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When Names and Schools Collide: Critically Analyzing Depictions of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Children Negotiating Their Names in Picture Books

Tina Keller & Judith K. Franzak

Abstract

Names and experiences in schools are often tied together in a child's identity formation. This is true for all children, but becomes an increasingly important topic as classrooms in the United States are becoming more diverse. In this study, we seek to explore the idea of names as identity in picture books depicting minority children. In doing so, we seek to understand the connections between the pressures to assimilate the names of diverse children and the behavior of their classroom teachers. To explore this topic, we have chosen to examine ten picture books published since 2000 that depict diverse children and their experiences surrounding their name and their identity in schools in the United States. To analyze these texts we used an inductive qualitative model for content analysis (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2011) and critical discourse analysis (Rogers and Christian, 2007) noting scenes and illustrations from the texts that best represent three main themes: Negotiating the Pressures to Assimilate, Teacher Characters and the Abdication of Responsibility, and Negotiating the Fear of Identity Loss. Critical literacy and postcolonial thought offer insights into the fear and pain associated with assimilation to school settings as well as the roles of adults, both parents and teachers, in perpetuating the assimilation of students into U.S. schools. The findings support the idea that while these books seek to empower minority and immigrant children, they often inadvertently reify the very systems of power they set out to critique.

Keywords

Names Identity Picture books Assimilation Diversity

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“I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for ‘talking back’ to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name.”

Gloria Anzaldúa, (1987, p. 75)

Introduction

The seemingly simple question “What is your name?” is one of the first outward markers of a struggle between assimilation and acceptance. This teacher-student exchange can set the tone for a classroom experience that can be empowering or destructive and can have “profound effects on children’s feelings of self-worth” (Baghban, 2007, p. 73). Understanding this encounter can shed light upon the pressures that culturally and linguistically diverse students face surrounding the negotiation of their names. This analysis of picture books depicting name negotiation illuminates how texts that seek to empower may also inadvertently reify the systems they seek to critique.

While several studies examine immigrant children and their experiences in a new culture as depicted in children’s books (Lamme, Fu and Lowery, 2004; Hadaway and Young, 2009; Yoon, Simpson and Haag, 2010), the particular issue of how name negotiation is conceptualized has not been adequately explored. We examine name negotiation of culturally and linguistically diverse child characters illustrated in the school context, as it is in this institutional context where children often first encounter dissonance between their unique identities and the dominant school culture. This dissonance is evident when personal names are seen as problematic. We believe that names symbolically represent a child’s cultural identity and that the denial or change of a child’s given name is an attempt to force assimilation, even when the child seemingly chooses this new name. In contrast, the support and acceptance of a child’s name in a school context speaks to an environment that welcomes diversity and validates the child.

Review of the Literature

A name is both a foundation and a connection that signifies relationships with family, culture, and identity (Kohli and Solórzano, 2012). Names represent “important gender, ethnic, culture, and social class implications... Naming is an important decision with critical cultural identity implications” (May, Bingham and Barrett-Mynes, 2010, p. 6). Names are packed with cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic significance. Choosing a name for a child is a difficult decision for many parents, one more complex and multifaceted when the child is not a member of the dominant culture. Stephens and Lee (2006, p. 1) explain, “Because identity is conceptualized as a communicative process... there arises a complex and ambivalent process of defining and articulating identity,” particularly in regards to personal names. At birth, parents must decide if they are to connect their baby to the mainstream culture, or tie the child to their cultural and ethnic heritage, or strive to do both. Riki Thompson (2006) discussed this phenomenon as “negotiating bilingual, bicultural, and binomial identities” (p. 180), noting that naming and renaming decisions occur throughout a lifetime. Renaming occurs for a variety of reasons. Some families assume that their child’s name is too difficult for English speakers to pronounce, so they choose a name with phonemes accessible to English speakers (Yi, 2013). For others, renaming occurs with the hopes of protection from ridicule at school (Thompson, 2006; Souto-Manning, 2007). In some cases, children conceal their given name as a means of protecting their inner world, only revealing it when they feel accepted (Igoa, 1995). Other individuals consider choosing an Americanized name a part of the immigration process (Thompson, 2006). In all of these scenarios, the parents and children are responding to a larger cultural context. Researchers find that even as adults, the memories associated with names and (re)naming are palatable and often traumatic (Souto-Manning, 2011; Thompson, 2006; Igoa, 1995).

Children are sometimes renamed against their explicit consent by outside forces such as teachers or peers. The historical tradition of renaming individuals in the United States continues to this day, as Rita Kohli and Daniel Solorzano (2012) concluded that mispronouncing or replacing a student's name impacted the self-perception of students so dramatically that some completely changed their names, while others identified with their mispronounced name for their entire school year. These racial microaggressions caused pain, embarrassment, and feelings of inferiority for the renamed students. Souto-Manning (2011) describes renaming as colonization and calls for educators to evaluate their own practices with a new awareness of the lifelong impact of their actions.

Children's literature illuminates the complex issues surrounding name, identity, and culture in contemporary United States society. Baghban (2007) notes picture books can be powerful tools in helping children cope with the pressures, expectations, and new identities associated with immigration and can "resignify established assumptions and meanings of identity" (Stephens and Lee, 2006, p. 1). Therefore, the use of children's books to discuss topics of language, names, and identity can allow all children and their teachers the opportunity to explore and consider these topics in a familiar yet meaningful context.

Methods

Ray Misson and Wendy Morgan (2006) argue critical literacy is "based on a poststructuralist understanding that all language is socially contextualized, and so texts are inherently ideological, and that texts are fundamental to the construction of our identity" (p. x). It is the ideological aspect of name negotiation that shapes our exploration of the texts. The educational experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse students intersect around issues of race, language, class, and nationality in school environments that often demand assimilation. Ngugi wa Thiong'O (1986) describes colonialism as having a two pronged technique of oppression; first, it requires "the destruction or deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature, and literature, and [second] the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer" (p. 16). Critical literacy and postcolonial thought shed light upon the fears and pain associated with assimilation to majoritarian school settings as well as the roles of adults in perpetuating the colonial assimilation.

With this theoretical lens in mind, we conducted analyses of ten best selling picture books published since 2000 in which a character's name negotiation featured as a central theme. While the ages of the children depicted in the books range from kindergartners to middle school students, the books are appropriate for middle to upper elementary school age children. Eight books depict immigrant children entering U.S. schools for the first time; two texts describe name negotiation of characters who appear to not be immigrants but whose names present them with a conflict in the school context. We use the term *name negotiation* to refer to the process in which a character (1) encounters a problem with his or her name as evidenced by interaction with another character or social institution; and (2) the character expresses agency in negotiating his or her name through reflection or action. Using a framework of guiding questions drawn from the scholarship and personal experiences, we read each book at least five times. Through content analysis, we identified three central themes that address our research question. Across the texts we studied, name negotiation was associated with assimilationist pressures, an absence of adult

advocates, and fears of identity loss. Together, these themes serve to perpetuate an ideology in which hegemonic values often contradict messages of affirmation that texts might have been intended to communicate. The themes illustrate the way name negotiation is normalized as an acceptable social practice, one that reifies the idea that entering a U.S. school necessitates a reconsideration of identity for many children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Findings

Negotiating Pressures to Assimilate

The impetus for name negotiation across all the books was a desire to fit in. Being accepted and valued in social contexts is a human need, one with which all children must contend. Our analysis of this phenomenon revealed not just a personal desire to fit in on the characters' parts, but also the presence of a pervasive assimilationist paradigm that values dominant culture. In these books, name negotiation appears as an integral part of becoming Americanized. Indeed, the very question of name change is framed within an assimilationist paradigm—a paradigm which often extracts a significant toll on ethnic minorities (Tse, 1998).

In several of the books, characters experience teasing, bullying, racial slurs, and even physical aggression surrounding their identity and given name. In *The Name Jar* (Choi, 2001), after experiencing teasing on the bus, Unhei refuses to reveal her name to the students in her class. She worries about her name and declares, "...it is *so* hard to pronounce... I don't want to be different from *all* the American kids." This thread of accommodation pressures runs across the texts in our study. In *Sumi's First Day of School Ever* (Pak and Kim, 2003), classmates tease Sumi for being different: "A boy stuck out his tongue. He made a noise, He squished his eyes," an insulting racial gesture. An implied message in these texts is that the bullying would cease if the characters assimilated. In several of the stories the decision to assimilate is manifested in a decision to change or hide a name. In *My Name is Bilal* (Mobin-Uddin and Kiwak, 2005), Bilal witnesses the bullying of his sister for wearing a Muslim headscarf. He decides to change his name to Bill "Because I want to be like everybody else. Nobody else in the class has a name like Bilal." When his teacher encourages him to keep his given name, Bilal says, "I don't want anyone to know I'm Muslim... You won't tell anyone, will you?" Bilal recognizes that his name signifies an identity unwelcomed at school. His name works against his desire to fit into the majoritarian mold and thus gain acceptance. His teacher, challenging Islamophobia, helps Bilal reframe his fear and reclaim the power of his name. The text situates name negotiation as both a personal and political process, and in Bilal's ultimate decision to reclaim his name, it rejects an assimilationist mandate.

In *My Name is Yoon* (Recorvits and Swiatkowska, 2003), the child wishes to continue to write her name using Korean letters, while her parents and teacher insist that she learn to write it in English. She notes, "I did not like YOON. Lines. Circles, Each standing alone. My name looks happy in Korean...the symbols dance together." In the end of the story, she acquiesces and writes her name in English, but rationalizes this decision because "It still means Shining Wisdom." This decision, pleases the adults and further assimilates Yoon into her English speaking school.

One text portrayed an assimilation-driven name change in a positive light. The book *Hannah is My Name* (Yang, 2004), recounts the author's own family journey as undocumented immigrants. Regarding her new name, she observes "It feels strange to become Hannah all of a sudden," and rationalizes the name change as a necessary step in becoming Americanized: "We want to become Americans more than anything in the world. We want to be free." As a compromise, her parents use her Taiwanese nickname "Tadpole" at home. Seeing her new name on an immigration card, she proclaims, "Hannah doesn't sound like a stranger's name anymore. It's my name. Hannah is my name and America is our home." In this case, the child makes this sacrifice in order to adopt an Americanized identity. The tacit message of this name negotiation, however, should be understood in the context of fear that permeates the lives of undocumented immigrants. The fear is described throughout the text, illustrating structural forces at work promoting an assimilationist paradigm. Yet, in affirming the character's satisfaction with her name change, the text ultimately falls short of critiquing assimilationist norms. In contrast, stand texts in which the child chooses to keep her or his name even when the pressure to assimilate comes from parents. In *Good Bye, 382 Shin Dan Dong* (Park, Park, and Choi, 2002), the protagonist's parents suggest she use Rose, the English translation of her name; yet, she decides to introduce herself to her new neighbors with her Korean name, Jangmi. She says to herself, "Maybe someday I would adopt Rose as my American name. But not today." While Jangmi is able initially to resist assimilation, she senses that she may need to renegotiate this in the future.

In three of the texts, *The Name Jar*, *My Name is Sangoel*, and *Rene Has Two Names*, grandparents or cultural elders function as a source of support for characters resisting assimilationist pressures. In *The Name Jar*, when Unhei left Korea, her grandmother gave her a red pouch with a wooden name stamp. She tells a friend, "Whenever I miss my grandma, I use it to fill a piece of paper." Throughout the book, she makes associations between her name and her grandmother. In *My Name is Sangoel* (Williams, Mohammed, and Stock, 2009), upon preparing to leave Sudan for the United States, the Wise One tells the protagonist, "Remember, you will always be a Dinka. You will be Sangoel. Even in America." After weeks of people mispronouncing his name, Sangoel's mother tells him, "America is our home now. Perhaps you need an American name." Sangoel rejects this premise, drawing instead on the mentoring of his cultural elder, and educating his peers and teacher how to pronounce his name correctly. In these texts, it is the memories and past experiences with grandparents or elders that provide strength, not the living presence of grandparents in the child's daily life. Thus, while grandparents and elders did promote resistance to assimilation, it was still based upon the child's ability to remember their elders' advice. The tacit and sometimes explicit assimilationist impulse that runs throughout these texts situates name negotiation as an uncomfortable experience for child characters. It could be hoped, then, that the adults in the stories would function to alleviate this discomfort. Our analysis revealed that often this was not the case.

Teacher Characters and the Abdication of Responsibility for Name Negotiation

Given the real power that teachers carry in relation to children in the school context, it is important to consider how the teachers in the texts are depicted in the name-negotiation context. Although childhood itself is a socially-constructed phenomenon this recognition does not negate asymmetry in adult-child power balances. Cultural models of the adult/child binary inform a societal expectation that adults have responsibility for fostering safe spaces for child learning;

this is particularly true regarding the role of a teacher. While the books we examine depict a range of expressions of child agency, these expressions are often situated in the context of an adult abdication of responsibility, which we find problematic.

Whereas parents were often depicted as not actively resisting name change, teachers were often directly implicated in name negotiation, in some cases, actively contributing to renaming. In *My Name is Sangoel* the teacher enables teasing when she repeatedly mispronounces Sangoel's name, only declaring his name a "good name" once Sangoel is able to make it easy for her to pronounce. The teacher appears in three illustrations in this book but only looks Sangoel in the eye in the last image when she is able to correctly pronounce his name. Such imagery conveys the understanding that Sangoel and his teacher may now have the potential for a relationship since Sangoel was able to enlighten her. The responsibility for a respectful teacher-student relationship belongs to the child, a theme which appeared across multiple texts.

Often the teachers are depicted as uninformed and culturally disconnected from the child protagonists, who take on the teacher's role by providing others with insights into their names and cultures. In *The Name Jar*, Unhei's classroom teacher appears disorganized and hasn't prepared the class for Unhei's arrival. He warmly introduces her, but doesn't seem to know what else to do. The illustrations depict him as disheveled, peering out from behind oversized glasses, often standing at the side of the classroom, never in charge. Once Unhei reveals her name to the class she notes, "Soon the kids began to say it better. Even Mr. Cocotos." The clause implies that the teacher is more likely to mispronounce her name than her peers, further reinforcing a lack of advocacy for Unhei. The vacuum of teacher authority, however, allows the children to interrupt the discourses surrounding name negotiation.

In *René Has Two Last Names* (Colato and Graullera Ramirez, 2009), René's negotiation is focused on his struggle to retain his two last names as was the norm in his native El Salvador. This cultural misunderstanding arises the first day of school when the classroom teacher includes only one of René's last names on a nametag. His teacher is unaware there is a misunderstanding until René provides the cultural value associated with keeping his name intact by sharing his family tree during a class project. He explains, "If you call me René Colato only, the other half of my family disappears." René then presents information about his relatives and his culture. After being educated by René, the teacher approves of the preservation of his complete name, smiling and declaring, "From now on you will be René Colato Láinez." Again, this book highlights that the responsibility for ensuring cultural acceptance and the right to retain one's name falls on the shoulders of the child. In this case, the teacher, while presented as unknowing, is open to learning from students and expresses a desire to create an inclusive classroom. This kind of improvisational pedagogy flips traditional notions of power in the classroom and allows for learning that validates students' lived experiences and identities.

Interestingly, in *René Has Two Last Names*, the teacher is only illustrated once in the entire book, and not until the twelfth page, even though her name is mentioned in the first sentence of the text. This is a common occurrence in several of these books (Colato Láinez and Graullera Ramirez, 2005). While teachers are mentioned, the focus of the illustrations is on the children. This further emphasizes the idea that, while teachers are present in these experiences, they are either unable or unwilling to actually help the students negotiate the pressures that they face in

school. Taken in isolation, the illustrations suggest the kind of space in which children are free of adult regulation, a space in which resistance to cultural models of name negotiation might be possible. However, the teacher or parent absent in illustrations is present in the written text. An interesting contrast occurs when the illustrations are juxtaposed to the written text. Does one message (pictorial) of suggested agency counteract another message (written) suggestive of subordination? It is possible to read the books in this way, though the weight of the authorial voice conveyed in the written text is ultimately difficult to dismiss.

The character of Yoon might also have had the opportunity to contribute to her teacher's and peers' learning had the teacher responded to Yoon differently. Instead, the teacher implicitly critiques Yoon's written name, acting as a force of pressure rather than safety. Had the teacher been willing to learn from Yoon, she could have provided the kind of dialogic learning space in which all classroom community members could gain in linguistic and cultural richness. Campano (2007) reminds us that even the most well-meaning educators can overlook the knowledge immigrant students can offer. Advocating a "pedagogy of improvisation" (p. 118), he argues for the importance of creating an inquiry space in which all become learners. Such a pedagogy is not evident in Yoon's story. Instead of supporting a child experiencing culture shock, and giving Yoon the time and space to explore her identity, the teacher "Shook her head and frowned." At the end of the book, once Yoon acquiesces and writes her name using English letters, she is rewarded by a hug from her classroom teacher. An illustration depicts the smiling teacher's face and the back of Yoon's head, emphasizing the teacher's retention of power. The text normalizes the idea that Yoon's need for understanding and support are only met once Yoon is willing to assimilate, reinforcing the belief that minoritized children must conform in order to gain the approval of the classroom teacher.

In the texts we studied, only two teachers are depicted as advocates for children negotiating their names. In *My Name is Bilal*, Mr. Ali gives Bilal a book about the historical Bilal Ibn Rabah that becomes a source of strength to Bilal in retaining his name. Mr. Ali is a cultural insider; he knows the child's family and religious traditions. He is able to make connections with Bilal on a deep level, building trust and support. The second example of a teacher-as-advocate is the teacher in *Sumi's First Day of School Ever* (Pak and Kim, 2003). In this text, the teacher, while a cultural outsider, is able to make Sumi feel at home in her new environment. When she observes another child making fun of Sumi, she quickly steps in and demonstrates that the behavior is unacceptable. In the illustrations, she warmly looks Sumi in the eyes and smiles. She also validates Sumi by placing her artwork on the wall, helping Sumi conclude that "Maybe school is not so scary." This teacher transcends the cultural and linguistic differences between herself and Sumi and creates a welcoming classroom for all students.

In both of these books, while the teachers are quite different from one another, they advocate for the children experiencing name negotiation. Neither teacher waits for the child to earn the right to retain his or her name and neither shirks their responsibility to include all children as valuable members of the classroom. These texts present scenarios in which power as embodied in the teachers is used to create a space for voices that are often suppressed, providing a counter-narrative to a cultural model that normalizes the concept of renaming to fit in.

One book that offers an interesting example of character's collaborative advocacy for identity is *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match* (Brown and Palacios, 2011). Marisol's blended multiracial, multicultural identity affords her a different status in negotiation of her identity than the other characters who are depicted as racial *and* cultural outsiders. Marisol proudly displays her mixed heritage as integral to her eclectic presentation of self. When she acquiesces to pressures from her teacher and peers to present a solitary identity and starts to "match" in her clothing, food, and habits, she experiences fear and identity loss. With the newfound support of her teacher, Marisol reclaims her right to be Marisol McDonald. This example epitomizes a teacher that is able to see how her unintentional actions caused pain and a confusion of identity for a child.

Although some of the texts we studied include supportive teachers, we found that the prevailing pattern in most of the picture books is an absence of teacher characters who actively acknowledge, sympathize with, or support the child to assert their named identity. We believe it is significant that teachers in this set of books are mostly depicted, not as allies, but as adults who are uninformed, culturally disconnected from their students, and absent or neglectful. In these works of fiction most teachers are depicted as abdicating their responsibility to mitigate the feelings of fear that children experience when faced with the possibility of losing their name and perhaps their identity.

Negotiating the Fear of Identity Loss

The characters in the books we examined juggled the desire for acceptance with a fear of what fitting in would cost them, particularly regarding the possibility of their name change. A representative example of this is in the book *René Has Two Names*. As noted, in his first day at his new school, René Colato Laínez is dismayed when his surname is shortened to only Colato by his teacher. That night, René wakes up with a nightmare and vows he can not lose part of his name again. The accompanying illustration effectively conveys the character's consciousness about the significance of a name change to his sense of self. René wakes up at midnight, eyes wide, mouth agape, looking at a photograph of a smiling version of himself surrounded by both sets of his grandparents (from whom his dual last name is derived). The contrast between the images of the larger anxiety-stricken René and the smaller family photograph is striking, as René contemplates a future without the symbolic connection to his extended family. While the nightmare is indicative of fear and oppression, it also illuminates the character's consciousness of his agency, as it is after experiencing the nightmare that he expresses empowerment by challenging the dropping of his last name.

In losing their names or fearing such a loss in the U.S. school context, these characters express how a name is essential to an understanding of self. This understanding is in agreement with research that establishes that the link between name and identity is strong and often laden with emotion (Souto-Manning, 2011; Dion, 1983). The connection between one's given name and identity is consistently depicted across these texts as being strong and meaningful. It is natural, then, that when this connection is threatened feelings of fear can arise, specifically so when a character is depicted as being an outsider to the dominant school culture whether through language or culture. In the texts we examined where the characters faced an involuntary name change (either initiated by parents, or, in the case of *René Has Two Names*, an uninformed teacher), the characters expressed anxiety and fear about the implications of the name change for

their sense of self. In several of the texts, dreams and their attendant elements of fear provide the protagonists with mental space to address issues of identity. Upon waking from unpleasant dreams, the characters resolve to assert a right to their names. In this way, dreams serve as an important negotiation strategy for characters.

We see this in *René Has Two Names*, *My Name is Sangoel*, *My Name is Bilal*, and *My Name is Yoon*. In *My Name is Sangoel*, it is the fear of displacement in a new culture and dealing with pain from past experiences that cause the dreams. Sangoel decides to sleep on the floor of his room instead of his “American bed” and dreams of the war in Sudan. This scene presents an interesting poignancy for a Western, first-world perspective where sleeping in a bed is normal. Inverting this and reclaiming a normed experience for himself, Sangoel expresses agency. As with dream or sleep scenes in the other texts, this liminal space simultaneously allows for agency and oppression: through his dreams, he can enact these various negotiation strategies to resist the assimilation of one’s self and gain the confidence to imagine an identity without fear. This is evident in *My Name is Bilal* (Mobin-Uddin & Kiwak, 2005), as Bilal is afraid that his peers will discover that he is a Muslim by his name. He hides his real name, replacing it with a more “school friendly” substitute of Bill as his first name and Al as his middle name. After his teacher prompts him to read about the historical Bilal Ibn Rabah, who was persecuted for his beliefs, Bilal dreams of people placing heavy rocks upon his chest to kill him telling him that they will only stop if he changes his name. In his dream he proclaims, “My name is Bilal, I am a Muslim.” As a result of this dream, Bilal gains confidence in reclaiming his name feeling a sense of peace from his faith.

Children’s fears about name loss are sometimes depicted in fiction as being experienced by the extended family. *Sumi’s First Day of School Ever* (Park, Park and Choi, 2003) provided the singular example as a pre-emptive move to preserve a character’s name. In the opening scene, Sumi’s mother is teaching her two important things that she must know upon entering a U.S. school for the first time. Sumi must learn, “. . . what people said when they wanted to know her name, and she taught Sumi how to say it.” This opening scene sets the stage for the importance of identity as tied to one’s name and the implied maternal concern that one may lose this name in the U.S. school system, providing insight into the fears of family members when they send their children off to school. Sumi’s mother creates a protective barrier for Sumi as she launches into a new unknown world of an English-speaking school. Sumi is not to forget who she is. Her mother equips her both with a foundation in who she is—her name—and the tools to interact with others—understanding the question “What is your name?” This example highlights the two-fold realization that a name is both a foundation and a connection, and anticipates the significance of names in a child’s social network (Thompson, 2006).

Across the texts we examined, illustrations help to depict the emotions of fear and loss characters experience. Many of the children in the books are depicted as looking down toward the ground, with their head lowered, furrowed eyebrows, or worried expressions. In the classroom illustration in *My Name is Sangoel*, Sangoel is the only child looking down with his eyes closed. The opening illustration in *My Name is Yoon* depicts Yoon standing alone in a meadow with a solemn expression on her face and an almost ghostly appearance. Her sorrow and loneliness is palpable as one reads the text, “My name is Yoon. I came here from Korea, a country far away.” These visual representations can also be seen to work in tandem with the written text to convey

not so much a sense of the characters' isolation, but rather their individuality, a condition that Barandiaran, X., Di Paolo, E. & Rohde, M. (2009) maintain is essential for agency. While individuality for these characters is painful, it is a necessary precondition for challenging the cultural model that frames their name change.

In many of the books in this study, the underlying message is that for children to move past feelings of fear and loss associated with their names, they must take control. As was the case with pressures to assimilate, adults are largely not depicted as being effective supports for children negotiating fear of identity loss. Often the responsibility rests solely upon the child. The mainstream culture is depicted as unable or unwilling to change until the child takes action to defend his or her right to express one of their deepest forms of identity—their name. There are very few adult allies; even parents are often depicted as either ambivalent, or, in some texts, encouragers of a name change. This parental re-naming documented by Souto-Manning (2007) and teacher racial microaggressions researched by Kohli and Solorzano (2012) highlight the ways that adults tend to require the child to take the lead, and bear the brunt of fighting to keep their name and identity.

Taken as a group, the books in this study reflect multidimensional factors and situations surrounding the assimilation of names and identity for culturally and linguistically diverse students. We propose that the characters depicted in these ten picture books reflect the actual experiences of many children in U.S. schools, making the impetus behind understanding the pressures of assimilation all the more substantial. Together these texts provide a picture of the multiple forces at work in the negotiation of name and identity in an assimilation context. Many children are depicted in these texts as feeling the pull toward assimilation, yet ultimately finding the strength to resist. These protagonists seek to hold on to their linguistic and cultural heritage by resisting the colonizing of their names, often without the assistance of their teachers. Accompanying this resistance is a negotiation of fears associated with potential or actual name change.

Discussion and Implications

What can we learn from these books? Teachers and parents of all students can recognize the critical importance of valuing students' names as part of their very identity. The issues of power present in these depictions of name negotiation point to the very real experience of many children in U.S. schools. As one Korean American woman vividly recalled, "I came home crying and my parents said that we could all have American names. They never thought that [our names] would be a traumatic experience, but it was" (Thompson, 2006, p. 195). Experiences like Thompson's demonstrate the emotional costs of name negotiation and work to counteract the pressures that exert the perceived need for an Americanized name. We realize that teachers are unlikely to speak every language or understand the naming traditions of all cultures represented by the students in their classroom and assert that such all-knowingness is antithetical to critical multiculturalism in that this approach, were it possible, would smack of essentialism that overlooks the individuality of people within cultural contexts. Likewise, it is possible that English-speaking teachers will mispronounce the names of their students. Mistakes are bound to happen. However, we contend that there is a vast difference between using ignorance to further marginalize students by establishing one's authority as the all knowing expert, such as the

teacher in *My Name is Yoon* or to provide a space for students to use their own power to educate the class, including the teacher, as evidenced in *René Has Two Last Names*.

While not a focus of specific attention in our study, it is important to recognize the pedagogical potential of three bilingual books in the study. The books *René Has Two Last Names*, *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match*, and *I am René, the Boy* are entirely bilingual, devoting a page or section to both English and Spanish. The very nature of having bilingual text honors and appreciates the child's first language and creates the opportunity for English monolinguals to appreciate diversity. It is not a coincidence that these three texts also were the most powerful representations of children able to negotiate between two cultures, exhibiting pride in their many identities. At the same time, it was discouraging that the books depicting Korean or Chinese students were not bilingual and only contained isolated words in the protagonist's first language. While authors or publishers may feel that some readers may be unable to or uninterested in reading Korean, the impact of having a bilingual text further emphasizes the fact that the child depicted in the book comes from a rich culture, with past experiences and a language that has value.

The books reviewed in this study portray a variety of renaming situations, teacher responses, and protagonists' standpoints towards assimilation. Children, parents and teachers can learn from reading a range of these books, as a collection helps disrupt the prevalence a single story. For example, if students were only to have read, *My Name is Hannah*, they may infer that all immigrants are eager to shed their traditional backgrounds, names, and home country in the desire to become Americanized. While this book was written as an autobiography it does not describe the experiences of all immigrant children encountering the assimilation of names and cultures in U.S. schools. Reading a variety of books that depict the diversity and complexity of name negotiation is one way to cultivate respect for individuals and their names.

Pedagogically speaking, it is also important to recognize that the texts we studied largely portrayed the name negotiation of immigrant children. Our own professional experiences tell us that many U.S.-born students have their own stories of name-negotiation during their school years. In only two of the texts we studied did we find depictions of culturally and linguistically different children who were not immigrants to the U.S. The absences of these characters in stories exploring names merits attention, both in terms of recognizing the renaming that occurs to many students as well as the perception that some names indicate immigrant status. This was directly addressed in *My Name is Bilal*, when the bully in the story tells Bilal's sister to "Go back to her own country." Bilal responds, "My sister and I are Muslims...and America is our country. We were born here." Children need more examples of books that portray diversity in many differing ways, and teachers must likewise be prepared to use these books critically, sensitively, and effectively in classrooms.

In the mainstream culture, the assimilation of culturally and linguistically diverse children is often depicted as "painless and smooth" (Nieto and Bode, 2008, p. 6). The characters depicted in these books challenge this belief and highlight the pressures to assimilate and the fears of identity loss experienced by the protagonists. In most of these books, it was through the child's ingenuity and self-advocacy that they were able to retain their names and identity. However, it is our contention that, while these books seek to empower minority and immigrant children, they

often inadvertently reify the very systems of power they set out to critique. These protagonists, while potentially empowering for readers, can also function to protect adults from their responsibility leaving children to defend the use of their names and negotiate their fears alone. As the child characters negotiate their names and the attendant pressures and conflicts outlined in our findings, they serve as semiotic reminders of why critical readings are important. It is through exploring contradictory and dissonant meanings that readers can come to know more fully the complexities of name negotiation.

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