

Sabbatical Report
March 21, 2018
Dr. Kathleen Contreras

Strikeouts & Golazos:
Creating Bilingual Biographies to Promote Educational Equity, Biliteracy
& Positive Self-identity for Latino Children

The primary purpose of this project was to create two new works of non-fiction literature for the expanding market of bilingual/multicultural literature, specifically biographies of significant sports figures for children. The biographies focus on two popular Latino sports figures, one in baseball, ex-L.A. Dodgers pitcher Fernando Valenzuela, and the other a global soccer star, Javier, “Chicharito” Hernandez.

These two individuals have and continue to contribute to the sports world, in various roles, not only in athleticism, but also in the broader Latino community living in the U.S. Both are people of integrity, family, fame, and gifted athleticism, who demonstrate a positive impact on young Latino boys and girls living in the U.S.

During my sabbatical in the fall of 2017, I was able to accomplish three of the methodological research components proposed: 1) biographical research of both individuals; 2) Participant observation and fieldwork in the respective sports environment of both Fernando (baseball) and Javier (soccer); and 3) interviewing Fernando and his support team and interviewing Javier’s teammates.

Specifically, for securing more biographical info on Fernando’s professional and personal life, I wrote to La Dodger Public Relations and was invited by their press team to Dodger Stadium to interview Fernando, his Spanish language broadcaster colleague (Jaime Jarrin), view a game from the press box, speak with sports journalists, and even meet and briefly interviewed the Dodger baseball scout (Mike Brito) who first discovered Fernando playing ball in Mexico in the 1980’s. (See attached photos: end of document).

Interviewing Fernando, who has a history of declining interviews, was historical in so many ways. Number one, he rarely grants interviews; 2) a female in the press box is rare; 3) being able to conduct the interview in Spanish and English facilitated the trust and depth of his answers during the course of the interview. As the interview was for the purpose of writing a children’s book, he agreed to a few minutes before the game. His colleague Jaime Jarrin, who was also Fernando’s translator provided interesting stories of Fernando’s early days on the team, both at home games and on the road.

In addition, Fernando and Jaime suggested I speak with Mike Scoscia, the manager of the California Angels. Mike was Fernando’s teammate, but more importantly, his catcher in the 1980’s. Since pitcher and catcher have a strong communication bond, I decided to follow their suggestion. I met Mike at Angel Stadium where his press team coordinated an interview with him a few minutes before the game and we met in the Angel dugout.

Mike provided some funny stories and even spoke Spanish to me when I asked him about Fernando's communication style. He had a unique perspective of Latino players, having played with, and now coaching so many from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.

After triangulating the data based on Fernando's sports and personal life, I began the process of distilling the many stories, facts, quotes, and baseball and personal history to align it with children's reading and interest level. After many drafts and reading aloud to a small focus group of children, I was ready to seek publication. (For an excerpt from the completed manuscript, please see attached)

I followed much the same process for gathering data on Javier "Chicharito" Hernandez, (interviewing teammates and club officials of his current team). However, I was unable to interview him directly as his professional agent in Mexico would not grant access to him without a financial commitment. In other words, the agent demanded payment for direct access to him. I am still working on establishing some kind of direct request through a variety of different sources, in order to do an interview with Javier, in order to write the full biography.

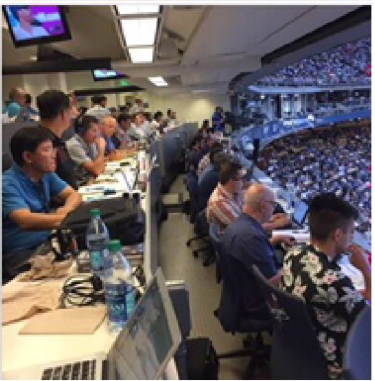
I have a first draft manuscript, with Javier's biographical facts, quotes from teammates, coaching staff, even himself (found on video excerpts). However, I am hopeful in securing access to him some time after this summer World Cup soccer competition, in order to substantiate and expand upon his biography. It's important I complete the biography book for children, as he is a positive role model for children, especially Latino immigrants who both adore the sport, the Mexican National team, and Javier, the player and the young man. He is also the UNICEF Ambassador representing Mexico. Please see attached photos of Javier at his home game in England where he plays with the English Premier league on the team West Ham United. See attached photos at end of document) & (See attached for an excerpt from the manuscript).

I am currently seeking publication via a literary agent, as most publishing houses now require literary representation in order to submit the manuscript, (even though I'm a published children's author of 4 previous books). Since I'm seeking a large bilingual audience, I have identified several publishing houses, which specialize in Latino children's literature with bilingual translations and will submit in mid-April when submissions are accepted.) In addition, I will be attending the *Color of Children's Literature* conference in New York on April 7, 2018, to read for editors and literary agents in this field.

The process of writing a children's biography from conceptual idea, to research, fieldwork, interviews, writing, editing, and eventual publishing is both methodological procedural yet, creative in its formation. I appreciate the support of the sabbatical leave as it facilitated the travel, access, and creative writing process in supporting my goal of eventual publication in the bilingual children's publishing marketplace, which will further promote educational equity, biliteracy, and positive self-identity for Latino children.

Photos at Dodger Stadium with Fernando & Jaime Jarrin





Mike Scoscia (Fernando's catcher in the 1980's)



Attending soccer game at London Stadium West Ham United: Chicharito Hernandez





Kathleen Contreras

Excerpt from:

From México to the World: Javier "Chicharito" Hernandez



The soccer ball never stops spinning for Javier "Chicharito" Hernández, Mexico's top goal scorer. Let's spin around the globe and travel with Chicharito, yesterday and today, as he packs his sports bag and ball for the next game.



Chicharito's first stop is, of course, in México. His travel bag is light as he plays for his first professional team, *Las Chivas de Guadalajara*. He was scouted for their club team when he was just nine years old! Later, in his teens, he turned professional making his first pro goal for Chivas when he was 18.

Come game time, Chivas fans wear red and white stripe jerseys. Sometimes they paint their faces with the team's colors. Like other global fans, they cheer for their team, play drums, and wave banners.

The whistle sounds, the game begins. Like an engine, the team and ball start to move forward. Chicharito, as a striker, plays forward and accelerates, cuts in and out and between, weaving a zig -zag pattern in the top half of the pitch. His teammate crosses him the ball...He takes a shot...The ball spins and curves around three players heads and out of reach of the goalie, as it hits all net.

Goooooooool for Las Chivas! Goooooooool by Chicharito!

He flies around the field like a proud Mexican eagle. His teammates catch up to him and jump for joy!

Just like his grandfather and father who both played professional soccer, Chicharito has been kicking the ball, since he was able to walk and run. He was born to play soccer!

In fact, just after learning to talk, he said to people he met, "Do you want my autograph. Because someday I'm going to play for Mexico's junior national team."

Like his father, Chicharito has greenish eyes. That's why they call him by his nickname, Chicharito (little green pea) a younger version of his father, Javier "Chicharo" Hernandez.

Let's go with Chicharito as he travels to Europe, where he has played in three countries-- England, Spain, and Germany.

Traveling with each of the teams, Chicharito makes new friends, sees new places, speaks new languages, tastes new food, and learns new traditions. He loves learning new ideas and meeting new people.

In England, his sports bag and soccer ball land in Manchester where he played with Manchester United.

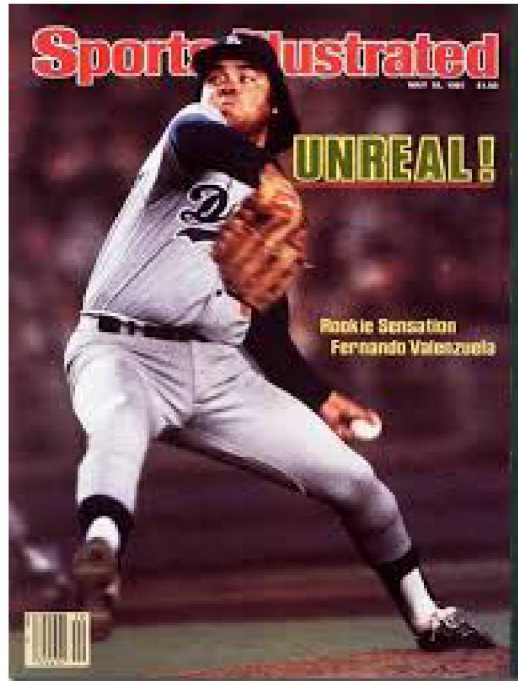
Let's watch the game...

His teammates drive the ball down the field, pass the ball forward to Chicharito who dribbles past two defenders, barely escapes the tackle of a third, then shifts the ball from right foot to left curling the ball over the keeper's head and into the net's top corner...

Goooooooooal! Goooooooooal for Manchester United! Chicharito flies freely with joy. He slides across the grass, like a plane landing smoothly.



Excerpt from Fernando's Dream
Kathleen Contreras
March 22, 2018



Fernando's Dream

In a small village in Sonora, Mexico, a young boy with big dreams loved to play baseball. Fernando played everyday after school and each weekend on dusty dirt fields. He came from a large family--five sisters and six brothers and had plenty of friends, so there was always someone willing to play.

He fueled himself for playing long days with his mom's gigantic flour tortillas called *sobaqueras*--tortillas as long as his mom's arm! And he devoured plates of *machaca con chile* to fire his strength to throw the ball.

Fernando's pitches also fueled his dream. "It wasn't the big leagues I dreamt about, it was about getting better with each pitch, step by step, each time," he said.

Fernando grew stronger as a teenager and was as fierce as a bull or *toro* when he pitched. Later, *El Toro* would become his nickname on the baseball field.

He wanted to be a better pitcher, but he needed something special. Something unique, something few pitchers could do. He practiced all kinds of pitches-- fastballs, sinkers and curve balls. He was learning to throw sliders and change-ups too. But still he wasn't satisfied.

As Fernando grew older and stronger, he dreamed of the Big Leagues. American and Mexican professional baseball scouts watched him closely. One curious Los Angeles Dodger scout, Mike Brito, went to Mexico to see a teenage Fernando pitch. He was so impressed with his pitching that he invited Fernando to come to Los Angeles to practice with the team. It was a dream come true!

"Going to a different country, with a new language and traditions was going to be difficult. I often wondered how I would get used to a new way of life," said Fernando, who was determined to see his dream come true...

In Los Angeles, Fernando practiced a new pitch--the screwball. A teammate, Bobbie Castillo helped him perfect this special pitch. Few batters could hit it. Even fewer pitchers could throw it, especially left-handed. It was a screwing backward slider. This was it! The special pitch he dreamt of!

Soon, it was opening day at Dodger Stadium, players and fans were excited for the new baseball season--mitts were oiled, uniforms bright, balls tossed, and bats swung in lazy swings. A sea of blue caps and white jerseys painted the stadium like an ocean wave. It was another sunny southern California day in Los Angeles.

It was April 9, 1981 when L.A. Dodger manager Tommy Lasorda chose Fernando Valenzuela, a 19 year-old pitcher to be the Dodger's starting pitcher against the Houston Astros...