

Review:

Community Literacies en Confianza

By Steven Alvarez

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Steven Alvarez's *Community Literacies en Confianza* provides a perfect example of how conversations about language, literacy, and community can benefit from cross-disciplinary engagement. In this accessible, grounded illustration of how youth navigate literacy learning at two after-school programs, Alvarez ties together interdisciplinary conversations related to language and literacy while also providing clear recommendations for teachers at several levels who want to continue engaging in community-driven work. As an interdisciplinary scholar, I particularly appreciate the way that Alvarez threads together disciplinary conversations while simultaneously maintaining focus on the lived experiences and stories of his participants and collaborators.

Following the goals and structure of the "Principles in Practice" imprint of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) book series, *Community Literacies en*

Confianza links research on a particular topic (in this case “Teaching English Language Learners”) to a specific NCTE brief or policy statement. The book thus opens with the “NCTE Position Paper on the Role of English Teachers in Educating English Language Learners (ELLS),” which sets the tone for the purpose of the book and the discussion and problematizing of the statement that Alvarez engages in throughout the manuscript. While, as Alvarez explains, this position paper has paved the way for honoring and building on the strengths of linguistically diverse youth in classrooms, further attention to the language and literacy practice of contemporary youth and their communities is critical to the ongoing sustainability of our classrooms.

Although there are multiple elements of value in this manuscript, one of the things I most appreciate about Alvarez’s discussion is the way in which he provides concrete, adaptable definitions of terminology that is often contested in academic circles related to theories and practices of language and literacy. For example, the book includes a “Statement of Terminology and Glossary” written by Steven Alvarez, Betsy Gilliland, Christina Ortmeier-Hooper, Melinda J. McBee Orzulak, and Shannon Pella. This glossary is an invaluable resource for teachers and researchers interested in language and literacy scholarship, as the authors provide a cross-disciplinary historical overview of terms such as “English Language Learner,” “bilingual, multilingual, or plurilingual,” “emergent bilingual” (García 2009), “English as a foreign language,” and many more. As a researcher who has frequently made the common mistake of conflating and interchanging this terminology without understanding its histories, I truly appreciate having this glossary as a reference tool that can help me to better articulate the ways in which I’m describing specific language practices. In addition, this glossary (and Alvarez’s clear undertaking of specific terminology throughout the manuscript) further illustrates the importance of conducting historical traces of language scholars across disciplinary boundaries in order to ensure that we, as researchers, are not ignoring entire lines of scholarship as we develop “new” concepts for describing linguistic movements in our work.

In addition to its clear, historical overview of terminology related to language and literacy, *Community Literacies en Confianza* provides in-depth, contextualized accounts of how language and literacy learning extend beyond classrooms and institutionalized contexts. As Alvarez explains, “cultivating a caring atmosphere in multiple languages...requires additional effort, guidance, and trust-building between teachers and communities” (p. 3). The responsibility of caring for our youth, then, rests not only on the shoulders of teachers and administrators, but is also in the hands of our entire community, as “it takes a community to raise a bilingual child” (p. 3). Because this community support is frequently already present in the lives of emergent bilingual children (García 2009), teachers’ roles in continuing to extend this supportive environment rely on their willingness to “learn about students’ families and communities while establishing connections of trust” (p. 3). This is where Alvarez’s guiding concept of *confianza* emerges as a “reciprocal relationship”... built through an ongoing, intentional process that is centered in local communities and involves mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation (Delgado Gaitan; Zentella)” (p. 4). Thus, through my interpretation, *confianza* is a mutual trust established among teachers, students, and families, primarily through a practice of listening and valuing home-based knowledges and literacies.

As Alvarez continues to illustrate *confianza* as it is enacted with his participants across two research sites, the stories and experiences of emergent bilingual youth are brought to the forefront, providing readers with opportunities to listen to and engage with youth voices and perspectives directly. For example, Alvarez presents excerpts from writing that youth composed to share their experiences learning and practicing languages. Through these excerpts, readers get to hear from participants like Ana, who writes about her “disappointment in not feeling ‘authentic’ like a monolingual Mexican Spanish or American English speaker” (p. 2), and Celia, a high school student who interviewed her mother about the role that community-driven after-school programs play in her daughter’s confidence and growth (p. 17). As the chapters continue, Alvarez blends conventional written narratives from youth with multimodal digital and visual stories that depict youth’s translanguaging practices through alphabetic and non-alphabetic modalities. These illustrations of youth’s composing practices can make valuable contributions to ongoing research in

both English Education and Rhetoric and Writing studies regarding the connections between language diversity and digital technologies in contemporary contexts (e.g., Banks 2006; Jocson 2018; Fraiberg 2010).

Through his depiction of how youth take ownership of their stories while leveraging multiple modalities, Alvarez also showcases both the power of his participants' stories and the various roles that youth can play in not only developing but also researching their own language and literacy practices. As Alvarez clarifies, "when students begin to view their own lives from the perspective of a researcher, their everyday realities seem strange and new. This reorientation causes them to narrate their own and others' stories in a new way, as students learn to use their voice and maturity, and gain confidence in representing their communities and expertise from their lives" (p. 46). As Alvarez (re)positions literacy and language expertise in the histories, practices, and lived experiences of youth and families, he also centers these participants as research collaborators with methodological expertise, and he welcomes other researchers and teachers to do the same.

Overall, *Community Literacies en Confianza* makes important contributions to conversations about the value of community knowledges in classroom practices, about the connections between languages and modalities in language and literacy, and about the value of Latinx communities coming together to build infrastructures for support, growth, and survivance outside of institutionalized contexts. Though Alvarez's writing, readers gain much more than important tips and lessons for supporting linguistically and ethnically diverse youth in and outside of classrooms—we also get to see the story of a committed teacher who purposely not only shares but also builds his own talents and expertise through the collective voices of his participants. Through embedded translingual poetry like his poem, "Fieldnote" (p. 85-88), Alvarez demonstrates what it means to not just learn from but *with* youth, always en confianza.

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