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Finding Memorable Moments: Images and Identities in Autobiographical Writing

Two fifth-grade dual language teachers (English–Spanish) and a university researcher engage their bilingual students in a study of memoir, helping the children find not only where their stories hide, but to tell them in crafted ways.

Juggle Trouble By Galo

It was an accident when I tried to juggle! Everyone in my family knew how to juggle. My tío could juggle three things at once. I would watch him for hours. I would follow his every move. My dad would say, “No debes de tratarlo Galo, eres demasiado joven y puedes quebrar algo.”

One day I couldn’t take it anymore. I was going to try to juggle. I looked around and spotted three glass cups. These will do I thought to myself. I turned around suspiciously to make sure no one was around. I found a corner in the kitchen that I thought was perfect. I held the cups tightly in my hands, my hands became sweaty and I grew very hot. I threw the cups up into the air. I watched them float up, up. They went higher than I was expecting. The cups swam around in the air like fishes. I was amazed at their movement. Then I realized that they were now coming down all three of them at the SAME TIME! I threw both my hands in the air to try to catch the glass cups and closed my eyes tight because I knew my hand would miss the cups. I prepared for the impact. I began to wonder what parts of my body the cups would hit? Would they hit my shoulder? Would they hit my head? Should I move out of the way?

It seemed like I had my eyes closed forever, maybe I would be able to catch the cups I thought. I slowly opened one eye. It was too late. The cups were right above my head. I tried to save the first cup. It fell out of my hands. I stumbled after it. The other two cups crashed on the floor and scattered in a million pieces. Soon the third cup joined them. That is when I heard the voice of doom! “What is going on in here?” It was my mother.

“Nada,” I said quickly standing in front of the evidence.

“Galo,” my mother said. And it was all she needed to say. I confessed to everything. I had to

clean up the mess and promised never to try to juggle again.

Well at least not try again that week!

It is a beautiful January afternoon in Phoenix, Arizona. Fifth-grader Galo, a bilingual student in a dual language setting, has just finished printing his memoir. He holds the recently printed paper close to his heart while he jumps up and down with excitement, asking if he can share it with the class and if he can take it home. Although he had a lot of oral stories to tell, most of his entries in his writer’s notebook were two or three lines long. For example, Galo wrote, “*It was an accident when I tried to juggle with glass cups the fell down and broke then I slipped and cut my self I started to cry then my mom came in “said what happened? Then I expland everything so my mom put bandads on my arm.”* In another entry he wrote, “*When I went To los Angeles. It was fun! First I went to Disneyland Then I went to California advainchers (adventures) Then long beach and the rental.”*

At the beginning of the school year, as these examples illustrate, most of Galos’s drafts were “bed-to-bed stories”—tales that merely listed the events of a day that wouldn’t sustain him to develop a writer’s stamina (Ray, 2005). These were not pieces of writing in which he was going to invest time and energy over an extended period of time. Instead, he would abandon them rather quickly because crafting them was almost impossible. However, in his published memoir piece “Juggle Trouble,” Galo made several intentional choices as a writer. He included details by showing not telling (Fletcher, 1998), he exploded a moment (Lane, 1993), and used dialogue in two languages. Instead of telling the reader, “I was excited,” Galo utilized the crafting technique of showing not telling by describing how his body felt once he grabbed the cups and began to juggle:

“my hands became sweaty and I grew very hot.” He exploded a moment (that he had written about in his notebook as: *“I first tried to juggle with glasse cups I dropped them on the floor and they broke”*) by filling in details and stretching a key event that in real time took just a few seconds,

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In his utilization of multiple crafting techniques, Galo provided the reader with a glimpse of his growing identity as a writer. Most of Galo’s classmates made similar changes in the quality of their writing. How did this happen? How did fifth-grade immigrant bilingual students grow into their identities as writers? How did they acquire the language of writers? I argue that over the course of this project, the students grew into their identities as writers and acquired the language of writers through participation in an extended study of memoir. This occurred when two teachers, Ernestina and Rebecca, and I collaborated to create and research “meaning-making invitations” (Faltis, 2001) in which second language learners could engage with rigorous content.

Bilingual/second language scholar Christian Faltis (2000) states that it is the responsibility of the teachers of bilingual children to create opportunities for their students to engage actively in oral and written language through meaningful and authentic participation that not only builds on prior experiences, but also provides access to challenging curriculum. Faltis uses the term “meaning-making invite” (p. 117) to refer to ways that teachers adjust their language and their teaching to meet the needs of learners, so that, instead of the learners simply acquiring the new language, the teachers and the classrooms “acquire the learners” (p. 116). In his proposal, Faltis draws from the work of situated learning theory, in which the underlying premise is that learning is social and results from participating in social practices appropriate to a specific community of practice (Faltis and Hudelson, 1998; Wolfe, 1999). By communities of practice, Faltis means organized social activities that have a social his-

tory and their own particular ways of using language (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Paraphrasing Vygotsky (1978), Chapman (1999) states that learning to write is not something imposed on others, or even learned, in the traditional sense; instead, it is cultivated. We say *cultivated* because “children do not invent literacy anew; rather, they are socialized into literacy with interactions with their literate communities” (p. 371). This socialization takes place as children participate in the social dialogue. Utilizing a Bakhtinian perspective, Chapman writes that children appropriate the words of others (both oral and written) dialogically by making them their own through the assistance of others. Everything individuals know about words and the ways to use words are shaped by and developed through encounters with others. The words we use are learned from those around us. Like other aspects of writing, the cultivating of genre knowledge results from engagement in purposeful activi-

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ties with others; such engagement requires that the genre be integral to the actions in the classroom and used as a tool for learning, instead of an end in itself. Chapman (1999)

emphasizes that learning about genres is an emergent process involving “both social and cognitive construction” (p. 472).

Chapman (1999) challenges teachers to conceive of classrooms as communities where children can cultivate their knowledge of genres through: 1) engagement and immersion, 2) exploration and inquiry, 3) personal connections and meaning making, 4) participation in a discourse community, 5) apprenticeship and mentoring, 6) collaboration, and 7) talk about text. Other educators (Nia, 1999; Ray, 2001; Calkins with Harwayne, 1991; Smith, Espinosa, Aragón, Osorio, & Ulloa, 2003) have also written about the ways in which they engaged children in focused units of study, emphasizing the importance of immersing children in the particular study; inviting them to ask questions about the genre; gathering seed ideas; studying authors’ crafts; trying out crafting techniques; and preparing a piece to put it out into the world. For teacher-researcher Hindley (1997), one intensive class-wide genre study influenced deeply what her students did later by themselves as readers and writers of other genres. According to Atwell (1998), part of the apprenticing process involves making the teacher’s writing process in

the particular genre visible to her students. Bilingual/second language educators, like Faltis and Hudelson (1998), Freeman and Freeman (2001), Whitmore and Crowell (1994) document through their research the importance of creating spaces at school for bilingual children to bring their lives and interests into the curriculum, and, thus, to explore issues within their own worlds.

OUR COLLABORATIVE WORK ON MEMOIR

Ernestina and Rebecca teach fifth grade at Martinez Elementary School in Phoenix, Arizona. At Martinez, 95% of the children qualify for free lunch. Approximately 85% of the children are Mexican immigrants, 4% are Anglo, 10% are Mexican Americans, and 1% self-identify as other. In addition, Martinez is one of the few schools in the area that has managed to maintain a K–8 dual language program, in spite of the passage six years ago of Proposition 203, a law aimed at eliminating bilingual education in Arizona by mandating public school instruction in English. Ernestina and Rebecca have been team-teaching for seven years. As team-teachers, they plan together and engage the children from both classes in joint projects. For the last three years, they have been part of the dual language strand at Martinez School. The 11- and 12-year-old children in this dual language program spend 50% of their classroom time immersed in Spanish and 50% of their classroom time immersed in English. Since Ernestina and Rebecca are both bilingual, they each have a self-contained class of approximately 30 children, so they keep the same group of children for the entire day. For the memoir study, Ernestina used English and Rebecca used Spanish.

Over the past four years, Ernestina and Rebecca have participated in study groups and in collaborative research projects with university researchers such as myself (Smith et al., 2003). Their stance towards having researchers in their classes is to have university colleagues plan and work alongside them with the children. Ernestina calls this collaborative work the “adult work.” “Without it,” Ernestina says, “the conversation and the work in the class would be missing a layer of complexity and richness.”

Since I had previously been their colleague at Martinez Elementary before working at the university, and because I had collaborated with

them on a previous project, I knew that our work together wasn’t about finding definite answers; instead it was about engaging in dialogue, posing new questions, and supporting each other in pursuing our own inquiries. As their collaborator in this study, I came to their classrooms for nearly five months to work with them and their children three times a week during language arts. I alternated my days in each classroom. The teachers and I also met at least once a week for lunch or after school to talk about our plans for the memoir study, to collect and study the work of the children, and to plan our presentations at conferences. I tape-recorded our conversations and many class discussions. I also interviewed the children and the teachers at the end of the study. After leaving the classroom each day, I wrote my notes in my researcher’s notebook while I listened to the tape recordings. Over time, I transcribed the tapes. The stories in this article represent a “slice of life” of our work as collaborators.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Ernestina, Rebecca, and I determined that, as we had done in a prior collaboration (Smith et al., 2003), we would engage the children in a

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12-week unit of study of the genre of memoir. We began with the following working definition of memoir: A memoir is a small piece about the

life of the narrator written in a conversational tone. In it the writer says, “This is true” (Barrington, 1996, p. 26). Yet, vital to a memoir—its form and content—is how one recalls one’s existence. If the memories are chronological in nature, perhaps a diary format would work; if instead they are mental snapshots of people, places, events, one might write a series of poems or vignettes.

We began the study by collecting a variety of memoirs written for children. Just as Chapman (1999) and others (e.g., Nia, 1999; Ray, 2001; Atwell, 1998; Calkins with Harwayne, 1991; Smith et. al, 2003; Hindley, 1997) advocate that teachers immerse and engage children in and with a particular unit of study by having them explore it and create their own personal connections, we first read memoirs aloud to our students to encourage their interest and commentaries. After each read-aloud, we asked the children to respond

to each memoir with a story from their own lives. The children gathered these story seed ideas in their writer's notebooks. As they examined the memoirs that were read aloud, the children also generated the following definition of memoir: You feel something, it is about something from your life, it is about girls and boys, some had dreams, it is written in first or third person I, he/she, it is a memory from your life, not your whole life.

Over the course of the study, the children spent several weeks selecting a seed idea and drafting their own memoir. With our support and the support of their classmates—we helped them learn to respond to one another as writers of memoir—the children crafted and revised their pieces. Thus, we engaged in what Chapman (1999) calls mentoring, apprenticeship, collaboration, and talk about text. Or, as Faltis (2000) suggests, we helped the children become members of the community of practice of memoirists.

In this article, I reflect upon our collaborative work, as I consider the adaptations we made in the memoir study in order to provide the best possible experience for the bilingual students in Rebecca and Ernestina's classes. Although we believe that all children who are learning to write would benefit from these experiences, we also believe that the bilingual children in this study benefited especially from the following kinds of support: 1) opportunities to tell their stories out loud, 2) opportunities to learn to see where the good stories hide, and 3) opportunities to do more than just look at text when it comes to developing an understanding of the crafting techniques. What follows is a discussion of how we carried out several of the opportunities we created for our bilingual children to cultivate their development as writers of memoir.

SEED STORIES ARE FIRST SHARED OUT LOUD

On the first day of the memoir study, Rebecca read to the children *My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother* by Polacco (1994). She deliberately chose to read a book written in English because she felt strongly that Polacco's book offered a theme that the children would have no trouble imagining and elaborating on when it was time to share their own stories. Since both teachers are part of the dual language program, and Rebecca was in charge of the Spanish portion of the program, she asked the children to respond to the read-aloud in

Spanish. Ernestina read to the children *Too Many Tamales* by Soto (1993) in English and most of the children responded in English.

On this day, Ernestina used part of our teacher-researcher meeting time to read a couple of the "seed stories" the children had written. When she was done, she said, "You can tell when you read their stories that they put so much more into it than if it was a simple reflection." Rebecca commented, "I noticed that the children had no problem writing their entries. I think it had to do with the fact that we asked them to share them out loud with a partner first and that they heard our own stories." We commented that not only is it challenging to find where the good stories lie, but in one's second language, it is best if they are told orally to a caring audience first.

Before asking the children to respond orally to the read-alouds with a story from their own lives, the teachers demonstrated how to do it by sharing orally a story from their own childhood or by asking thoughtful questions to an adult partner who had shared a seed story. Through this process, the teachers helped the children to see that everyone's life is filled with memories worth writing about, and that it matters that we begin by supporting each other in the telling of a fuller story. This is how the children learned that as a child, Ernestina used to spend her summers in Mexico at her grandma's house. Her grandma still owns the same house in Mexico, though she lives in Phoenix, and even though she is getting older, she still takes the bus from Phoenix to go back there sometimes. No one lives in the house now, but the neighbors take care of it while her grandma is gone. Ernestina's careful descriptions helped us to imagine the shape of her grandma's house, including the inside patio where they would sleep during the hot summer nights. Ernestina shared with the children many seed stories that took place in this setting. Through Ernestina's passion for storytelling, Rebecca became more at ease about sharing her stories with her students.

Before inviting the children to write in their notebooks, Ernestina and Rebecca asked the children to share a story orally with a partner, reminding them to prompt their partner with thoughtful questions that would elicit more detail. This practice allowed the teachers to create an environment filled with storytellers, caring and active listeners, and an abundance of stories to share.

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Through these engagements, the children were given opportunities to “participate in social activities that represent legitimate ways of acting and talking within particular communities” (Faltis, 2000, p. 177). During our adult planning conversations, we were struck by the ways in which one child’s story helped other children uncover what had been forgotten memories. This is how we found out, for example, that Nelson still remembered his Mom’s exact words when she told him they would be moving to Phoenix, and the sense of loss he felt when he had to give his dog away to a man he didn’t even know.

Our experience working with second language learners affirms our belief that children need an audience who will care enough to ask thought-provoking questions, questions that can elicit just the right words to capture the storyteller’s intended meanings. Classrooms need to be filled with the voices of the children’s and teachers’ stories. It is only from a room filled with stories that other stories are remembered and that the writers of memoir can begin to speak truthfully about their lives (Barrington, 1996).

This idea of having an abundance of stories from one’s life shared out loud also had unforeseen consequences. For example, the sharing of stories orally made it easier for newcomers to enter the world of writing in these classrooms. Jesus, a child who had just arrived from Mexico eight weeks before, said to Luis, who was an even more recent newcomer, “En esta clase tú puedes contar tus propias historias, no las tienes que copiar de la pizarra. Vamos a pedirle a la maestra que te de un cuaderno” (*Translation: In this class you can tell your own stories, you don’t have to copy them from the board. Let’s go ask the teacher to give you a notebook.*) Soon, Luis was writing his own stories in his notebook. Adamant about helping Luis find a good seed story, Jesus recommended he write about the day he came to the United States from Mexico. He said, “Escribe sobre ese día, pero cuenta como te sentiste cuando te fuiste de México.” (*Translation: Write about that day, but tell how you felt when you left Mexico.*) Not only had Jesus discovered

that in this class one writes one’s own stories, he had also learned that key to writing one’s memoir are the author’s feelings. This example illustrates one of the ways in which the students attempted to “make sense of and identify with new communities of practice” (Faltis, 2000, p. 117.)

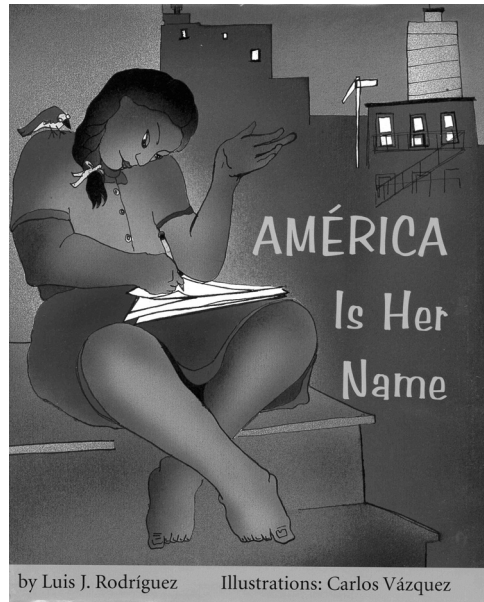
LEARNING TO SEE WHERE THE GOOD STORIES HIDE: FINDING THE STORIES THAT MATTER

The collection of memoirs that Ernestina and Rebecca had gathered to use in the memoir study spoke not only to the children’s cultural, immigrant, and language backgrounds, but also to

the children’s ages, fears, and other universal themes. Some of the books they had gathered were: *Owl Moon* by Yolen (1987), *My Very Own Room/Mi Propio Cuartito* by Pérez (2000), *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories* by Cisneros (1991), *América Is Her Name* by Rodríguez (1997), *La Mariposa* by Jiménez (1998), and *The Relatives Came* by Rylant (1985). As noted before, we noticed early on that the children were responding with sequences of events or “bed-to-bed” stories. In our collaborative group, we talked about ways we could make more explicit how to find the “good stories.” We wanted the children

to see that a good story might lie in just 5 or 10 minutes of an individual’s life.

On the day Rebecca read aloud “*Once*” (“Eleven”) by Cisneros (1991), she explained to the children, “Sandra Cisneros escribe mucho sobre su vida. Ella tiene una vida interesante, pero la razón por la cual sus historias son únicas es porque ella escribe sobre cosas que no parecen tan importantes, pero para ella sí son cosas importantes. Ustedes van a ver que lo que ella escribió es un pedacito de su vida, no un gran viaje o algo así.” (*Translation: Sandra Cisneros writes a lot about her life. She has an interesting life, but what is unique about her stories is that she writes about things that don’t seem important, but for her these are important things. You are going to see how what she chose to write about is a little piece of her life, not a huge trip or anything like that.*)



And so, as Rebecca read “*Once*” with the children, she studied Cisneros’s craft as a writer and the children made connections to their personal lives. They discussed how at times those issues that matter to children don’t always matter in the same way to the adults, as in the case of Rachel, the main character in Cisneros’s story. The teacher had forced Rachel to wear an old sweater that wasn’t hers, humiliating her in front of the class. “Most people wouldn’t choose to write about an incident like this. It seems so small,” Rebecca explained to the children. “But for Cisneros, this was an important moment worth writing about. The good stories,” she stressed, “lie in those small moments. When you write your entries, I would like for you to try to do that.”

Just like Galo and his story about trying to juggle his mother’s drinking glasses, the other students worked hard at finding those moments in their lives where good stories hide. Carolina, for example, after hearing the story *Owl Moon*, wrote an entry that covered just 10 minutes of her life, yet is filled with emotion.

This story made me think of all the times I go out with my brother. It is just special when I go out with him because most of the time he has to work and I don’t really spend time with him. But every morning he wakes me up and I love it when he does that. It just tells me that my brother is still there and that he hasn’t left for school yet. And sometimes in the morning I wake up before my brother wakes me up. When I hear that he is opening the door from the shower I act like I am sleeping so he can wake me up and touch me with his bumpy hands and tell me wake up Carolina and I love how he says my name. And then I look at him for a long time because I am not going to see him until the next morning.

After hearing Carolina read her entry, both children and teachers were struck by the decisions she made as a writer and by the feelings this piece evoked. We marveled at the detail with which Carolina described her brother’s bumpy hand—such attention to noticing those small features. In addition, the children asked Carolina if her brother spoke to her in Spanish or in English. Carolina replied, “We speak in Spanish at home.” The children recommended that for her final piece, she use his “authentic language,” that is, she include dialogue in Spanish, just like Jimenez (1998) did in his memoir *La Mariposa*.

LEARNING TO RESPOND TO ONE ANOTHER AS WRITERS—WRITING THROUGH AND WITH THE BODY

For a while, our teacher lunchtime conversations centered on the difficulties we were having with the children’s revision of their papers. For most of the children, revising meant a focus on spelling and on making each piece look nice again by copying their draft onto clean paper. During our adult conversations, we began to think about ways to introduce the bilingual children to the idea of crafting techniques. Through our discussions of the readings we had just completed, a chapter from Lane’s book (1993) *After the End* and an article published in *Language Arts* by Harper (1997) titled “The Writer’s Toolbox,” we decided that we needed to try something different than asking the children to name each one of the crafting techniques that the different authors use and then chart them on paper.

We were impressed by the way Lane suggested that writers use their whole body to show meaning. We loved Harper’s take on the use of writing tools that she geared specifically for children learning English as a second language. We

thought that the ideas raised by Lane and Harper would make a lot of sense, not only because we were working with bilingual learners and we were certain that they could benefit from these activities, but also because writers often feel the need to experience what they are writing about. We used the example of Pam Muñoz Ryan (NCTE Conference, Atlanta, 2002), who talked about her need to experience driving a horse carriage prior to writing her book *Riding Freedom* (Muñoz, 1998). Ryan needed to have this experience before being able to describe this action in her story.

Because we were working with children who were learning English as a second language, we knew that it wasn’t enough to introduce the children to these techniques only by using examples from texts. Instead, it mattered that the children matched language to experience. For example, in our search to help some of the children use the crafting technique of “exploding a moment” (Harper, 1997; Lane, 1993), we decided to ask the children to use their bodies to help them imagine the motions they wanted to describe with words. We did this in two different ways: 1) by asking a child who did “explode” a moment to read it

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aloud and have another child act it out; and 2) by asking a child to show us what he was doing with his body during a particular action prior to exploding that moment in writing (for example, when he was trying to hit the ball while playing baseball with his brother).

We introduced the idea of “exploding a moment” by modeling for the children how to select a line that needed to be exploded from one of the seed stories in our own notebooks. We called these “try its” (Smith et. al, 2003). Once we had chosen the line, we demonstrated how partners could ask each other questions in order to get the details out. Then we said to them, “Now we want you to find a sentence in one of your three chosen seed stories that you think is important to your story and needs to be exploded. Once you find it, we want you to get with a partner, read each other’s sentences, and ask each other questions about it. Then try to write an exploded moment. Make sure you write it in your notebook right away. Don’t forget to use the opposite side of the page.” We explained to the children that by doing the “try it” on the opposite side of the page, they could go back later on to revisit the different crafting techniques they had learned, and use them in the crafting of the memoir they were going to publish.

The children gathered their notebooks, looked for a sentence, and worked with a partner asking each other questions. During this time, we met with several pairs, listening to their dialogue and helping them to think of appropriate questions. After these paired discussions, the children wrote for 20–25 minutes before we called them back to the carpet.

As part of sharing time at the end of the writing session, we said to the children, “You know, a good way to find out if we have done a good job exploding the moment and creating our scene is to act it out. Writers create these types of vivid images with their words. Let’s try it.”

We asked Berta to read her “scene” while another child acted it out. This way the whole class could see how she not only had exploded a moment, but also had begun to create a scene with her words. She read to the class the following scene:

My mouth watered. I stared at the tamale sitting on the tray. I unwrapped it, slowly, careful not to burn my fingers. The tamale rolled out

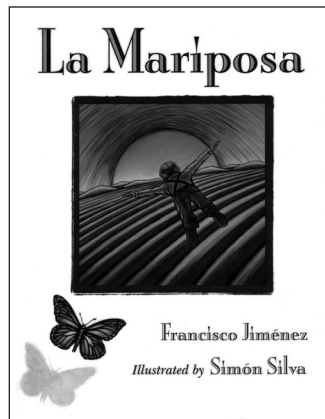
of the steamed husk and dropped into my plate. The aroma filled the air. I took the fork and cut it, anxious to take the first bite. The fork rose to my mouth. I could feel the masa. The taste of meat filled my taste buds. I bit down; all of a sudden a sharp pain shuttered my mouth. A strange sensation filled my mouth. I opened my mouth slowly afraid to bite again.

After Berta was done reading, we asked her to read her original draft, “*It was eight o’clock and she was making tamales and she put olives in it but I didn’t know that and I said this tastes like a rock and I don’t like it.*” The children commented on the difference between the two entries by say-

ing, “She really slowed it down a lot when she exploded the moment. She didn’t just say, ‘I saw the tamale and I ate it.’” Another child commented, “You can see it in your mind very much.” In fact, the detail was so clear, the actors had no problem using their bodies as Berta read this section of her piece out loud. The idea of using the body as a way to begin to describe the actions of the character was also very useful during our conferencing with the children at the end of the study, as we tried to help them get their writing pieces into publishable form.

On one of these days, Rebecca shared with us, “Today I was conferencing with Celsio. His piece is about playing baseball with his brother. I was trying to get him to explode the moment of when he is getting ready to hit the ball with the bat, but he was having difficulty putting each action down on paper. So I said, ‘Show me exactly how you stand and how you move your body when you are getting ready to hit the ball. We will write down all your actions.’ So, he did it, and I took notes on the computer. We had to do a lot of talking about it. Luckily, I know a lot about baseball because my son plays it. Do you want to see what we came up with? I think he was very pleased with the results.” Here is what he wrote:

Comencé a prepararme. Agarré el bate. Me acomodé las manos sobándolo con mis dedos. Planté mi pie derecho en la tierra. Incliné mi cuerpo hacia adelante del plato. Luego miré hacia mi hermano. Esperando que me tirara la pelota. Memiró—con confianza. Levantó el brazo y me la tiró poco recio. “CCCaaccc” pegué la pelota.



La pelota fue volando arriba de la cabeza de mi hermano hasta el campo derecho. ¡Hice una carrera! Corrí muy rápido por todas las bases.

Translation: I began to get ready. I took the bat. I put my hands in place, feeling the bat with my fingers. I placed my right foot on the ground. I put my body forward in front of the plate. I then looked at my brother, waiting for him to throw me the ball. He looked at me confidently. He lifted his arm and threw the ball a little bit fast. “CCCrraaacccckkk,” I hit the ball. The ball went flying on top of my brother’s head all the way to the right field. I made a run! I ran really fast around all the bases.

Ernestina and I commented on how vivid the image was this time around. We could really picture him in the field playing baseball.

Throughout our mini-lessons, we searched for ways to create invitations so that the bilingual children would grow in their identities as writers of memoir. We created situations in which, in order to invite the bilingual children into the learning to become writers of memoir, we went beyond the exclusive use of transparencies, charts, or just talk as tools to create learning opportunities for the children. Instead, we engaged the children physically, emotionally, and linguistically. We helped the bilingual children connect language to body actions and language to content, or as Faltis (2000) states, we created “meaning-making invites” to provide the bilingual children with access to authentic, meaningful and rigorous curriculum.

CONCLUSION

As teachers and researchers in a dual language setting, we concur with McCarthy and Watahomiggie (1998) who state:

In classrooms, curriculum and pedagogy are the mirrors in which students see themselves reflected, and through which they construct images of themselves as thinkers, learners, and users of language. Educators have the ability to strategically manipulate those mirrors in ways that ensure that the image students see and develop is one of self-affirmation, efficacy, and trust. (p. 85)

From our perspective, by making the children’s lives, languages, and experiences an integral part

of the curriculum, we were able to offer the children a learning experience that reflected and affirmed who they really are. Certainly, it was the richness of our collaborative relationship and its impact on pedagogy that allowed us to create a learning environment filled with meaning-making possibilities for the children.

As collaborators, we knew the children were capable of learning the crafting techniques we had introduced to them as writers of memoir (Nia, 1999; Fletcher, 1998; Ray, 2001; and Lane, 1993). Yet, as teachers of bilingual children, we also came to realize that if we truly wanted the children to cultivate their genre knowledge and acquire their identities as writers, we needed to slow down the process and make adaptations to the strategies suggested by Fletcher (1998), Lane (1993), and Ray (1999, 2001). We were aware that we still needed to maintain meaning-making invitations by adjusting our language and our actions to acquire the learner, thus inviting the learner not just to

learn a second language, but to “learn a new knowledge system” (Faltis, 2000, p. 116).

Although we adapted the curriculum for the children who were learning English as a second language, we were never satisfied and had high expectations for what the children

would be able to accomplish. In this stance, we kept in mind the words of bilingual educators Freeman and Freeman (2001), who reminded us that English language learners might be limited in English, but not in thinking, and that “They need to be engaged in curriculum that challenges their thinking” (p. 241). We also took seriously the assertion of Faltis and Hudelson (1998), “What students talk about, read, and write about matters” (p. 101). From my perspective, the children’s published memoirs exemplify talking, reading, and writing that matters, and I close this piece with Carolina’s published memoir, further developed from the seed idea about her brother waking her each morning. Carolina writes:

Seeing Him Once by Carolina

I wake up in the morning every day and a ray of light hits my face. “Carolina, ya levántate y no te vayas a dormir otra vez,” my brother shouts.

My brother wakes me up every morning when he wakes up. That is the reason I love the

We went beyond the exclusive use of transparencies, charts, or just talk as tools to create learning opportunities for the children. Instead, we engaged the children physically, emotionally, and linguistically.

mornings, because I don't really get to spend time with my brother. When I come home from school my brother has already left for work.

I love it when he comes into my room to wake me up every morning. It just tells me that my brother is still there and that he hasn't left to school yet.

Sometimes in the morning I wake up before my brother wakes me up, but I lay in bed pretending to be asleep. I hear him opening the door. I pretend that I am sleeping. The door creaks open - creak. He tiptoes into my room—he comes in softly, so that I don't wake up. His long hand stretches out to touch me and wake me up. His soft hand feels like a feather tickling me in between my ribs and I laugh a little trying not to laugh too loud. I start to feel his cold and bumpy hands going up and down my face. I hear, “Carolina ya levántate y no te vayas a dormir otra vez.”

I love how he pronounces my name. First his lips get tight, then his mouth opens and he says in a soft voice “-Carolina-.” Then I look at him for a long time because I'm not going to see him until the next morning.

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