book
<p><i>Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez</i> by Kathleen Krull</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2004 Jane Addams Children's Book Award Nominee Picture Book ● 2004 Pura Belpré Award Nominee, Illustration ● 2004 Elizabeth Burr / Worzalla Award
<p><i>Julián is a Mermaid</i> by Jessica Love</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 2019 Stonewall Book Award, Children's Literature ● 2019 Jane Addams Children's Book Award Nominee, Younger Children Honor ● 2019 Ezra Jack Keats Book Award Nominee, Illustrator

Data Analysis

We began the data analysis by scanning each of the ten picture books. Once we had the PDFs of the books, we each conducted an analysis by looking at the following questions developed by Yoo Kyung Sung and Kristi DeMar: Who is depicted in the book?; What actions and relations are depicted?; Where, when, how, and with what are the participants depicted?; What languages are spoken in the texts and how?; Whom was the book banned by and why? We organized this information into our own table format organized by the questions. We chose to use this framework because we believe the questions would allow us to familiarize ourselves

with the texts, conduct a close reading of the texts, and to consider what characters and stories were featured in the texts.

After the initial analysis, we returned to the texts and conducted a second round of analysis. This time, we focused on the critical aspect of the texts in order to get a better understanding of how the construction of race and racism may have led to the ban or proposed ban. For this round of analysis, we were guided by Pérez Huber et al.'s alignment of Critical Race Theory with Critical Content Analysis:

1. *The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination*: This tenet is similar to the focus of Critical Content Analysis on the examination and critique of how power and agency operate within a text.
2. *The challenge to the dominant ideology*. Critical Content Analysis uncovers and challenges how texts reflect dominant ideologies that sustain social inequities.
3. *The centrality of experiential knowledge*. This tenet is similar to the Critical Content Analysis emphasis on books being reflective of human experience and lived realities.
4. *The interdisciplinary perspective*. Critical Content Analysis considers broader historical, cultural, and sociopolitical contexts of stories that would require an interdisciplinary approach.
5. *The commitment to social justice*. This tenet directly aligns with Critical Content Analysis' goals of challenging and transforming social inequities (5)

Findings

The initial analysis allowed us to get familiar with the books and consider what characters were featured in the books and what experiences were highlighted. The Critical Race

Content Analysis (Pérez Huber et al.) provided a framework for our analysis of the books. Here we present the findings of the critical content analysis by tenet: experiential knowledge, the centrality of race and racism, challenging dominant ideology, interdisciplinary perspectives, and commitment to social justice.

Experiential Knowledge

In the analysis of the text, we found that all the texts demonstrated how experiential knowledge of individuals of color should be valued. These experiences focused on the lived realities of the characters in the text. The text *Niño Wrestles the World* by Yuyi Morales focuses completely on the experiences of a Latine child, demonstrating how they should be treasured. Yuyi Morales' other text, *Dreamers*, is full of experiential knowledge because in it she shares her own immigration story of coming to the United States with her son. The book demonstrates the depth of knowledge the mother brought with her, how brave she was in this new space, and how her cultural and linguistic practices were "bundled gifts." *Islandborn* by Junot Díaz is another text whose whole storyline includes experiential knowledge from individuals of color. The premise of the story is that Lola has to share about where she is from, even though she doesn't remember the island. To remedy this issue, she speaks to her community who each share valuable insight. The members in this story know each other and support each other. She is encouraged to speak to her neighbor, Mr. Mir, to get additional information. This text demonstrates how valuable assets that a community holds can be tapped into, something that doesn't always happen in schools, especially for students of color and multilingual children. This text provides an example of the benefits that can be had from the sharing of intergenerational knowledge. Other texts that demonstrate the importance of these intergenerational relationships are *Mango, Abuela, and Me* by Meg Medina and *Where Are You From?* by Yamile Saied

Méndez. Both of these texts show a grandparent with a grandchild sharing the knowledge they have about linguistic and cultural practices and background.

In *My Papi Has a Motorcycle* by Isabel Quintero, we see the relationship between Daisy and her father. Daisy rides on her father's motorcycle as they travel through their community. Together, they see aspects of their community, such as the murals that "tell our history—of citrus groves and immigrants who worked them, and of the famous road race that took place on Grand Boulevard a hundred years ago," and how things have changed, such as the closing of Don Rudy's Raspados, her favorite place for shaved ice. Daisy and her father also stop by her abuelito and abuelita's house, which demonstrates the closeness of the family. Most of the texts demonstrated the importance of the connections between family members. For example, in *Drum Dream Girl: How One Girl's Courage Changed Music* by Margarita Engle, it was the little girl's sisters who helped her fulfill her dream of playing the drums, something that had previously only been an option for boys, by having her join their all-female band. This story is based on the true-life experiences of the childhood of Millo Castro Zaldarriaga, a Chinese-African-Cuban girl who broke Cuba's tradition of male-only drummers.

Two additional texts share real-life experiences and tell an important aspect of our United States history: *Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation* by Duncan Tonatiuh and *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* by Kathleen Krull. Both of these texts share how the experiences and challenges faced by the main characters led to important changes to US policies on education and immigrant rights. More precisely, these texts show how shared experiences of discrimination led to the collective actions that were necessary to make these changes. In *Separate is Never Equal*, we see how Sylvia's father started a parent association of Mexican American children and went campaigning to find

others with similar experiences of segregation. In *Harvesting Hope*, we see how Cesar Chavez was able to connect with fellow migrant workers because he had gone through similar experiences. The shared experiences of discrimination are what brought them together.

Julián Is a Mermaid by Jessica Love is the text we found to have the least experiential knowledge shared. It does share a story of a grandmother being accepting of her grandson when he shares that he wants to dress like a mermaid. Grandmother even gives Julián a pearl necklace to complete his outfit. The story shares the connection to the real event of the Coney Island Mermaid Parade, which many of the readers might not have been familiar with previously. It is important to note that while *Julián Is a Mermaid* was awarded the 2019 Stonewall Book Award of the American Library Association that is “given annually to English-language books of exceptional merit relating to the LGBTQIA+ experience” (“Stonewall Book Awards”), there are still some problematic aspects related to the text that need to be addressed in discussions with children. For one, the author of the text identifies as a white ciswoman, and therefore does not have any direct experiences as a trans child. Love did have the experience of meeting her partner’s older brother, who had recently transitioned (Flood). The text also paints the experiences of Julián, whose grandmother sees him for the first time in a headpiece with a flowing train and responds by giving him some pearls and taking him to a mermaid parade as all good and happy. This can be seen as negating the experiences of many trans youth that have not been accepted for who they are. It is important to engage these two points in discussions with children to have them integrate these ideas.

Centrality of Race and Racism

In our analysis we focused on the picture books, looking specifically at how the books upheld or challenged issues of race and racism. Pérez Huber et al. focus on the analysis of texts

that highlight “*The centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination*: This tenet is similar to the focus of Critical Content Analysis on the examination and critique of how power and agency operate within a text” (5). In their description of how CRT and Critical Content Analysis align, Pérez Huber et al. describe how the analysis of this tenet in picture books “centralize racism and intersecting forms of oppression in the storylines of books about People of Color” (5).

Across the banned Latine picture books, English was the prominent language featured in the texts. All the books that we analyzed were written in English, although many of them also have a Spanish version of the text. For example, in the book, *Mango, Abuela, and Me* by Meg Medina, English was the dominant language, and the limited use of Spanish was restricted to family words. The book *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* by Katherine Krull, provides a juxtaposition of language use in schools by describing the experiences of Cesar Chavez when he was a child and being made fun of for speaking English. The page in the book shows Cesar Chavez with a sign that says “Speak English” around his neck. The book is written in English and includes very limited use of Spanish.

The analysis of the books also revealed challenges to the *centrality of race and racism*. The books that we analyzed challenged issues of race and racism by describing experiences of racism that the characters encountered. For example, the book *Separate is Never Equal* describes the case of the Mendez family and their fight in court for the Mendez children to be able to attend the white school in town. The book explicitly describes the issues related to racism that led to the Mexican children being sent to an inferior school than their white peers, and how the white school administrators made assumptions about the Mexican students without assessing their knowledge. Another book that challenges the tenet of the centrality of race and racism is the

book *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez*. This book focuses on the power of the community to fight a system of race and racism that has created unreasonable working conditions for migrant farmworkers. These two historical accounts of events challenge whiteness and white privilege. Other texts in this study, such as *Dreamers* and *Niño Wrestles the World* by Yuyi Morales, *My Papi Has a Motorcycle* by Isabel Quintero, and *Mango, Abuela, and Me* by Meg Medina challenge stereotypical depictions of Latine families and characters by centering and showcasing joyful experiences of Latinx families and decenter whiteness by not including white characters as a protagonist in the texts.

A Challenge to Dominant Ideology

We also analyzed the picture books to see how the texts challenged dominant ideologies. Our analysis of the picture books focused on Pérez Huber et al.'s notion that analyzing picture books through this lens “uncovers ideologies of white supremacy that underlie racist storylines and literacy practices” (5). The analysis revealed that the picture books in this study challenged dominant ideologies related to how immigrants are viewed, they challenged the dominant ideology of assimilation, and they also challenged traditional gender roles that are often ascribed as being part of Latine experiences.

The book *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales challenges the dominant ideology of what an immigrant is. The book presents Yuyi's story of coming to the US with her son. The book details her love for reading and words and how she found solace in the library. This notion of an immigrant who can read and learn through books challenges the dominant ideology of immigrants as being uneducated. The books we analyzed challenged traditional assimilation views. These views have suggested that immigrants would need to adopt the dominant culture by shedding their cultural identities to fit into their new community or country. The books

challenged this ideology by presenting a narrative that encourages readers to be proud of who they are and their cultural heritage. For example, in the book, *Where Are You From?* Yamile Saied Méndez sends a strong message when the abuelo describes where they are from by mentioning different places. In the end, Abuelo tells the child that she comes from love and their ancestors' dreams.

The books we analyzed also challenged traditional gender roles often assigned to males and females. The book *My Papi Has a Motorcycle* by Isabel Quintero challenges stereotypical depictions of Latino males and machismo. This book displays a beautiful relationship between a father and his daughter. It showcases how the father lovingly takes his daughter for motorcycle rides around the city which is quickly changing. The book begins with Daisy describing her father, "My Papi, the carpenter, is covered in sawdust and smells like a hard day at work. His hands are rough from building homes every day—his job since he first arrived in this country. But even though he comes home tired, he always has time for me." The book *Julián is a Mermaid* by Jessica Love also challenges the male/female dichotomy. It features Julián, a gender non-conforming child. The story is about the importance of being seen, accepted, and affirmed for children who may not fit the rigid gender expectations. As noted in the previous section, it is important to integrate this book when using it with children because it does portray a rose-colored experience.

Interdisciplinary Perspectives

In analyzing the texts for interdisciplinary perspectives that consider socio-historical, cultural, political, and economic contexts we asked the question: *Is there a context to situate race and/or its intersections (historical, political, social, geographic, temporal, etc.) or not?* We found that the majority of the texts addressed this to varying degrees. For example, *Dreamers* by

Yuyi Morales shares the broader context of what it means to be an immigrant in the United States. She shared how she became an immigrant and was therefore unable to return home. Also, she discussed how she had to advocate for not only herself and her child's needs but also for the needs of other immigrants with similar experiences by becoming "caminantes"—walkers. She states that they walked thousands and thousands of steps. The book *Islandborn* by Junot Díaz touches on the realities of what it was like to live on the island and why so many individuals left for the United States. There is a monster presented in the text that is never explained, but during an interview, Díaz said, "For me, the Monster represents the savage, traumatic histories from which many of us immigrants emerge—a history that is often erased or silenced within our communities and inside of the community in which we find ourselves. It's a common injury that many immigrant communities wrestle with" (Li). The Dominican Republic's struggles under Rafael Trujillo's thirty-one years of dictatorship runs parallel to the thirty years of havoc the monster in the text unleashes.

We see the intersection of race, historical, social, and geographic contexts in *My Papi Has a Motorcycle* through the murals that Daisy describes. Referencing the murals, she says, "We roar past murals that tell our history—of citrus groves and immigrants who worked them, and of the famous road race that took place on Grand Boulevard a hundred years ago." This demonstrates the importance of understanding and knowing our own history. The motorcycle ride also displays the changes that their town is going through. The book shows businesses closing down and new homes being built which are examples of gentrification.

In both *Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation* by Duncan Tonatiuh, and *Harvesting Hope: The Story of Cesar Chavez* by Kathleen Krull, we see how all of these contexts intersect through the presentation of the reality

of the times as well as the challenges the characters in the texts had to face and advocate against for themselves and others. Both texts share important events in our United States histories that are often ignored and untaught in schools. *Separate is Never Equal* demonstrates the importance of collective action, something that is still done today in order to fight against oppressive practices. In *Mango, Abuela, and Me* by Meg Medina we get a glimpse of some of these oppressive structures when Mia's grandmother comes to visit her. Mia shares "My español is not good enough to tell her the things that an abuela should know," and "her English is too poquito to tell me all the stories I want to know about Abuelo." We don't know exactly why Mia has not learned Spanish, but it could be the hegemony of English. This is an experience that many children today go through where they do not speak the language of their ancestors and are unable to communicate with members of their families.

A Commitment to Social Justice

Finally, our analysis of the picture books focused on the commitment to social justice displayed in the texts. Pérez Huber et al. describe this analysis as focusing on texts and how they are "Committed to social justice by challenging and transforming inequity in stories for children" (5). The texts that we analyzed demonstrated a strong commitment to issues related to social justice. The book *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales describes how books became a tool used to make a difference. She described how "books became our language, books became our home, books became our lives. We learned to read, to speak, to write, and make our voices heard" (Morales).

Several of the books showcased communities that were able to take a stand against injustice. For example, the book *Harvesting Hope* by Kathleen Krull shows the harrowing account of Cesar Chavez and his commitment to nonviolence in advocating for farmworkers' rights. The book *Separate is Never Equal* by Duncan Tonatiuh is another account of a

community taking a stand against injustice. The book details how families fought to have their children attend schools designated for white students. Both books show each person's bravery and how they were able to take a stand against injustice. Other books like *Niño Wrestles the World* by Yuyi Morales, *My Papi Rides a Motorcycle* by Isabel Quintero, and *Islandborn* by Junot Díaz show a commitment to social justice by showcasing characters and storylines that express pride in their cultural heritage and home. The book *My Papi Rides a Motorcycle* shows a changing neighborhood and how a community can survive and thrive despite gentrification. These texts share with readers historical information they might ordinarily not have access to through the classroom curriculum. It provides a way to affirm their cultural experiences and knowledge while promoting advocacy for changes that may need to take place.

Discussion

Our analysis of banned Latine picture books illustrates the essential topics that these books address. The books we analyzed show the value of the Latine community and the importance of individuals being proud of who they are and where they come from. When children do not see themselves reflected in the classroom space, they begin to believe that something is wrong with them or they must change who they are (Tschida et al.). The books in this study challenge dominant perspectives about Latine communities being homogenous in that they are all immigrants coming to the United States to take jobs. Instead, these texts showcase the diversity of the Latine experience. The books feature characters that have a commitment to social justice and to making a difference. They want to make the world a better place and the texts share some of the ways they do this. The books that we analyzed showed the importance of experiential knowledge in the Latine community. The texts demonstrate how important family is

to the Latine community and the bonds across various members of their communities. These banned and challenged picture books are a portal towards cultural affirmation and validation that honors and celebrates the cultural as well as linguistic diversity of the readers.

The question then becomes, what can teachers do to keep these books in their classrooms? Ashley K. Dallacqua discusses how important it is for teachers to know the policies that relate to book banning. It is also crucial for teachers to know the process in place to analyze texts that have been challenged. A book challenge does not mean automatic book removal from classrooms or schools. Teachers must advocate on their students' behalf and ensure that books representing children's multiple identities are included in classrooms. Teachers can also turn to professional organizations for guidance on what to do if they face a book ban or challenge. The National Council of Teachers of English has created the Intellectual Freedom Center in response to the growing number of book challenges and bans. This center provides an assistance hotline for teachers that have questions about book bans and challenges and has created a rationale database for books that teachers can access.

Conclusion

The increased amount of book banning and book challenges demonstrate the limited view of the social constructions of childhood. Some individuals view children as unable to engage in critical conversations around racism, immigration, language, LGBTQIA+ issues, gentrification, and identity when the opposite has been demonstrated by a wide range of researchers (Osorio; Dyson; Quast). Engaging in book discussions around texts that include characters that are reflective of the children and those that are not is important for children to develop racial literacy. Racial literacy teaches children how to recognize, respond to and counter forms of

everyday racism (Sealey-Ruiz 117). This is especially important for Latine and Black children because books that reflect their lived experiences support positive racial identity development as they shape their perceptions and understandings of who they are. When children “cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in society” (Bishop ix). Children, especially ones from historically marginalized communities, need access to picture books that center their lived experiences and provide the language to engage in a discourse that challenges dominant ideology and promotes a commitment to social justice. As classrooms become increasingly more diverse, educators need to use all the resources and texts available to meet students where they are and provide moments where culturally and linguistically diverse students see themselves represented in the books they read.

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