



Fotonovela's a guide for Hispanics

By Matthew E. Milliken : The Herald-Sun

mmilliken@heraldsun.com

Oct 27, 2008

DURHAM -- Young Cristina was having trouble sleeping. She lived not only with her mother, Amelia, but with Amelia's cousin Eduardo and Eduardo's family as well. Frequently, Eduardo's friends kept her up at night, drinking beer and making noise.

But that wasn't the only thing wrong.

"Sometimes Cristina talks about sexual topics that she shouldn't know about at her age," Maria Angélica told Amelia.

"Oh my God!" Amelia cried, holding her head. "What are you saying?"

A moment from a telenovela? Not quite.

A snippet of conversation between a social worker and an anguished parent? Closer, but still not exactly right.

A scene from "Protegiendo a nuestros niños," the fotonovela developed by a UNC Chapel Hill nursing student and collaborators from El Centro Hispano, the Durham County Department of Social Services and other local groups? Precisely.

Social worker Maria Angélica's fictitious conversation with Amelia, including the suggestion to put Cristina in a more child-friendly home away from Eduardo and his friends and immediate family, was originally written in the fall of 2007 by El Centro Hispano intern Caitlyn Mathis. A 2008 graduate of UNC Chapel Hill, Mathis got guidance from the Department of Social Services, Healthy Families, the Exchange Club and other organizations.

Mathis won this year's Kindred Spirits Award from the university's Office of Multicultural Affairs for her work on the 20-page brochure, which is titled "Protecting Our Children" in English.

"I think it is going to be very helpful," said Chuck Harris, the county's assistant director for family safety and permanency, whose social workers will soon begin distributing the fotonovela. "I'm very pleased with it."

The fotonovela was printed in a 500-copy color run this spring and recently reprinted in black-and-white. Its messages about appropriate parenting, dealing with hazardous situations and the role of social workers are conveyed with photographs of El Centro Hispano workers. Dialogue appears in word balloons.

Maritza Chirinos, El Centro Hispano's assistant director of health programs, thought a fotonovela could help address child welfare issues in Durham's Hispanic population, which has generated many complaints about youngsters left home without any adult supervision. She believes the format works better than a print-filled brochure.

"This way is more culturally appropriate because it's with pictures of members of our community," Chirinos said. The fotonovela isn't as wordy as a brochure might be, she added -- another benefit because "some of the people of our community have low levels of education."

Nadeen Bir is El Centro's director of family programs. "The reason that we're really proud of this is that it was collaborative, it gets across important messages, [and] we think it works with our community," she said.

© 2008 by The Durham Herald Company. All rights reserved.

heraldsun.com

Why pictures with dialogue work: 'Fun, easy to read'

By Matthew E. Milliken : The Herald-Sun

mmilliken@heraldsun.com

Oct 27, 2008

DURHAM -- Ana Consuelo Matiella has spent a lot of her life dealing with fotonovelas.

The Santa Fe, N.M., resident grew up reading them in Mexico. In 1984, when she was working as

a health educator at the University of Arizona, she decided to create a fotonovela after she was asked to translate into Spanish a pamphlet that she found "long and incomprehensible" in English.

"I thought, why not do something that is fun and easy to read?" Matiella said. "So that's how I got started."

Matiella now owns a social marketing firm that produces English and Spanish fotonovelas for clients all around the country. Recent customers include the federal Centers for Disease Control and Stanford University, she said.

There are several reasons why fotonovelas are effective educational tools, according to Matiella.

"Because it's a story, you can model healthy behaviors -- I guess that's the simplest way of putting it," Matiella said. "And people learn from each other, modeling and watching other people's successes and stuff. ... The second advantage is that they're fun. You don't want to bore people to death. And the third is that they're easy to read. It's fun -- it's dialogue!"

Fotonovelas have been produced locally as educational tools on child-welfare issues in Durham and household safety issues in Orange County. Around the nation, fotonovelas have been used to communicate public health and safety messages in California about methamphetamines, in Virginia about statutory rape and in Charlotte about drinking and driving.

Robin Lewy understands just why fotonovelas are so useful.

"The combination of the visual images with the very succinct dialogue makes a tool that's enjoyable to read and can really put the focus on people recognizing themselves within the material," said Lewy. Her organization, the Rural Women's Health Project in Gainesville, Fla., produces fotonovelas for educational purposes and trains others in production techniques.

Fotonovelas are an obvious choice for Spanish-language education because they were so popular in Mexico. Also, Lewy added, "when we're working with the immigrant population, we're working with such a variety of literacy levels."

The form suits other audiences too.

"The fotonovela works beautifully in African-American communities, in white communities and with youth and with older people," Lewy said. "People being able to see themselves -- that's

what's the joy of it. And it's amazing that a low-tech technology can make as much or a bigger impact on a community than video and MP3."

© 2008 by The Durham Herald Company. All rights reserved.

Not just a crossover comic book

By Matthew E. Milliken : The Herald-Sun

mmilliken@heraldsun.com

Oct 27, 2008

DURHAM -- Call it a crossover comic book if you like.

But the fotonovela is more than just a cross between a comic book and a camera. The medium has evolved from its origins as a form of movie adaptation in mid-20th-century Italy to a best-selling type of entertainment in Mexico to a common educational tool in the United States.

Fotonovela producer Ana Consuelo Matiella traces fotonovelas' origins to World War II Italy, where the publications -- known as fotoromanzi, according to Wikipedia.com -- contained frames and dialogue from movies.

The form was wildly popular in the 1950s through the 1970s in Mexico, where it flourished as magazine-style weekly and monthly publications in every genre from crime to romance to pornography, Matiella said. Some fotonovela stories were serials, while others were self-contained. At their peak, she believes there were 70 million copies of fotonovelas published each month.

Fotonovelas are sometimes referred to as historietas, but Matiella distinguishes them this way: fotonovelas feature photographs; historietas, like comic books, consist of drawings.

In Mexico, fotonovelas continue as entertainment, according to a 2005 article for American librarians. On her most recent visit to a Mexican newsstand, however, Matiella found drawn historietas but not a single photographic fotonovela.

"Photonovels" had an American heyday in the 1970s as adaptations of movies and television shows, primarily science fiction. Today, as English-language entertainment, the form seems to exist mainly on the Web.

Robin Lewy of the Rural Women's Health Project suggested that the fotonovela's evolution into an educational medium is somewhat ironic.

"There's a need to change the way in which the form is traditionally used," Lewy said.

"Fotonovelas are a lot about sex and power and domination. And for us, the fotonovela has really had to acculturate as it's crossed the border in working with immigrant communities."

© 2008 by The Durham Herald Company. All rights reserved.