

“The Way Water Takes to Paper”: Identifying Teacher Caring in YA Novels with Latinx Characters

In research conducted over the last decade, Garza and his colleagues (Garza, 2007, 2009; Garza & Huerta, 2014) have examined how Latinx students perceive and identify caring behavior in their secondary school teachers. This research into an *ethic of care* suggests that Latinx students do perceive their teachers, whether Latinx or not, and their behaviors differently than White students do (Garza, 2009). Likewise, students’ responses suggest many teachers have difficulty demonstrating their care.

Despite the fact that classroom demographics have dramatically changed in many school settings, teachers are especially challenged to understand Latino students’ cultural, social, and linguistic assets. Therefore, teachers must make a conscious effort to know their respective community of learners and respond to them in a culturally responsive way. (Garza, 2009, p. 301)

Using the characteristics that Garza and his colleagues found in their research as a framework (e.g., reflect a kind disposition through actions, available to the student, respond with a positive tone, and show a personal interest in the student’s well being inside and outside the classroom), we analyzed four young adult novels with primary characters who self-identified as Latinx: *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* (Medina, 2013), *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* (Quintero, 2014), *Under the Mesquite Tree* (Garcia McCall, 2011), and *Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood* (Sáenz, 2004). These books were selected because they were award-winning novels that included plot points in a school setting as well as teachers as significant characters.

Garza and Huerta (2014) argue that, “Considering Latino youths’ perceptions of caring behaviors may improve social and academic interactions between teachers and students and provide more positive schooling experiences for students” (p. 146). Evaluating how these novels portray caring (or a lack of caring) by teachers of Latinx students, and how the teachers’ words and actions are perceived by the student characters, we hope to provide models and insight to teachers as to how to improve their demonstration of caring for their students.