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Engaging Adolescent Latinas through Literature

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Abstract

It is important to engage Latina adolescents in literature that reflects their culture and life, as well as to provide them with an outlet to have conversations about their own identity and perceptions. Amoxtli, an afterschool literacy community, was designed to allow Latinas this opportunity and to give them a space to articulate and affirm their identities within the context of personal goals and cultural expectations. Over the course of three months, 10 Latinas participated in the program that was designed as an inclusive space for reading and discussing literature that reflected their cultural heritage. Through participation in the program, the goal was to learn more about the girls': 1) connections with characters in the readings and other Latinas, 2) views of self-identity within their culture, 3) use of reading strategies and 4) perceptions of the program. Interviews, journals, artifacts, and written narratives created by the adolescents were collected throughout the program to document their perceptions and experiences. The Latina adolescents reported positive experiences with both reading culturally-relevant novels and engaging in the activities.

Engaging Adolescent Latinas through Literature

Reading opens the mind to new ideas, places, and experiences. Through literature, adolescent readers may find confirmation of their personal beliefs and experiences or encounter challenges to their own view of the world (Park, 2012). By reading critically, making personal connections to texts, and discussing topics raised by literature, adolescents may not only gain knowledge, but also explore issues relevant to their lives (Garcia & Gaddas, 2012; Park, 2012). For adolescents, reading literature can provide opportunities for developing self-awareness and cultural identity (Landt, 2006; Howard, 2011). By making connections between themselves and the stories they read, adolescents may find affirmation in their own experiences and cultural heritage (Landt, 2006).

The benefits of recreational reading are well documented and correlate both with higher academic achievement as well as positive social engagement (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008; Howard, 2011). Given that traditional school classrooms often provide limited to no opportunities for reading and discussion of literature relevant to underrepresented populations, out of school spaces can provide environments conducive to adolescent exploration of identity, culture, and social issues (Garcia & Gaddes, 2012; Polleck & Epstein, 2015). Creating safe spaces to interact with and discuss culturally relevant literature is especially critical for adolescents of Latino descent, given that Latino youth experience higher rates of high school dropout and lower reading comprehension skills than their same age peers of other ethnicities (Garcia & Gaddes, 2012; Lesaux, Crosson, Keiffer, & Pierce, 2010). Moreover, many Latinos appear to place less importance on reading than their urban peers of other racial identities, thus engaging less with literature (Barry, 2013). This is especially concerning for Latino students with special needs, given that reading difficulties are more prevalent in this population (Wei,

Blackorby, & Shiller, 2011). Therefore, it is important to provide safe spaces for adolescent Latinos to see themselves in literature and critically analyze what it means to be Latino within and outside their community. It is through these spaces, that they can have conversations which allow them to explore their identities, assert their voices, and analyze the readings and issues from their own perspectives (Wissman, 2011).

Although the importance of integrating multicultural literature into the school curriculum has been emphasized for years (Brooks, 2006), a comprehensive exposure to this literature continues to not occur within schools (Tatum, 2006). Thus, providing opportunities for students to engage in literature that reflects their culture and life is the basis of culturally relevant pedagogy, which can foster students' academic success and develop or maintain their cultural awareness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In building academic success, interaction with culturally relevant texts is shown to increase the reading engagement among Latinos (Godina, 2003) and African Americans (Piazza & Duncan, 2012). Additionally, culturally relevant texts support comprehension as students are able to apply background knowledge to the material in the text (Jimenez & Gamez, 1996; Freeman & Freeman, 2004). As an example, Godina (2003) incorporated Mesoamerican ancestry in the instruction of content and found that Latino students not only learned more about their culture, but that it promoted positive perception about their participation in class. While research in the school environment supports utilizing culturally relevant text to increase engagement and participation, literature involving out of school literacy communities (e.g., book clubs) reveals how literary practices involving these texts can assist adolescents from underrepresented groups in understanding their identity and navigating issues in their social worlds (Polleck & Epstein, 2015).

Due to the pressures of standardized, high-stakes testing and inadequate teacher preparation related to issues of race and gender in the classroom, out-of-school literacy communities can provide a space for adolescents to share about what it means to be an adolescent of a certain ethnicity, class and gender, as well as the demands and expectations surrounding those labels (DeBlase, 2003). Framed primarily as a social activity, recreational literacy communities create a place for sharing and negotiating understandings of literature, identity, and the world, which can result in a transformative experience (Polleck, 2010). In fact, participating in these types of experiences can increase students' enjoyment of reading and engagement with texts. Polleck (2010) noted, in a study specifically focused on urban, female, adolescents, the powerful influences of participating in a book club and how it impacted adolescents' self-concept, self-esteem, friendship with other girls, and emotional development. As an illustration, in discussions of a text in which a character struggled with body image, girls in the study supported each other with difficulties related to body weight and low self-esteem; they ended the book feeling "more confident," "more open-minded," and "respected" (Polleck, 2010, p. 60). Likewise, girls reported that by making connections with characters in the books and talking about them, they were able to work through personal conflicts in their own lives.

Similarly, Park (2012) conducted a study of the responses of urban middle school girls to literature in an after school reading community. In this study, the researcher discovered that members of the group developed a sense of comradery by talking about literature together and felt a sense of trust within the reading community. Thus, these literacy communities become vehicles that allow adolescents to interact with literature through social engagement and within the context of community. The social interactions in the programs involved recognizing both the

shared heritage of the adolescents as well as the personal thoughts and experiences each brings into discussions (Arzubiaga, Artiles, King, & Harris-Murri, 2008).

Purpose

Reading is a cultural practice and the interactions between readers and text can differ depending on context (DeBlase, 2003). Where traditional classrooms often place the adolescent reader in a passive role and typically exclude diverse voices, the literacy communities can encourage questioning and discussion about gender, culture, family, and identity issues. Through discussions about both literary characters that represented the traditional view of Latina women and characters that challenged traditional, static identity labels, girls are provided opportunities to co-construct their identities and views about culture. By interpreting text through the lens of their own experiences and social interaction with other Latina adolescents, literacy activities can be used as ways to negotiate different/competing “codes of meaning” among families, friends, school, and community (DeBlase, 2003, p. 285).

In this study, reading is viewed as both an individual and a social activity that contributes to social and cognitive development; when individual connections to text are shared with others, it allows for a merging of narratives and deeper understanding of individual lives, families, and communities (Polleck, 2010). Furthermore, although this research focuses on a specific demographic, namely, Latina adolescents, this group identity is viewed as dynamic and culturally constructed. While the girls in this study are mediating two cultures, that of their Mexican parents and the dominant mainstream culture, they are not viewed as passive, but perceived as able to define how they see themselves and their culture, and create their own goals (Artiles, 2009).

Amoxkli, which means book in Nahuatl (historically Aztec), was developed by the researchers as an after school literacy community program which included both social and literacy components. The program was developed to provide opportunities for adolescent Latinas, including girls who struggled with reading, which were not available in the community or schools. Amoxkli provided an inclusive space for girls to share and negotiate their understandings of literature, identity, and the world. In this study, we were interested in learning about adolescent Latinas': 1) connections with characters in the readings and other Latinas, 2) view of self-identity within their cultural, 3) use of reading strategies, and 4) perceptions of the program.

Methods

Participants and Setting

The Amoxkli program was located in a predominantly Latino neighborhood (78%) with strong identification with the Mexican culture located in a large, Midwestern city. The neighborhood has historically been a port of entry for immigrants with residents living mostly in modest bungalows and brick two-flats. It is a working-class neighborhood with families predominately from low to middle socioeconomic status with a median household income around \$36,000.

The program was housed at a local elementary school that had a number of community and afterschool programs. Adolescent Latinas were recruited by distributing information to local schools and organizations. The goal was to create an inclusive program open to Latinas of all ability levels, thus special effort was made to encourage Latinas that were identified with a disability or struggled with reading. Thus, special education programs were specifically targeted as well. A total of 11 adolescent Latinas (ages 12-17) signed up for the Amoxkli program and 10

consented to participate in the research study. All of the girls lived in the neighborhood where the program took place and attended one of three local schools. Table 1 presents a summary of the demographics of the participants in this investigation. To protect the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms are used.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name	Grade	Age	Ethnic Identity (Self-Reported)	Languages	Country born	Years living in U.S.	Struggling Reader
Marisol	8 th	13	Mexican	Spanish, English	U.S.	13	Yes
Patricia	8 th	13	Mexican	Spanish, English	U.S.	13	Yes
Violeta	8 th	13	Mexican	Spanish, English	U.S.	13	Yes
Yvette	8 th	13	Mexican	Spanish, English	U.S.	13	No
Daniela	8 th	14	Mexican	Spanish, English	Mexico	7	No
Veronica	8 th	14	Mexican	Spanish, English	Mexico	8	Yes
Paula	9 th	14	Latina	Spanish, English	Mexico	13	Yes
Erica	9 th	15	Mexican	English	U.S.	15	No
Yolanda	9 th	15	Latina	Spanish, English	U.S.	13	No
Julia	11 th	16	Latina	Spanish, English	U.S.	16	No

Amoxтли Program

The Amoxтли program consisted primarily of a literacy community that focused on reading texts with Mexican-American heroines, but also incorporated speakers and exploration activities in the community. The program took place over the course of one semester (three months) with Latinas meeting after school once a week for about 90 minutes for a total of 10 sessions. Funding for the program was provided through a community engagement grant designed to provide support for small projects in local communities. Each session was led by project leaders, who were all current or former teachers. During program registration, the girls were provided with an overview of different books and were asked to select which they were interested in reading. The girls were then divided into three small groups and read either *Tequila Worm* (2007) by Viola Canales or *Dancing Home* (2011) by Alma Flor Ada and Gabriel M. Zubizarreta. A third book was also used, *The Smell of Old Lady Perfume* (2008) by Claudia Guadalupe Martinez, however most of the girls had already been exposed to it in school; thus it was not a primary focus. The book was used at times to demonstrate the strategies or facilitate discussions, given that the girls were able to make connections between this book and the current book they were reading.

During each session, both whole and small group activities were incorporated. The same project leader worked with the same small group of girls throughout the program. The sessions were divided into four parts: check-in, small group time, large group discussion, and journaling. In small group, girls would read parts of the novel, using reciprocal teaching strategies to support comprehension and engage in discussion. Since a variety of comprehension strategies can be beneficial for students, particularly those struggling with reading (Berkeley, Scruggs, &

Mastropieri, 2010), a number of reading strategies were utilized including predicting, questioning, summarizing and clarifying difficult language and vocabulary words. The explicit use of these strategies by the project leaders in the sessions provided the participants with a great deal of practice along with guidance and were designed to help them process information and enhance learning (Beckman, 2002.) From the very first session, reciprocal teaching was introduced to the participants by the group leaders and the strategies introduced were reviewed at the start of each session. Girls used anchor charts and notes from previous sessions to remind them of the strategy and continue a flow to discussion from week to week.

Additionally, prior to each session, project leaders met to review and discuss the readings and identify themes or issues that were present across the different novels. As part of these discussions, questions were created that spanned the themes across the novels the participants read to help foster discussions. Given that each of the leaders were also teachers, they were prepared in formulating questions that not only addressed comprehension but also would provoke discussions about identity and culture, which were themes that guided the creation of the project. Examples of questions that were asked included: 1. What parts of the main characters life experiences are similar to your own life?; 2. Have you ever fought with a relative or friend? What did you do? If the fight is over, how did it end? Would you do things differently in the future?; and 3. Choose a character from the book. What do you think of the character? What do you like? What do you not like about the character? How do you think people view you? Explain.

A goal was that within each of the small groups, participants had an opportunity to discuss these themes or issues as related to their readings (e.g., self-identity; conflict between expectations at home and society at large) and then later expand the discussions in large group as

they connected it to the other readings and their own experiences. Furthermore, the adolescents were asked to share about events, themes and personal connections they made with their books to help the group gain a better understanding of the texts each small group read. Large group discussion time was designed so that the girls could share out ideas, themes or questions they had with the girls in the other groups. Lastly, at the end of each session the girls would write journal responses to questions posed by the project leaders. These questions built on the discussion questions and themes pulled from the books that allowed the participants to think about their own personal and cultural identities and experiences in relation to the novels.

Guest speakers, who were Latinas, were invited to speak during two of the sessions and discussed their own experiences as a Latina. One discussed the challenges she faced with the language when she was emigrating to the United States (U.S.) and entering higher education. The other guest speaker spoke of her pride of being a Latina and her love of Latino literature and how it helped form her self-identity. A third guest speaker, who was the mother of one of the girls, spoke at the culminating celebration. She discussed her experience of being a mother of a young Latina adolescent and her search for programs that would help her daughter grow into a strong young woman who is proud of her Mexican culture.

Throughout the last few sessions, the girls completed a narrative or poem and created an artifact that defined who they were. Example narratives and short stories were presented to the group from an anthology written by Latina adolescents. These stories served as a means to provide examples of expressing personal and cultural identity and build discussions about participants' own self-identity. The last two sessions were used to give the girls time and support to create the final artifact and written narrative.

Finally, the girls had the option to participate in three additional community experience activities: attending a student art show, seeing a youth theater production, and exploring the city. The art show was attended before the program began as a way for the girls to meet one another as well as experience art culture in their own community. It was produced by a local art program for Latino youth and adolescents within their neighborhood and included masks, paintings, short films, sculpture and interactive art. The youth theater production was written, produced and acted by youth across the city. The play was about the lived experiences of the adolescents and presented short skits about navigating relationships with parents and peers, working toward academic success in school, and dealing with difficult/traumatic life experiences. Lastly, the city outing explored the downtown area of the city the Amoxtli participants lived in by visiting multiple historical sites. This trip was also utilized to take photographs within their neighborhood and of the city to use in their culminating artifacts. Although these outings were optional, all the girls attended the play and only a couple did not attend the art show or community exploration events due to conflicting engagements.

At the conclusion of the semester, the program hosted a celebration where the girls were able to share their written narratives and artifacts with family and friends. This was a festive occasion that brought in many relatives of each of the girls to acknowledge their commitment and growth in the program. It also provided the project leaders an opportunity to showcase the experiences the girls engaged in and to thank the families for the support they provided.

Data Sources

Interviews. All the girls were interviewed individually before enrolling in the program and again once the program ended. Interviews were designed to learn more about the Latinas' reading interests and habits, as well as to learn more about their thoughts regarding issues of

identity and culture. The pre-interview contained 10 open-ended questions, lasting roughly 20 minutes (see appendix A for protocol). The initial interview included items on reading interests and habits (e.g., What types of books do you like to read?, How do you know you understand what you are reading?) and personal/cultural identity and experiences (e.g., Tell me about a Latina you admire, Once you finish school what do you want to do?, What do you think your family expects you to do after high school?). The post-interviews consisted of 12 open-ended questions and took on average 15 minutes to administer (see appendix B for protocol). This survey included items about reading interests (e.g., Do you enjoy reading books?), connections with the readings (e.g., Did you connect with/relate to any of the characters in the book you read?), cultural/identity experiences (e.g., Has reading this book changed the way you think about yourself/family/school/future?), and overall feelings about the program (e.g., Can you tell me something you enjoyed about the program?). Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed.

Journals. At the end of each the first eight sessions the girls were allowed up to 10 minutes in which to respond to questions related to group discussions in their journals. Journal questions presented to the group included questions such as: Some of the characters in our books care about being smart and/or being pretty. Do you care about these things? Is one more important than the other? Why?; [In the book you are reading] what parts of the main character's life experiences are similar to your own life? Give examples!; and Have you ever been in a fight with a relative or friend? What did you do? If the fight is over, how did it end? Would you do things differently in the future? Copies of their journal entries were collected at the end of the program.

Written Narrative. During the final sessions, the girls were asked to write a personal narrative about themselves. The girls could choose between either an essay or an "I am..." poem.

Guidelines were provided for both the essay and the poem to help them organize their thoughts. Seven of the girls wrote essays and three produced the “I am...” poem.

Artifact. All the girls completed a culminating project of their choice that demonstrated who they are as an individual. A list of possible projects was provided with examples of each product. These included creating a vision board, picture journal, artistic journal or short film. All proposed projects included compiling pictures, words, drawings, and images to represent the girls’ sense of personal and cultural identity. The girls were given the option of choosing one of the provided projects or propose one of their own. Vision boards were the most popular with eight of the girls creating one, while two created picture journals. These artifacts were also shared with their family and friends during the end of the program celebration.

Data Analysis

Data from the interview transcripts, journals, written narrative, and artifact were gathered and coded using qualitative methodology (e.g., Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Coding was used as a means to rearrange data into categories that allow for comparison of the data and creation of summaries (Maxwell, 2005). Codes were used as labels to assign meaning to chunks of information in a study (Miles Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Three flows of analysis were applied for summarizing the data (Miles et al., 2014). The first flow of analysis involved the researchers independently coding and then summarizing the written data. Key themes were identified and the researchers met to discuss their findings. The second flow of analysis included the development of written data summaries on each theme. These data summaries were presented to the research team and findings were negotiated using the group mind process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Rules were revised as needed and all salient phrases and sentences were read to insure they were placed in the appropriate theme (e.g., connections

with characters). The third flow of analysis involved drawing conclusions and verifying findings. Contradictory evidence was examined and firmly established conclusions reported.

Results

Major themes that emerged from the coding of participants' responses were 1) connections made with characters from texts read, 2) participants' expression of self-concept and cultural identity, 3) use of reading strategies, and 4) participants' overall perceptions of the Amoxтли program. Findings within each theme are presented with direct examples from the various types of data collected across participants.

Connection with Characters

All of the participants, prior to starting the program, reported connecting in some way with characters in books they read. The majority of these connections surrounded adolescent culture (i.e. female lead characters engaging in relationships with boyfriends) and their personal identity (i.e. characters displaying similar personality characteristics as the participants). Julia and Yolanda expressed how they related with characters based on their personal response to life experiences. For example, Julia discussed how she connected with a character, but had more difficulty moving past tragic events than the character in the novel.

[I connected with a] girl that got raped. ... She was actually able to...face it...[and] move on over it... But there was something that happened like a long time ago with my little brother... I can't see this person and feel the same way I used to before that happened because, like, I can't totally get over it. So I guess that was the difference that that girl was able to overcome it and I am still, like, struggling with it and stuff like that.

None of the girls initially identified connecting with characters based on their cultural identity. However, Yolanda reported that she experienced living in a similar environment as a

book she read. "...they were talkin' about gangsters, and everything and on my block we have a lot of that."

In the post interview, eight of the girls indicated that they connected differently with the characters in the books they read within the program than they had to other characters in previously read books. They noted, after reading the book, that they had a stronger sense of pride in their culture. This was evident in their interview responses, such as Veronica's, "[What I liked about the book we read was] how we have to be proud of our cultures and have to be yourself and be proud of who we are and where we come from...because it's a book that makes, like, it makes you realize that you have to be proud of your culture." Other girls made connections specifically to the character's Mexican culture. Specifically, they made reference to Mexican traditions, such as Christmas, quinceañeras, and fiestas. Violeta discussed how she connected with the character in the play with her own experiences.

I want to cry sometimes...because, I don't know, the parts [of the play] where the parents argue with their children and stuff. And it reminded me of me and like, I was like, at the moment I was, like, greedy. Like that at sometimes I don't treat them (my parents) the way they deserve. And it's like, I don't know how to appreciate them or stuff like that.

Both Paula and Patricia said they did not make a connection to the characters in the books read, indicating they did not feel a dissonance with their Mexican heritage as some of the characters did. Paula stated that unlike the character in the book, she felt proud of her culture. Although most of the connections revolved around culture, there were girls that made connections with the characters based on age appropriate themes. Daniela and Erica noted a connection with a character based on navigating relationships with boys. Julia spoke about her struggle with deciding if she should move away from her family in the future, particularly for

college: "I connect to the [character] because I think as a parent, like for my mom, it's very hard to know that I'm leaving at one point...and I know that it might be kind of hard because we've always been together, but I think that at one point we have to leave because that's the, like, life." Besides most of the Latinas making connections to characters in the books, the program appeared to have influenced how they thought about their culture in their own lives.

Self-Concept and Cultural Identity

Prior to the start of the program, the majority of the Latinas described parts of their self-concept and identity in regards to being learners in school and members of an adolescent culture. Violeta's response was typical of the girls' during the pre-interview in that she expressed her identity as a math student and how she wants to improve in the subject despite her difficulties. Only three girls discussed their culture or family as part of their identity before the beginning of the program.

At the end of the program, girls continued to show self-identity in regards to adolescent culture, such as building relationships with friends and boyfriends, interest in beauty and fashion, engaging in sports and hobbies, and personal goals of going to college. However, data suggest that the girls also came away with a realization of not being afraid to show who they are, being proud of their culture, their religion and their families. Veronica noted that the program changed the way she thought about her family by "not being shy to show how you finally are from the creations and the culture." In her narrative, Julia described how much her Mexican culture means to her.

From the songs and all to the food and traditions I am joyfully part of each and every year... 'El acostamiento del Niño Dios,' in which we rock baby Jesus to put asleep on December 24th, and traditionally, pick him up/or get him February 2nd. Traditions like

these in which I deeply enjoy because I know that it damn well means family reunion, food, and laugh to laugh.

In their culminating projects, all of the girls included images that reflected their cultural heritage, including images of Mexican food, their families, traditional celebrations and holidays as well as religious artifacts.

The girls' deep connection to their culture also emerged when they were asked who they admired. When asked to name a Latina they admired, seven girls referred to a family member. The girls indicated that they admired their mothers or another family member, because of the person's strong sense of family and hard work ethic. "I admire my mom because she's a hard working woman. That sometimes she gives her food to me when we don't have enough food. And she tries to give me the best, and always make sure I have everything I need or want," Violeta expressed. Another reason the adolescents provided for admiring their family members was their relatives' pride in their culture. Daniela expressed, "[I admire] my mom. That even though she like, she lived in Mexico and now she came here... She's still like Mexican... she's not afraid to say that she's Mexican and she doesn't, like, she's not ashamed of herself." This was a noted change from the start of the program when nine of the girls identified people who were not in their family, such as famous figures, singers and actresses. The girls showed interest in exploring their culture to find out more about themselves as a result of this experience.

Reading Strategies

During each of the sessions, project leaders modeled the use of different strategies as they read the text in their small groups. As a result of this exposure, the girls reported increases in their use of reading strategies over the course of the program. Although prior to the start of the program all of the adolescents reported utilizing at least one reading strategy to ensure they

understood what they read, the most common techniques used by nine of the girls included reading carefully, annotating and rereading. As Patricia stated, "... when I'm reading, I go back to reread the chapter or the page that I didn't understand". One adolescent was able to discuss a more comprehensive approach in that she incorporated a number of strategies while reading, such as asking questions, annotating, and researching topics in more depth on the internet.

However, when interviewed after the program about their reading strategies, the girls reported using a larger number of effective strategies including annotating, questioning, and making connections to support their comprehension. Julia noted that, "The strategies that I used were looking for ways to connect, because I think that's very important because if you don't connect to it or probably if you don't even know what you're reading you're probably not going to pay attention to it." Additionally, the girls also noted using a variety of research strategies that assisted them in monitoring their understanding such as using sticky notes, summarizing and visualizing. Paula explained that writing a summary on a post-it note at the end of each chapter helped her remember what happened in the story and reduced the need to reread to gain the information when discussing the book with her peers. In general, the range of strategies used expanded from the start of the program when girls primarily talked about general reading activities such as carefully reading or rereading.

Perceptions of Program

All the girls rated the Amoxtli program positively. Many of the responses revolved around the social component of the program. The program was organized around a social atmosphere, where girls were able to have time to talk with others about the reading and other topics. Some girls noted being able to make friends, sharing "ups and downs" of the week, going to community outings, group discussions and guest speakers as positive aspects of the program.

For example Erica stated, “There were a lot of things I enjoyed. I enjoyed the instructors. I enjoyed the girls, the food. I enjoyed the books...”. Writing was another aspect they liked about the program. They indicated that journaling helped them to think about their lives, culture and issues of self-concept. Also, writing a goal statement helped them to think about the future. Although some girls noted that they did not like that they had to read a book, they chose to remain in the program and participated in the activities. As Julia declared, “I don’t really like to read and I actually found books that I could connect to. And definitely that looking for other books could help me know that I actually am interested in reading.” Many of the girls, whether they had difficulties with reading or not, stated that they enjoyed the reading that was done during the sessions and especially liked when they were read to.

Discussion

The Amoxtli program was developed to provide an inclusive literacy community for adolescent Latinas. Over the course of the program, it became quite apparent that the girls were excited about this opportunity and appreciated being able to talk with other adolescents and adults. Although the books served as a backdrop to many of the discussions, over time these conversations expanded to issues more proximal to them. The girls were able to discuss how, like many of the characters in the books, they wrestled with their identity as a Latina – both within their family structure as well as society at large. Another trend that was noted was their willingness to be more assertive about the importance of their culture, to talk about what that meant to them, and how their background impacted their interpretations of situations or characters they were reading about. As the girls read the books, talked to other Latinas, and explored during the social outings, they appeared to appreciate their own family members more, especially their mothers, and struggles their relatives had to overcome. However, at the same

time, many of the Latinas also talked about wanting to break away from traditional norms (e.g., not moving out of the home until marriage) that their families had and the difficulties of doing that.

These experiences are very much in line with what others have noted when literacy communities are established with similar populations (e.g., Wissman, 2011). The adolescent Latinas faced and had to negotiate a complex set of cultural identity issues as they read the books and discussed them. Therefore, professionals working with adolescents in out of school literacy communities need to keep this in mind as they consider what texts to read and how they structure conversations about the material (DeBlase, 2003). The texts that are used in recreation literacy programs can provide young Latinas with ways to talk about their own cultural identity and set into motion avenues for them to explore further issues brought forward during these interactions (Carter, 2006). It is key that adolescents are able to make strong connections to the literature they read, since it allows them to make authentic connections to characters or situations taking place (Brooks, Brown, & Hampton, 2008). It is through these associations that Latinas can begin to visualize and consider possibilities not only for the characters, but for themselves based on their life experience.

Professionals heading out of school literacy programs should consider the pedagogy they use to facilitate discussions that go beyond text-central or universal themes, and to allow adolescents to incorporate their own perspectives and challenge conventional standards (Sutherland, 2005). These literacy communities provide springboards for Latinas to engage in complicated conversations with their peers not only about the text, but to explore and reflect on situations closer to home from their own perspectives (Twomey, 2007). Literacy communities, such as book clubs and literature circles, provide unique venues to explore ideas, given that

typically there are a small number of participants making it a more intimate experience (Sanacore, 2013). Thus, these recreational literacy communities can be integral to the overall literacy and identity development of Latinas, since they are able to make connections with one another and the book they are reading (Lenters, 2014). Through the social learning that literacy communities can provide, adolescents are able to reassess their beliefs and thinking about their own identity, community, and the world at large and discover other viewpoints (Davis, 2010).

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Appendix A

Amoxтли Pre-Interview Protocol

1. What types of books do you like to read? What was the last book you read about? Do you enjoy reading at home?
2. In the books you read, are there characters that you connect with or are similar to you? In what ways?
3. Can you tell me about a favorite character you have from a book or story? Why did you like the character?
4. How do you know you understand what you are reading? Are there strategies that you use to help you read?
5. What do you like to write about? What have you written in the past?
6. What do you use to help you with your writing? Do you have strategies that you use?
7. Do you use books, stories or other readings to learn more about yourself or your family? If so, give some example of what you learn?
8. Tell me about a Latina you admire? It could be someone in your family, someone you know in real life, or it could be someone that is famous, that you look up to or admire. What do you think it is about her that you admire?
9. Once you finish school what do you want to do? What do you think you need to do to make that happen? What do you think your family expects you to do after high school?
10. Have you ever written a goal statement for yourself? Are your goals and ideas about what you want similar to what your family expects you to do or are they different? Give examples of how they are the same and/or different.

Appendix B

Amoxтли Post Interview Protocol

1. Do you enjoy reading books?
2. Did you connect /relate with any of the characters? If so, which ones? Why did you feel connected/or relate to the character?
3. Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or Why not?
4. Has reading this book changed the way you think?
 - yourself
 - family
 - school
 - future
 - How? and Why?
5. Describe some strategies that you used. Were any of the strategies helpful? Which ones? Why?
6. Tell me about a Latina you admire (can be someone you know personally or someone you know about)? What is it about them that you like?
7. Once you finish school, what do you want to do? What do you think you need to do make that happen?
8. Did writing your goals (goal statement) help you plan for your future? Did it help in other ways?
9. How did you feel about writing in your journal? Did it help in any way? (Clarify your ideas, help your articulate your thoughts.)
10. How did Amoxтли help you think about yourself and your culture?
11. Can you tell me something you enjoyed about the group?
12. Can you tell me something that you did not like about the group?