



Research on Diversity  
in Youth Literature

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*Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*

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Volume 6 | Issue 2

May 2025

**Montaño, Jesus and Regan Postma-Montaño. *Tactics of Hope in Latinx Children's and Young Adult Literature*. University of New Mexico Press. 2022. 202 pages. Print ISBN 9780826363831. eText ISBN 9780826366337.**

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**Recommended Citation:** Cintron-Gonzalez, Edcel. "Montaño, Jesus and Regan Postma-Montaño. *Tactics of Hope in Latinx Children's and Young Adult Literature*. University of New Mexico Press. 2022. 202 Pages. Print ISBN 9780826363831. ISBN 9780826366337." *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2025.

Discussions on diversity are essential for children's and young adult literature. Monocultural dominance restricts the richness of stories that young readers are exposed to, but scholarship increasingly challenges these entrenched norms. Scholars such as Marilisa Jiménez García also advocate for the importance of diversity and representation when advocating for the importance of youth and Latinx literature. Hence, books such as Jesus Montaña and Regan Postma-Montaña's *Tactics of Hope in Latinx Children's and Young Adult Literature* theorize and explain how Latinx authors, illustrators, and scholars challenge exclusionary publishing practices and carve out space for authentic storytelling. Latinx authors for young audiences "destabilize unjust and inequitable practices and ideologies by presenting characters and stories that are more equitable and make visible Latinx culture" (Montaña and Postma-Montaña 11). In other words, by creating narratives that reflect the complexities and value of Latinx identities, these authors are not only broadening the scope of representation in Latinx children's and young adult literature but are also pushing back against the systemic barriers that have historically marginalized their voices. Therefore, Latinx youth literature is a process of cultural reclamation, offering young readers an opportunity to see themselves and their communities represented in ways that are authentic and empowering. This is not only an act of resistance, but it is also a

Transformations allow children and youth to see themselves represented in children's literature and media in more diverse and equitable ways, where they see themselves treated as people who celebrate and make visible their unique cultural backgrounds. This is the foundation of Montaña and Postma-Montaña's concept "tactics of hope," where the collective efforts of Latinx authors and artists come to light to give children and youth the ability to reimagine a world where they can flourish as members of Latinx communities. In addition, tactics of hope open spaces where Latinx youth can identify moments of social injustice and dismantle the

inequitable practices and harmful ideologies often negatively presented and shown as disruptive against the Latinx people. To explain these tactics, Montaña and Postma-Montaña offer different ways to think about the empowering, reflective, and healing power of hope and what it means for youth to hold on to that hope.

In Chapter 1, “Reading for Conocimiento Mirrors in Farmworker Kid Lit: Roots of Transformation and Activism,” Montaña and Postma-Montaña explain how the history of migration issues is rooted in the unethical hiring practices of Latinx immigrants, including children, who were seen as cheap labor for those in power. These exploitative conditions not only demanded long hours of physical labor but also restricted access to education, as Latinx youth often had to prioritize work over school to support their families. Montaña and Postma-Montaña argue that books are the key to save the future generation of children and youth because books “allow young Latinx readers to explore ways in which knowledge opens up locked places, thus allowing them to first survive and then soar” (26). Following Gloria Anzaldúa’s teachings and Sonia Alejandra Rodríguez’s research on conocimiento narratives, Montaña and Postma-Montaña coin the term “conocimiento mirrors” which are “books [...] for young Latinx readers who can see themselves, their histories, and their present realities reflected, and further find their potential futures mirrored as they begin to imagine the possibilities of activist leadership for their generation” (25). Through analyses of several books such as *Side by Side/Lado a Lado* by Monica Brown, and *Tomás and the Library Lady* by Pat Mora, they demonstrate how “conocimiento mirrors” allow youth to see their history, heritage, struggles, and challenges and to imagine themselves as the future generation of activists. Just as Rodríguez explains, “knowing is a healing process captured within the stories and exemplified through the characters. Conocimiento is an opportunity to recognize the oppressions that direct the characters’ existence

and provide a means to challenge and transform them” (10). Healing is an important practice throughout *Tactics of Hope*, because healing can be “forms of *resistance* that *conocimiento* fosters and look for the ways that *conocimiento* forges personal and societal *transformations* in and by Latinx children and youth” (Montaña and Postma-Montaña 7). *Conocimiento* goes beyond the information we acquire when we read; rather, it expands to the ability Latinx youth gain to imagine, reflect, reconnect, and process traumatic moments in their lives as a pathway to start their own healing journey.

In Chapter 2, “Border Kids in the Land of Nepantla,” Montaña and Postma-Montaña use their term *nepantlera-roman*, a riff on the bildungsroman, to explain how children who live on the US/Mexico border gain *conocimiento* by learning different forms of resistance against assimilation and the dangers of single narrative models to acknowledge the cultural and geographic differences around them. In other words, border kids learn to navigate and negotiate multiple cultural, linguistic, and geographic realities while forging identities that embrace hybridity rather than erasure. Border kids develop a critical awareness of their liminal position using storytelling, language, and personal experience as tools of agency and self-definition. To demonstrate the concept of *nepantlera-roman*, Montaña and Postma-Montaña examine Guadalupe García McCall’s *Under the Mesquite* and David Bowles’s *They Call Me Güero* as examples of how children who live on the border draw on *conocimiento* as a sense of belonging to connect to their understanding of how their identities links to culture and contend with their geographic realities.

Another important aspect *Tactics of Hope* offers is how Latinx novels “point to the movement from loss and disinheritance, in other words, deficit thinking, to forms of agency and cultural wealth” (77). In Chapter 3, “The Cultural Wealth of Diasporic Youth,” Montaña and

Postma-Montaña explain how cultural wealth is essential to understand how Latinx youth are the creators of knowledge. They argue how these narratives challenge deficit thinking, a perspective that views marginalized communities through the lens of lack or inadequacy. Cultural wealth refers to the intangible resources, values, and forms of knowledge that individuals and communities inherit, nurture, and pass on. This includes traditions, languages, beliefs, artistic expressions, and historical experiences that shape a group's collective identity and social well-being. By centering cultural wealth, the authors emphasize that Latinx children's and young adult literature, such as *Summer of the Mariposas* by Guadalupe García McCall, offers more than just representation. These stories become sites of resistance, where Latinx youth assert their identities, reclaim their histories, and contribute to the collective knowledge of their communities.

Another part of *conocimiento* is the power of storytelling. In Chapter 4, "Kids' Agency and Empowerment in an Era of Family Deportation," Montaña and Postma-Montaña invoke *testimonios* or testimonies, which are a powerful storytelling tool because they "support all children in developing their full potential, including a strong sense of identity, the courage to transform their own personal reality, and the commitment to creating a just society" (Ada xi). Montaña and Postma-Montaña explain that it is important to acknowledge the wound and suffering caused by deportation found in these testimonies, for it is a reality for Latinx children and their families who live with the fear and reality of this situation. By confronting these painful experiences through the act of storytelling to acquire *conocimiento*, Latinx children's literature not only offers a voice to those who have been silenced but also provides a means for healing and resistance. The primary texts used for these analyses are the young adult novels *Efren* *Divided* by Ernesto Cisneros and *Land of the Cranes* by Aida Salazar, as well as the picture book

*From North to South/Del Norte al Sur* by René Colato Laínez and illustrated by Joe Cepeda.

These stories empower young readers to understand their own agency within these oppressive structures, giving them the tools to envision and work towards a more just and compassionate world.

Chapter 5, “The Role of the Border Artista,” Montaña and Postma-Montaña draw on Anzaldúa’s conceptual framework to argue that Latinx youth protagonists such as Julia, from Erika L. Sánchez’s *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, and Gabi, from Isabel Quintero’s *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces*, function as “border artistas” whose narratives exemplify Anzaldúa’s notions of autohistorias, nepantla, and conocimiento. The chapter begins by explaining that border art supersedes mere pictorial representation, embodying both personal and collective history through the blending of cultures—what Anzaldúa calls una mestizada. These young characters, who bridge multiple intersections of gender, ethnicity, race, and class, illustrate how feeling “in-between” can become a creative site for transformation.

Julia’s story illuminates how the fracturing caused by family expectations, secrecy, and loss can be reassembled into new configurations of self-awareness and empathy; her journey highlights the healing and generative power of reimagining personal and cultural histories. Similarly, Gabi’s journal entries and zines disrupt neat separations between “American” and “Mexican” cultures, affirming the political potential of translanguaging and creative expression. Through poetry, self-reflection, and resistance to gendered double standards, Gabi reveals how writing can expose social inequalities, such as teen pregnancy, religion, and sexuality, and foster community-based critique. The chapter contends that these autohistorias transcend traditional autobiographical forms by weaving cultural memory, linguistic hybridity, and insurgent self-inscription into acts of self-making and re-making; ultimately, Julia and Gabi’s struggles,

creative responses, and refusals to conform epitomize Anzaldúa's vision of border artistas who heal wounds and assert agency by reinventing themselves and their broader communities in radical, transformative ways.

Ultimately, in *Tactics of Hope*, Montaña and Postma-Montaña demonstrate that through *conocimiento*, *testimonios*, cultural wealth, and diversity, readers and educators can develop deeper cultural awareness and connection. The inclusion of *testimonios* allows readers to learn through personal and collective storytelling, creating opportunities to discuss and challenge systemic inequalities. Furthermore, the text underscores how these works cultivate cultural wealth, celebrating the unique strengths, traditions, and histories of Latinx communities while inspiring hope and agency. At its core, *Tactics of Hope* offers a framework to understand how Latinx literature fosters intergenerational dialogue, preserves cultural heritage, and imagines new possibilities for the future. In the end, the book offers ways not only for Latinx youth to see themselves represented, but to also understand, hold on to, and pass along hope to the next generation of youth.

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