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Linguistic Inclusion and Language Acquisition: An Analysis of a Spanish Reading Group

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Linguistic Inclusion and Language Acquisition:

An Analysis of a Spanish Reading Group

By

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A culminating thesis, submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science of Education

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

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Abstract

This research explored the impacts of a linguistically inclusive Spanish reading group on student learning outcomes. This research took place at an elementary school in Marin, which consists of a large Spanish speaking and rural community of third and fourth graders. The research takes into consideration grouping methods (Oakes, 2005), Critical Race Theory (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), and Schema Theory (Rumelhart, 2017) with regard to a Spanish classroom, in order to reimagine educational structures and instructional approaches. Through Spanish reading group sessions, interviews with adult stakeholders, and a student participant focus group, it is evident that all groups believe that class integration is more effective in acquiring a second language compared to traditional forms of leveled groupings for class segregation. The student participants also revealed internalized perceptions of race about themselves and others as Spanish language learners. The findings of this research point toward important implications for how schools implement effective grouping policies around language integration, and how teachers integrate their own classroom practices to understand student identity and to support language learning.

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This work is dedicated to all the Latinx folks *que se pusieron y se estan poniendo las pilas* so that our next generations can have a better tomorrow.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I attended the school at which I now teach. I remember being in fourth grade and being split up a few times each week for special classes. One group went to the Spanish room and the other group stayed behind with me. The people around me were my best friends. Our last names were Gonzalez, Gutierrez, Macias, and Martinez. It was always so fun to be hanging out with my friends in a smaller group, but I absolutely dreaded the activities we were forced to do. I remember the teacher calling on me, and asking where I should put a period, question mark, or exclamation mark for a certain sentence. I remember feeling hot, looking around at my friends for the answer, and whispering “period?” The teacher nodded and drew a period on the transparency sheet that was on the projector. I always wondered why my group never took Spanish. I wondered why my group had to take the “Rewards” program. It didn’t feel like a rewarding experience at all.

I hadn’t planned to be a Spanish teacher. I received my general education credential from Dominican in May of 2019 and was ready to take a 7th grade position at a school in my district. At the time, I was student teaching at another school within the district. The interview process had gone well, but one day after school, I received an email that the school had decided to hire someone different. Devastated and desperate, I quickly applied for every teaching position near where I lived; however, I kept getting the same response- “Thanks for your interest; we are not hiring right now, but we will consider you in future openings.” I discovered that the Spanish teacher at the school I was teaching at was leaving her position. The staff and I joked around about me being a potential candidate because I spoke Spanish so well. It was all joking until the principal approached me and asked if I was interested. Desperate for work, I said yes. A few days later, I was interviewed and the following day, I was offered the job. I was delighted until I realized that I didn’t know how to teach Spanish. I did what any scholar would do and hit the books. That summer, I studied to pass exams to obtain my single subject credential. By August, I was credentialed to teach Spanish. During the first week, I was given rosters that delineated between was defined as and labeled “Non-Native” and “Native” sections. In the Native section, I

saw students with the last name Gonzalez, Garcia, and Gutierrez. In the Non-Native sections, I saw students with the last names Stevens, Livingston, and Johnson. I felt uncomfortable with this reality, watching students which, by consequence, were grouped by skin color, come into my classroom at two different times of the day. I remember feeling sick to my stomach writing “Non-Native” or “Native” on my homework bins.

Statement of Purpose

The historical context of my research demonstrates the evolved forms of student tracking that are connected to race. In the United States, the 1946 Mendez V. Westminster court case called for school districts to integrate Latinx students in predominantly White schools (Tonatiuh, 2014). The Cisneros v. Corpus Christi court case, twenty-four years later, called for school districts to consider Mexican-American students as an ethnic minority and therefore a group that must be integrated in White schools (Salinas, 1971). The recent detracking of the math programs at San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) show efforts to integrate students in math courses to avoid racial- and ability- (a form of disguised racial) based segregation (Barnes & Torres, 2018). These three seminal historical markers show the different ways Latinx students have been segregated based on race over the last eighty years.

The purpose of this study was to explore the efficacy of integrated Spanish language classrooms at the elementary level, to determine if detracking of students augments student learning while also desegregating “ability-based” (which ends up looking like racially-based) student learning groups. A secondary purpose was to unearth and understand the pedagogical assumptions about race and educational abilities that continue to maintain de facto racial tracking in schools.

A review of the literature revealed the intersection of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Schema Theory, and Student Tracking, as they engage in conversation about the impacts of integrating students in a linguistically inclusive space. CRT revealed the educational structures that maintained the student tracking in Spanish groups, which has been based on assumptions about race (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Schema Theory provided a lens to show how when

groups are dismantled, students gain increased access to their backgrounds in relation to texts, which can make grounds for connections and common shared interests in integrated reading groups (Al-Issa, 2016; Zhao & Zhu, 2012). CRT also revealed the types of student tracking practices at Cypress Elementary, while Schema Theory provided a way for students to link up based on their shared interests, rather than based on race and ability categories.

Overview of Research Design

This research was designed around a convergent mixed methods approach with a transformative philosophical worldview. The project integrated the experiences of eleven third and fourth grade students in a detracked and integrated Spanish reading group, as well as the perspectives of three educational professionals and a parent. The students participated in interest-based Spanish reading classes and focus groups, and in short answer responses. Quantitative data for the students was gathered from the reading interest inventory and the pre- and post- Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) Spanish reading assessments, which were used to determine overall reading growth in comprehension and to further justify or confirm the effectiveness of integrated student groups. The adult stakeholder qualitative data came from interviews that consisted of open-ended questions, which were designed to gather information about their perceptions about educational tracking and race. This study revealed information about the learning outcomes of students when they were placed in a linguistically inclusive Spanish classroom and the perceptions of students, a parent, and educational professionals on ability-based grouping.

The research was conducted at a public elementary school located in Marin County, California. The school is situated in a rural community, where there is a mix of Latinx and White populations. As the researcher, I also served as the classroom teacher at that site for two years, attended the school from kindergarten through eighth grades, and have lived in the community for the majority of my life.

Significance of the Study: Findings

The findings of this research revealed remarkable and measurable improvement in reading comprehension scores through the process of a linguistically integrated Spanish reading group, and showed that students preferred an integrated classroom. Two other findings, though, showed that students have internalized perceptions of ability based on race, and that while educational professionals and a parent did not support racially segregated classrooms, there is a continued belief that tracking and ability-based segregation is an important tool- a belief that does not fully recognize the extent that ability-based tracking results in racial segregation. This is because the change in the grouping strategy from race to ability, is still embedded in race due to the perceived assumptions or attitudes the students and educators uphold towards Latinx students.

Significance of the Study: Implications

The findings of this research further support the movement to detrack students based on ability and to integrate learning aptitudes for greatest efficacy of learning. Within individual classrooms, the findings of this research suggest that it is paramount to integrate student populations even based on ability, both because integration creates more effective learning environments and deconstructs remnant forms of racial segregation. When educators are given a group of mixed-race students, it is important to be aware of the ways they group them internally within the classroom. If students are placed into groups based on ability, then the efforts for detracking become lost due to the fact that the groups are formed on the perceived capabilities of students, which are often tied to assumptions about their racial backgrounds. From a school, district, and policy perspective, the most immediate implication of this research project is to broadly discontinue tracking practices as a form of grouping. It is also recommended that schools facilitate professional development opportunities that aim to address the dominant narrative concerning assumptions about groups of students. Possible training topics include ones that focus on uncovering biases and assumptions, such as microaggressions. This focus can create the space for counter-narratives to formulate amongst school staff and students and positively impact the

overall school culture. These implications can further efforts in detracking schools, which progresses our work toward educational equity.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This research is situated in the historical wake of the pivotal 1946 court case of *Mendez v. Westminster*, which addressed the segregation of Mexican-American students in California schools (Roos, 2019). The creation of segregated schools for Mexican students was in response to the surge in Mexican laborers in the citrus fields of Southern California (Roos, 2019). Roos (2019) estimated that at that time, "...80 percent of Mexican American students in California went to so-called 'Mexican' schools." Tonatiuh (2014) notes that the argument in favor of this segregation was that Mexican-American students would receive a more catered education, "...to help them improve their English" and because "...White students are superior to Mexicans..." (pp. 25-27).

In 1944, three children, Sylvia, Gonzalo, and Jerome Mendez were refused entry into the Westminster School in Orange County, California (Tonatiuh, 2014). The Mendez family subsequently brought a case against the district. Tonatiuh (2014) notes the larger milieu of this case and the more than five thousand children in Orange County who were experiencing the same structural and racial barriers. The presiding judge, Paul McCormick, ruled in favor of the family, stating that, "public education must be open to all children by unified school association regardless of lineage" (Tonatiuh, 2014, p. 30).

This was the first successful court case that determined segregation in public schools as unconstitutional (Roos, 2019). This lawsuit mandated that schools integrate students, despite their racial backgrounds. However, some schools fabricated a legal loophole by which they managed to continue segregationist practices by reclassifying Mexican-American students as White and then assigning them to schools with students of color. This allowed districts to create the illusion that schools had been reasonably integrated, while the reality was that schools were segregating out the non-White students (Salinas, 1971).

The Cisneros, a Mexican-American family from Texas, brought attention to these discriminatory school practices in the Corpus Christi Independent School District (Salinas, 1971, p. 3). Schools within the Corpus Christi Independent School District had school locations for specific racial groups where there would be "...bussing Anglo students to avoid the minority group schools...and assigning [Black] and Mexican-American teachers in disproportionate ratios to the segregated schools" (Salinas, 1971, p. 19). The Cisneros family opened the court case, calling for the school district to integrate Mexican students in the White schools. In 1970, Judge Woodrow Seals officially identified Mexican-Americans as an "...ethnic minority group" (Salinas, 1971, p. 3). By court order, the school district was required to submit a desegregation plan that integrated Black, Mexican-American, and Anglo students, and disallowed the subversion of racial identity as a way to segregate schools (Salinas, 1971). Despite the achievements of these two important court cases, segregatory practices have continued to exist in a variety of forms.

Oakes (2005) and Ballard (2018) both document the way student "tracking" has facilitated an ongoing form of racial segregation amongst and within schools. Tracking is the practice of grouping students based on ability and achievement levels (Ballard, 2018; Oakes, 2005). This practice has been identified as racist because the result of the practice is that historically segregated and disadvantaged students are grouped together most often in lower level course tracks (Ballard, 2018; Oakes, 2005). Although tracking aims to create student groups that focus on growth for students at their level, it results in students taking lower track courses which omit necessary curriculum which impacts overall future achievement, student perceptions of themselves and their peers, and institutional perceptions of these student populations (Ballard, 2018; Oakes, 2005).

There have been efforts to detrack student populations. As one example, San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) created this detracking policy in 2014 that pushed for heterogeneous student groups in math classes (Barnes & Torres, 2018). This effort integrated student populations, including Black and Latinx students, who had been historically underserved and had consequently been tracked disproportionately into low achieving math courses (Barnes & Torres, 2018). The need to detrack was determined by the evidence that only a small number of students would typically pass Algebra 1, but that “these numbers were disproportionately lower for African American and Latinx students in the school district” (Barnes & Torres, 2018, p.1). The district made the decision that focused on “... no longer separating students in mathematics and to providing high-quality learning experiences to every student” (Barnes & Torres, 2018, p.1). This program started in 2014 and the results of their data show that, “African American, Asian, Filipino, Latinx, mixed race, Pacific Islanders, and White students... girls, English language learners, and students on free or reduced lunch” (Barnes & Torres, 2018, p.2) were able to enroll in math courses higher than Algebra 2 the following year. This shows that detracking provided the opportunity for these students to achieve higher level courses, something that would not have been done if the students were tracked. Barnes and Torres (2018) argue in their report that this research shows that more students are taking higher leveled courses, and it could be argued that they would not be taking such courses if this policy did not exist.

The two court cases from the families, Mendez and Cisneros, and the SFUSD detracked math program are evidence of the efforts throughout history that have tried to address tracking in schools, as a means to dismantle the dominant narrative regarding the assumptions of student groups with the intentions of placing them in situations where they can achieve their greatest potential.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) in Spanish Language Classrooms: Detracking

Solórzano and Yosso define critical race theory as an examination of race and racism in educational spaces (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This theory seeks to dismantle educational practices that maintain structures of oppression for racial groups (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The CRT framework is used here to understand the educational structures that maintain the dominant narrative that students from Spanish-speaking families are fluent Spanish readers, writers, and speakers. I challenge the educational practice of linguistic segregation in Spanish classrooms. The assumption behind this practice is that all students who come from Spanish-speaking families, inadvertently know how to read, write, and speak fluently in Spanish. This racist expectation sets the precedent that students in this group are less likely to receive quality and quantity instruction in the Spanish language at school. My research strives to address this issue and offer the counter-narrative, that heterogeneous groups in Spanish classrooms are beneficial for all students, especially those from Spanish-speaking families.

In this framework, race is viewed as central and intersectional with other identities such as gender and socio-economic class (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This intersectionality is parallel to Gándara and Orfield's (2010) claim about triple segregation. This study argued that English Learner (EL) students in Arizona are "...triplely segregated in the schools to which they are assigned: by ethnicity, by poverty, and by language" (Gándara & Orfield, 2010, p.4). The impact of segregated schools is that impoverished students are likely to attend impoverished schools which create a learning experience with "...inadequate facilities and materials, less experienced and less qualified teachers and less successful peers" (Gándara & Orfield, 2010, p.5). This has a direct impact on the rate of college dropouts, maintains impoverished neighborhoods for generations, and contributes to the school-to-deportation and school-to-prison pipeline. The practice of multiple segregation existed at my research site because students in the Spanish

classes were segregated into Native and Non-native Spanish speaking groups, which consequently separates them based on race and ability. Experts may argue that the counter for this practice is to create heterogeneous class groups; however, there are consequences to this approach.

Howard (2020) notes and argues against the “melting pot framework,” which is defined as when students are grouped to represent a balanced number of Whites, Blacks, and others, and not otherwise influenced by their abilities and other identities. This paradigm is dangerous because it disregards other student identities that are valuable, and misses hidden intersectionalities. Taken together, Gándara and Orfield (2010) argue that homogenous groups are detrimental and Howard (2020) argues that racially heterogeneous groups are similarly superficially ineffective.

Although there are arguments for segregated and integrated groups, the CRT lens views race as a social construct. For instance, in *Mendez v. Westminster*, it was believed that Mexican students would best progress in society when taught in a segregated setting because they were taught along with peers from their background and at their English acquisition level (Roos, 2019). Research shows that students benefit most when they are placed in racially mixed groups (Estrada, Wang, & Farkas, 2020; Garver, 2020; Oakes, 2005). However, the intentions behind the groups created must be taken into consideration as to prevent Howard’s (2020) melting pot phenomenon and Gandara and Orfield’s (2010) idea of triple segregation.

Consequences of Student Tracking

Classroom grouping has a direct impact on student learning outcomes. Tracking is a method by which students are placed into learning groups based on their academic abilities (Oakes, 2005). In language classrooms, this approach limits student potential in acquiring a second language (Garver 2020; Gifford & Valdes, 2006; Oakes, 2005). Garver (2020) and Gifford and Valdes (2006) further show that the limitations of linguistically segregated classrooms include English language learners' (ELLs) minimal exposure to English models, social isolation from non-EL peers, and overly simplified curriculum. Matias (2013) adds that student identities can be influenced by the portrayal of its community as it is situated in school settings. When a student's community is portrayed in a certain way, the student is likely to perceive themselves through that description. (Matias, 2013). In tracking, students associate themselves based on the group they are placed into, which impacts their self-perceptions and how they view their peers and the people in their community.

Oakes (2005) adds that grouping low-achieving students together can prevent them from mobilizing to a higher track because certain curricular topics are omitted in the low track (Oakes, 2005). From a state assessment standpoint, Estrada, Wang, and Farkas (2020) found that in classrooms where ELLs were in the majority, they scored lower on state exams for language arts and mathematics. They found that, in these classrooms, students were grouped solely on their English proficiency. The result in classes separated by English proficiency is that they were also segregated by culture, race, student performance, and behavior (Estrada, Wang, & Farkas, 2020). This creates a multi-faceted problem in which students who are tracked and grouped, are then segregated in more ways than one. Ballard (2018) found that the students who are tracked "... align with the race, socioeconomic status, and special education status of each of these classes"

(p. 36). This shows that integrated schools can still practice many forms of segregation, through tracking. These outcomes can be reflected in the Spanish classroom because similar missed opportunities can occur due to tracking and grouping based on language acquisition abilities.

Positive Impacts of Detracking. Gifford and Valdes (2006) have argued that now more than ever, it is important for schools to create linguistically inclusive class groups because of the increasing numbers in the Spanish-speaking ELL student population in California. These researchers found that, "...little or no attention has been given to the consequences of linguistic isolation for a population whose future depends on the acquisition of English," showing that insufficient action has been taken to meet the needs of this population through school programs and class placements (Gifford & Valdes, 2006, p. 146).

Student Self-Perception. Student self-perception and peer relationships become stronger when placed in integrated groups. Oakes (2005) found that, "...83 percent of the classes where slower students were mixed with others had markedly more positive relationships with their teachers... at least 56 percent of the classes had substantially more positive relationships with their peers" (p. 197).

Ballard (2018) found that lower level courses have a "...reputation of being a remedial course reserved for minoritized students" (p. 18). Students in these courses may perceive themselves as lesser than other groups which can lead students to have an identity crisis, which can result in poor behavior choices and, ultimately, school dropouts. Banks (1993) added that, "...student behavior derives from their self-perception of gender, race, social class, religion, and other identifying factors" (p. 17). Ballard further contends that, "...students are able to identify how structure and course placement are unfair, how important teacher perceptions of students are at a school system, and how tracking leads to inferior instruction for students who are placed in

lower courses" (Ballard, 2018, p. 21). The conclusion, here, is that schools with tracking programs inadvertently instill these perceptions into students and the students themselves are aware that they are being tracked. Tracking gives "...a defined picture of what students in each class look like and how they are expected to act" (Ballard, 2018, p. 36).

Peer Modeling. In contrast to linguistically separated classrooms, linguistically inclusive classrooms allow the opportunity for student peers to fill in the gaps of background knowledge and therefore activate the prior knowledge of others. Oakes (2005) found that, "...35 percent of the heterogeneous classes were identified as being more like high-track classes...the presence of a number of the brightest students in class may raise the quality of both the content presented and the kinds of learning opportunities available to students of all types" (p. 195). This aligns with Estrada, Wang, and Farkas (2020) finding that ELLs learn best from "...English-speaking models and higher performing peers...[and] increased opportunities to structure academic tasks with peer interactions..." (p. 1821). In addition, Garver (2020) found that flexible grouping allows students to experience a variety of English proficiency levels and tasks. This shows that students in an integrated classroom setting have more opportunities to develop relationships with their peers through modeling.

Detracking Challenges. Linguistic integration presents some challenges. One is that integrated classes give educators a wider range of student learners with a variety of abilities in language acquisition (reading, writing, and speaking) in which they must differentiate instruction even more. Some teachers prefer to teach a deficit-based curriculum in which student groups are created based on common weaknesses to strengthen that groups' skills. The underlying assumption is that this type of grouping allows teachers to track student groups and understand

where students are learning independently and what teachers need to do, pedagogically, to get students to where they need to be. Ballard (2018) found that:

When members of the community oppose detracking, they use language that suggests that tracking is being used to help minoritized students. There is a belief that Black students, Latinx students, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and students with special needs are incapable of succeeding in a rigorous Mathematics course. (p. 40-41)

This shows the assumptions upheld by those outside of the impacted student groups, which maintains a dangerous dominant narrative that certain students are unable to advance in high math courses, due to their backgrounds. Although the intentions may be innocent and in the best interest of underserved students, this demonstrates a type of naivete and an oppressive cycle of thought that maintains tracking in schools and contributes to inequities impacting the lives of these students.

Access to Reading Through Schema Theory

Students' reading acquisition comes from their ability to access their prior knowledge and make connections with the text. These connections create opportunities for students to comprehend the texts they read and further their ability to acquire a language. Schema Theory in reading involves the activation of a reader's schema, which is defined as a reader's background or prior knowledge (Rumelhart, 2017). Prior knowledge is important to consider because it "...provides insights into why students may fail to comprehend text material" (Al-Issa, 2006, p. 41). This connects with Rumelhart's findings where "... a reader of a text is presumably constantly evaluating hypotheses about the most plausible interpretation of a text" (Rumelhart, 2017, p. 38). Accordingly, when readers read a text, they tend to match the several meanings and connections to the most accurate reading that makes sense to them. "To the degree to which a particular reader fails to find such a configuration, the text will appear disjointed and

incomprehensible” (Rumelhart, 2017, p. 38). Consequently, when a reader does not have the appropriate background knowledge, “[the] reader may misunderstand the author with their own interpretation” (Rumelhart, 2017, p. 47). Readers are said to have understood a text when they are able to find a configuration of hypotheses (schemata) that offers a coherent account for the various aspects of the text.

Al-Issa (2006) reported on research that “...observed how people, when asked to repeat a story from memory, filled in details which did not occur in the original but conformed to their cultural norms” (p. 143). The ability for readers to access their schema is by engaging their cultural backgrounds. Al-Issa (2006) argues that “the reader brings information, knowledge, emotion, and culture—that is schemata, to the printed word” (p. 42). This shows that teachers must create opportunities for second language learners to tap into their schema in order to activate prior knowledge and give text meaning. It is important to consider a student's schema through a cultural lens. Part of students' identities consist of their cultural backgrounds and their relationships with their cultures. When we think of culture in second language teaching, it is crucial to consider the written conventions and printed format of a second language. This is because if a second language learner is unaware of the second language and cultural conventions, they may struggle with reading comprehension in the second language.

Schema Theory is used to understand the way students compartmentalize their prior knowledge and how it influences the way they perceive texts (Zhao & Zhu, 2012). This compartmentalizing has a direct impact on student reading achievement. The knowledge in students' schemata determines whether they can access and comprehend a text. In second language reading, students use linguistic schema to understand a text (Zhao & Zhu, 2012). This involves students' ability to use their knowledge of phonics, grammar conventions, and word

recognition in the second language (Zhao & Zhu, 2012). For students who are learning Spanish, it is important that they have a solid foundation in Spanish conventions before attempting to read and comprehend a text. It is also in the best interest of the teacher to provide context for texts students read as a means to activate their prior knowledge and invite them to participate in comprehending the text.

Droop and Verhoeven found that effective reading instruction involves providing students reading materials that are relevant to their schemas and at their reading levels (Droop & Verhoeven, 1998). If a student cannot access a text due to limited proficiency, then their prior knowledge cannot be activated and therefore cannot comprehend a text (Brevik, Hellekjaer & Olsen, 2016). When students are engaged in a culturally relevant text, they may process and retain specific information that is meaningful to them (Droop & Verhoeven, 1998).

Abdelaal and Sase (2014) found that if background knowledge is not activated in the reader's schema, then reading results will be low. The use of culturally relevant literature with L2 readers influences their reading comprehension. It is evident that schema has an influence on the reading comprehension and thus reading fluency of L2 readers. Effective Spanish reading instruction requires educators to encourage students to access their existing schema.

Effective Reading Practices

Effective reading instructional practices in a second language are rooted in knowledge about second language (L2) reader trends. Acosta argues that "...L2 readers need to have and use their knowledge of L2 vocabulary in order to function in a second language successfully" (Acosta, 2019, p. 57). Acosta continues by saying that "some limitations to L2 reading comprehension include limited vocabulary knowledge, unfamiliar content, and limited knowledge of L2 language structures" (Acosta, 2019, p. 58). This shows that explicit teaching of

vocabulary and purposeful text selection are factors that contribute to successful L2 reading comprehension. This connects with research conducted by Friesen and Haigh because they argue that it is necessary to activate prior knowledge, specifically cognates, in order for students to comprehend a text in Spanish (Friesen & Haigh, 2018). It is important to encourage students to make explicit connections between their home language and the language they are learning (Friesen & Haigh, 2018). The study of cognates is a way to bridge this gap and encourage students to venture into the second language.

Friesen and Haigh (2018) claim that the first step to effective reading instruction is to conduct student reading assessments in the second language. L2 readers may score higher in reading comprehension if given the opportunity to retell in their home language (Droop & Verhoeven, 1998). This allows educators to identify the reading comprehension strategies students need to learn or strengthen. The next step is for educators to teach reading strategies that work for the majority of the class, encourage students to explicitly describe their reading strategies, teach new effective reading strategies that can be implemented in pre, during, and post reading of texts, and make students advocates for what works and doesn't work for them in reading (Friesen & Haigh, 2018). Overall, these experts argue that the teaching and use of reading strategies decrease the cognitive load on student memory, which creates an opportunity to further reading comprehension (Freisen & Haigh, 2018). Another important factor to consider is a reader's access to the content presented in the texts.

Droop and Verhoeven found that effective reading instruction involves providing students reading materials that are relevant to their schemas and at their reading levels (Droop & Verhoeven, 1998). When students are engaged in a culturally relevant text, they may process and retain specific information that is relevant to them (Droop & Verhoeven, 1998). If a student

cannot access a text due to limited proficiency, then their prior knowledge cannot be activated and they will therefore struggle to comprehend a text.

Eidswick investigated the impact of student interest and prior knowledge in successful reading comprehension. In this study, Japanese students were asked to rate their interest levels on eleven different articles. It was found that students chose texts about famous celebrities they knew because of the “...perceived personal relevance...” (Eidswick, 2010, p. 158). Another discovery was that when students were given a culturally relevant text on Japanese cooking, they were not as engaged or able to relate to the content. Eidswick (2010) argued that this could be related to the fact that the participants were not experienced with cooking yet. This shows that educators must not enact their presumptions about their students. Reading interest inventories are a successful method to ensure that educators minimize microaggressions about the backgrounds of their students and their interests, while also providing them with high interest texts they can engage with. In turn, these engagements in reading elicit student connections, which makes it easier for them to comprehend texts and expand their knowledge on the Spanish language.

However, although the use of culturally relevant texts benefits L2 reading comprehension, more often than not students must be taught about the cultures from the second language (Acosta, 2019). Since second language learners are learning a second language, they are subject to encounter different cultural practices and paradigms. It is important for educators to present the cultural content in a careful manner. Experiences from a different culture may need to be explicitly addressed as to discourage second language learners to misconstrue and pathologize a certain group of people (Al-Issa, 2006).

Detracking Student Reading in Spanish Classrooms

The existing literature reviews the impacts and outcomes of student tracking and detracking in schools through a CRT lens. Student tracking provides the opportunity to monitor student progress closely and give students access to material at their abilities and needs. However, tracking has negative consequences on student and teacher perceptions toward student populations based on race. Students and teachers may view certain groups as inferior and others superior in learning. In addition, students that are tracked are most likely to receive a lower quality education, which impacts their overall future achievement. This places historically disadvantaged student groups in a continuous cycle of oppression, where they are only able to achieve so much. A way to combat these outcomes is through the process of detracking.

The detracking practice focuses on integrating student populations into rich, high-quality educational courses. Integration allows for students and teachers to shift their attitudes about how someone learns and achieves away from their race and abilities. It celebrates all the multiple intelligences in a classroom and allows for different student groups to influence one another, through peer modeling. It is evident that detracking is an effective model for teacher pedagogy and student learning.

This literature provides the information necessary to understand the detriments and benefits of linguistically integrated groups in classrooms. However, there is a gap in the research about this impact on students in Spanish classrooms, specifically in reading groups. The purpose of my research is to investigate the learning outcomes of students in linguistically inclusive Spanish reading groups. Detracking can transfer into this district's Spanish classrooms because it calls for the reintegration of Latinx and White student populations. My study is situated in a third and fourth grade combination classroom from a rural, high Latinx population in Marin County, California.

This study was designed to utilize CRT and Schema Theory in reading as the lens to understand the experiences of students in a Spanish reading group in a linguistically inclusive space and to gauge the perspectives of the adult stakeholders. Schema Theory in reading provides a common denominator for how students from varying abilities can read together in an integrated group. When students are able to access their schema and activate their prior knowledge, it creates the space for them to access texts and make textual connections with themselves and their peers. Detracking makes it possible to bring students together in one space, which dispels teacher and student perceptions about student populations, and Schema Theory invites students to access texts based on something they already have, their background knowledge, which makes learning to read in Spanish an integrative and accessible possibility. It's not about thinking how language acquisition is out of reach, but rather how to make it so students can reach it.

Chapter 3: Methods

This study seeks to understand the impacts of a linguistically inclusive Spanish reading group on student learning outcomes in a mixed language classroom. This topic is important because it calls for Spanish classrooms to rethink their educational structures and instructional approaches, such as their grouping methods (Oakes, 2005; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Although segregation by language (which by extension tends to include race and class) in classrooms is widely researched (Howard, 2020), including with specific foci on English Language Learners (Estrada, Wang, & Farkas, 2020; Gándara & Orfield, 2010; Garver, 2020; Gifford & Valdes, 2006), research gaps exist in the study of the efficacy of pedagogical practices and inclusion in Spanish language classrooms. This research seeks to address the common misperceptions associated with students from Spanish-speaking families and students learning Spanish as an additional language.

Research Questions

This study focused on student experiences and learning outcomes from Spanish reading sessions. School staff and parent input was collected through interviews about Spanish instruction and experiences with the language. The data collection methods were formed around the following central question:

- What are the impacts of a linguistically inclusive Spanish classroom on student learning outcomes?
- What perceptions do students, educational professionals, and parents have about ability-based learning groups and integrated pedagogical approaches?

Description and Rationale for Research Approach

In researching the impacts of a linguistically inclusive Spanish classroom on the learning outcomes of students, I conducted a convergent mixed method study with a transformative philosophical worldview. This research uses a transformative worldview because it challenged the Spanish classroom grouping method that segregates students based on misperceived assumptions about their Spanish language acquisition. Creswell and Creswell (2018) describe this worldview as one that focuses on the experiences of the participants who have been marginalized based on their race. My research upholds an “...action agenda for reform...” (Cresswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 9) which is to change the grouping strategy in which students are taught Spanish. Through the use of student-centered focus groups and interviews with school staff and parents of my students, those directly impacted by the segregation in a Spanish classroom became co-researchers and informed my research with their perspectives and voices.

Mixed methods (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018, p.14) is an integration of both quantitative and qualitative data collection processes. Cresswell and Cresswell (2018) describe this method as one where one data collection method can inform a different collection instrument. In my research, the quantitative data involved understanding students’ reading interests and reading levels. This data served to help me make informed decisions about the types of texts to gather for the initial part of my study. In order to gather information about student reading comprehension in a mixed-race reading group, I collected qualitative data through the F&P assessment. The majority of the qualitative data was gathered through open-ended conversations with students, a focus group discussion with students, and open-ended question interviews with school staff and parents of my students. These convergent mixed methods gave me the opportunity to gather in-depth information about student learning outcomes in my Spanish classroom because the data showcased the reading processes of students, the group dynamics, and its impact on student self

perception and learning. It also revealed the narrative maintained at the school by the school staff, students, and parents.

Research Design

Research Site and Entry into the Field

This research was conducted at an elementary school in Northern California, which will be referred to as Cypress Elementary School. This site was selected because I have been working at this school for the past two years.

Cypress School is situated in a rural area, where the majority of families live and work on farms. The school directly funnels most children from the area. This is because this is the closest school in the area and one that offers bus transportation from the far away farms and student homes in the area. Some families enroll their children in schools out of town because of the perceived opportunities those schools have to offer. Cypress Elementary is a K-8 Title I school serving approximately 200 students. According to the School Accountability Report Card (SARC), the demographics of the students are 48% Latinx, 48% Caucasian, 0.7% Pacific Islander, 0.7% American Indian, 0.7% two or more races, and 0.7% Asian. English Language Learners make up 38.2% of the school and 59.2% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch.

Participants and Sampling Procedure

Eleven third and fourth grade students, four teachers and one parent participated in this research. The Spanish reading group consisted of six reading sessions, with a pre and post assessment, and a student focus group. The interactions with the adult stakeholders consisted of formal interviews. To protect the participants' identities, pseudonyms are used in place of participants' names.

The students in my third and fourth grade class were invited to participate in my study. Of the 21 students initially in my class, 11 students participated in my study. This was due to a shift in remote learning and in-person learning cohort organization, where my class size dropped to thirteen students. My students were a racially diverse group of learners who were taught Spanish in a segregated classroom in previous years. The segregated groups consisted of students from Spanish speaking households placed in Native Spanish and the others placed in Non-Native Spanish. Out of the 11 students in my Spanish reading group, seven were White and four were Latinx. From this group, all the Latinx students were classified as English Language Learners (ELLs).

I gave students a brief presentation about the purpose of this study. Students who were interested were given the consent form to be signed by their parent or guardian. The consent form described the purpose of my research, information about the study, and how I would maintain student confidentiality. All students in my class, despite whether or not they were given consent, were assessed in reading Spanish, participated in Spanish reading groups, and participated in a focus group survey, but only the data from the students who returned the consent form was included for data analysis and toward the research findings.

The participants for the interviews consisted of four adult interviewees, including three educational professionals and a parent of my student from Cypress School. The purpose for including staff and parents was to identify points and perspectives for triangulation with the experience of the students. The parent and educational professionals participant interviewees in this research were given a similar consent form. The consent form outlined the purpose of my study and provided details about how the data from the interviews would be collected, protected,

and used in my research. The interviews took between 15-20 minutes and were conducted virtually and were recorded and transcribed by me.

Methods

I conducted a Spanish reading group in a linguistically inclusive classroom setting. A pre-assessment and post-assessment of student Spanish reading levels was done using the Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) Spanish assessments, Sistema de Evaluación K-2 levels A-N. A Google Form reading interest inventory on student reading interests was filled out by students to provide information on the types of Spanish short stories collected for the reading group sessions. See Appendix A for the questions on the reading interest inventory. The reading sessions took place twice a week, and lasted between fifteen to thirty minutes. Each session was recorded and students engaged in comprehension conversations, where they checked their understanding of the text. The questions asked were derived from the F&P assessment tool and students were allowed to respond in the language of their choice. During these sessions, I wrote analytic memos about student interactions, physical responses, and perceived feelings. In the last week, I reassessed students' reading levels with F&P to determine reading digression or progression. On the last day of the reading groups, students completed a physical survey and engaged in a focus group conversation, where they shared their experiences. See Appendix B for the survey questions. I also wrote an analytic memo about the outcomes from the survey focus group.

Interviews were conducted with three educational professionals and one White parent at Cypress Elementary. The interviews were recorded and I wrote analytic memos about the interviewee's responses. See Appendix C for the interview questions.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data from student reading assessments and surveys were placed in an excel spreadsheet document. The recordings from the reading sessions, survey focus group, and interviews were transcribed by otter.ai and myself, and open coded by hand. When I analyzed the transcriptions, I highlighted expected words generated from the literature review. Expected codes were words that I was looking for based on their presence in the literature and my assumptions about possible findings (Maxwell, 2013, p. 195). Expected codes included segregation, integration, bilingual, and group.

In addition, I tracked “...in vivo...” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) words, provided by the participants, to make more codes and create more themes. The in vivo words I used were “Mexican,” “targeted,” and “model language learners.” The coding helped identify expected and in vivo codes which served to conceptually map for major themes.

The codes were used to conceptually map for emergent themes. These themes guided where I placed specific terms and phrases from the transcriptions. After, concept mapping was used to group the codes into categories. The concept mapping resulted in a series of three findings. The first finding revealed the impact of a linguistically inclusive group on student reading level outcomes. The second finding showcased the perceptions of students and educators on racial groups and identities at Cypress Elementary. The third demonstrated student and educator preference for linguistically inclusive groups.

The quantitative data from the pre and post F&P reading assessments were portrayed on a graph. The graph was set up to show growth in the reading levels from individual students. In place of student names, their racial identity was shown. This was done to show that both racial

groups showed reading progression in the linguistically inclusive group despite their backgrounds.

Validity

As a Spanish language teacher for the cohort of students involved in this research, I had a vested interest in the students' success with learning as well as informed bias toward linguistically inclusive learning. I also attended Cypress Elementary School as a child and am identified as a Latinx member who speaks, writes, and reads fluent Spanish in the community. My personal experience as a student has influenced the way I taught the Spanish reading groups and the way I collected my data. As a way to monitor the bias in my research, I implemented several strategies for validity.

As the classroom teacher, I had a long term involvement with my students, which according to Creswell and Creswell (2018), enabled increased accuracy to interpret data collected in this study. This already established relationships between the participants and researcher can result in accurate findings. Furthermore, as I worked with this group of students in small groups in a variety of subjects several times during the week, I had an opportunity for authentic conversations in group discussion settings.

This study collected rich data. The reading sessions with students and the interviews with the adults were recorded and transcribed. In addition, I wrote analytic memos that included detailed notes about the participants' feelings, physical actions, and other mannerisms that were not visible in the recordings. This ensured that I did not take notes on, "...what [I] felt was significant" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126), which controlled my interpretation biases. These notes allowed me to better match and interpret the verbal statement of the participant with the physical reaction.

During the reading sessions and the interviews with the adults, I made sure to use respondent validation (Maxwell, 2013). I made sure to use my participants' verbatim words when saying back their responses to ensure I collected their insights accurately. This allowed me to confirm with my participants that my interpretation of their statements were accurately received by me.

Furthermore, some of my data favored the linguistically segregated classroom environment. This shows that my research integrated discrepant evidence from the convergent mixed methods. This information served to, "...assess whether it is more plausible to retain or modify the conclusion..." (Maxwell, 2013, p. 127).

The analysis of my findings are valid because they triangulate. I collected information from a variety of sources such as the school administrator, school staff, a parent of my students, and my students. Maxwell (2013) states that, "this strategy reduces the risk of chance associations and of systemic biases due to a specific method" (p. 128). This shows that I collected input from my students, school staff, and a parent at Cypress Elementary School.

Chapter 4: Findings

This project measured the impacts of a linguistically inclusive Spanish reading group on student learning outcomes. Data was collected through observations of Spanish reading group sessions, interviews with adult stakeholders, and a student participant focus group. The data analysis process revealed three major findings. The first and most significant finding was that students both preferred racially and linguistically integrated Spanish classrooms and demonstrated marked improvements in reading comprehension scores in this learning environment. The second theme revealed that student participants maintained some inherited sense of implicit assumptions that the ability to learn Spanish is connected to race, which infers a quality of internalized racism. Third, despite the students' stated preferences and their measurable improvements in language comprehension, the education professionals continued to exhibit some conflict between a progressive preference for using the term "inclusion" and maintaining the worldview that student groupings should be formed primarily based on reported Spanish-speaking ability.

Student Performance Improves in Inclusive Spanish Classrooms

The findings from this study show that the impact of detracking is that integration produces results in the Spanish classroom. The findings demonstrate: that students prefer linguistically inclusive classrooms, the efficacy of a linguistic inclusive model on student reading levels, that students internalized perceptions of ability based on race, and a belief that students should be grouped based on ability, which consequently is based on race.

Students Prefer (Linguistically) Inclusive Classrooms

Due to the small class size and imbalance in the number of students across gender categories, all student participants are referred to as “they” throughout the findings discussed in this section; the gender-neutral “they” also serves to protect students’ identities.

When I announced my study plan to my students, which involved their participation in Spanish reading sessions, it was well received. The Latinx students were excited to read aloud in Spanish. During the reading sessions, I would ask the class for the translation and significance of a particular Spanish word. All the Latinx students would raise their hands immediately, even though most of their answers were incorrect. One Latinx student, Alex, had a tendency to accidentally share answers aloud. This student really came out of their shell, seeming more confident and participating more, after the Spanish reading sessions. I noticed they hang out more with the White students during class and at breaks. The experiences of the Latinx students show that they could not contain their eagerness to share their insights with the group, which demonstrates a sense of empowerment amongst the group. The White students seldom raised their hands first, if at all. This reaction was very interesting to me because it shed light on the switched participation and class dynamics of both student groups, when they were in Native or Non-Native groups. In our English classes, the White students were the ones ready to respond, whereas the Latinx students responded more to additional encouragement. I was able to compare this group's experience with their experiences in an all English classroom setting. During our English classes, the White students were typically prepared to answer questions with confidence. Regardless, the Spanish reading immersion positively impacted the Latinx students and helped to shape their current student identities, which consist of confidence and empowerment.

One White student, Leslie, resisted the idea of a Spanish reading group, arguing that they did not know how to read in Spanish and did not know Spanish at all. The first reading session with Leslie was interesting; they were hesitant to read aloud with the class after I would read. However, once we started to incorporate gestures and body movements with the sentences read aloud, I noticed Leslie start to let loose, seeming more relaxed and eager to participate. During each session, I noticed Leslie slowly start to add more energy to each phrase and its associated gestures. One day, I was shocked by Leslie's participation during our session. On the class whiteboard, I usually write our daily schedule. When we started our Spanish reading sessions, I changed the words "recess" and "lunch" into Spanish ("receso" and "almuerzo"). I also started announcing, "okay, it's time for almuerzo! Let's go!" One day, when I was about to announce our lunchtime, Leslie yelled out, "It's time for almuerzo!" I stared at them with my mouth completely dropped open. I said, "Oh my gosh, Yes! I love hearing you speak Spanish, you are a natural!" Leslie's face lit up and to this day they always say "almuerzo."

This outcome encouraged me to integrate more Spanish words into our daily routines, as a way to teach students more without a formal lesson and as fully integrated. For example, everyday during my lunch count, I asked each student if they'd like breakfast or lunch in Spanish, "desayuno" or "almuerzo." Most students answered with "nada" meaning nothing or "las dos" meaning both. Leslie usually always responded with "¡nada!" very enthusiastically.

I also noticed Leslie start to shift to a different friend group, one that consists of Latinx students. Every day, I noticed Leslie ask Alex the translation to a certain English word and then practice it with them. I also noticed the Latinx group speak to them in Spanish, which also surprised me since they usually rely on speaking English at school. This shows me that the White and Latinx students in my class experienced a type of empowerment in which they felt

comfortable to learn and explore the Spanish language and establish new relationships. It also demonstrates that the integrated class model provided the space for peers from different backgrounds to influence one another.

Another success story is about a Spanish-speaking student, Jaime, who gained a deep interest in reading in Spanish. Their mom reached out to me and said that Jaime was a bit too shy to ask me to read the rest of the book we were reading in Spanish. The mom also told me that Jaime shared that they were shocked to learn that they could read in Spanish. My face lit up and I immediately placed my copy of *La Familia de Federico Rico* on the student's desk. When Jaime returned from lunch, they brought the book to my desk and asked why it was there. I told them that I wanted them to read it if they wanted to read it. The biggest smile took over their face and they said "yes!" and returned to their seat and proceeded to devour the book by reading it aloud. Of course, after a while, I had to ask Jaime to transition into our next activity, which they met with a bit of resistance, but I told them they could take the book home to read with their family. At times now, Jaime brings the book to me and asks for help with pronouncing a certain word, but usually the way they say it is correct.

During the focus group, I asked students how they felt being in a whole class Spanish reading group. Izzy shared that they liked it and didn't notice being mixed at all. Sam said that, "the reading groups did not make me feel that I belong in a different group." Shannon shared that they preferred the mixed group because they liked how others could help them with words and understanding the text. Jesse shared a personal anecdote about their brother; they said, "he only knows Spanish because he was learning Spanish. So if a student that doesn't come from a Spanish speaking family is in a group of like, a lot of Spanish speakers, they'll probably catch on to it."

Efficacy of Linguistic Inclusive Model on Student Reading Levels

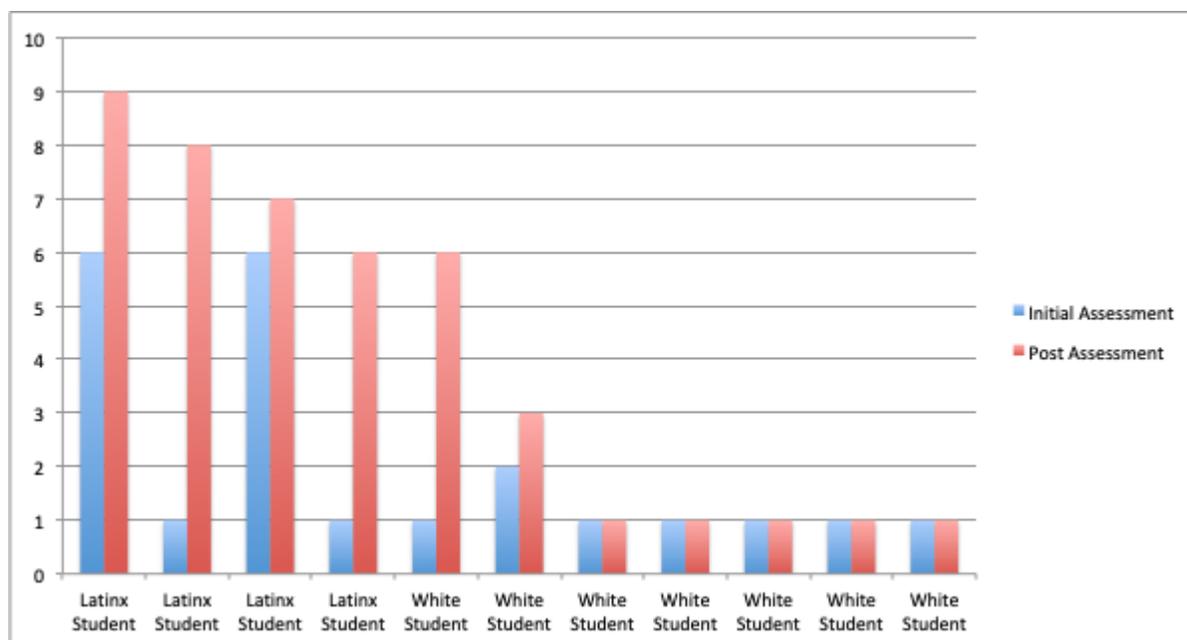
During the focus group with students, Angel shared that they did not enjoy our Spanish reading sessions. They added that they wanted to do other types of activities with Spanish, such as play games. I noticed Angel make their peers aware that Angel does not know Spanish. For example, when Leslie says a few words to Angel in Spanish, they say, “I don't understand what you are saying, I don't know Spanish!” These experiences made me feel nervous to assess Angel's reading in Spanish because I did not want them to shut down and close themselves to the experience of learning a second language. I also assumed they would not show much growth on the reading assessments due to their limited engagement with learning Spanish. However, my assumptions were wonderfully wrong. Angel started at a level B instructional in late January, but jumped to level C instructional by early March. They progressed to a higher level of reading in less than one month!

There are two possible measures for the significance of change in reading comprehension. The first is an increase in reading comprehension score within a reading level. The other is movement from one reading level to the next, once a level score has been maxed out. Around half, 5 of 11, increased their comprehension score noticeably. The other six students jumped at least one reading level. This data shows that the entire class had a significant increase in comprehension scores.

Last year, this class group was split into Native or Non-Native Spanish groups. As a class, we engaged in reader's theater activities with the text, *La Gallinita Roja (The Little Red Hen)*. In the Native group, I remember flying through the practices and the play because the more knowledgeable students pulled the class through with identifying words and modeling the pronunciations. Meanwhile, I remember feeling so frustrated that my Non-Native group was

falling behind schedule because of all the words they were learning for the first time. The only resource and access to identifying unknown words and pronunciations was me. It was so difficult to be the only person able to help this group, while in the other group, there were students ready to help peers that did not know how to read certain words yet.

Figure 1 3/4 Grade F&P Spanish Reading Assessments



The progress in reading comprehension can be attributed to the teaching practices students experienced. For example, many students shared that they enjoyed acting out each sentence from the stories. Alex shared that they liked, “acting it out and when the abuela kicked Pedro Toro in soccer.” Izzy said that they enjoyed “learning about the chupacabra and Federico’s abuela.” These responses revealed that students remembered parts of the stories that we read. What is even more incredible is that this growth occurred during a time where all the odds were against us. The 2020 pandemic brought about several concerns which included: the setting of my study, whether it would be virtual or in-person, the timing due to shortened school days, and overall student engagement because of the traumas they were healing from. However, this study

demonstrates that despite these obstacles, my students persisted and came out even more fluent in the Spanish language.

Students Internalized Perceptions of Ability Based on Race

During the student focus group, I asked how Spanish class groups should be created. A majority of the class agreed that integrated groups (i.e., White and Latinx students learning together) are more effective. However, as we engaged in deeper conversation, I was surprised by some of the students' comments about integrated reading groups. For example, Mari shared that the class could create smaller groups in which there could be a "Mexican" person in each one, with the assumption being that all "Mexican students" know how to read, write, and speak fluent Spanish. The word Mexican is enclosed with quotation marks to demonstrate the use of the students' in vivo code in the study. Other students agreed that allowing each group to have a "Mexican as a resource" would balance out the groups. Drew added, "we could put an American and a Mexican together." When this was shared aloud, some students started to count the number of Latinx students in our class. Josef then said, "there's only four. It won't be even!" I asked these student participants to expand upon this idea. Dani explained, "like if someone needs help like more, they can go get help from the Mexican." This discussion was intriguing because it drew attention to conflicting paradigms. This ideology assumes that "Mexican" students are great resources in learning Spanish, which celebrates the assets and strengths Latinx students bring to the learning space. In some way, this mindset repositions the power structure between the White and Latinx students because it places the Latinx students in a powerful position, where they are seen as contributors. However, simultaneously, these perceptions maintain the racial stereotyping that all "Mexicans" know how to read, write, and speak fluently in Spanish solely because they are "Mexican." The perceptions from these student participants showcased an internalized notion of ability based on race.

Integrated by Race but Separated by Ability? Disguising Segregation

The students' internalized assumptions about Latinx students in the Spanish classroom and the most effective grouping strategy was shared by the views of the parent and educational professionals. The desire for ability-based groups sheds light on the historical conditions of the school with their past Spanish grouping strategies, which has maintained the narrative about students learning Spanish.

A Staff Member Echoes the Student Perceptions with "Model Learners"

The student perceptions described above aligned with beliefs shared by one school staff member, Shelly. In our interview session, Shelly said that "...targeted groups" offers "differentiation within the class and having those model language learners who can help the other students." This response made me think about the concept of "model language learners." I wondered what they meant by "targeted groups" and "model language learners." The "targeted" grouping strategy suggests that, within the integrated class, smaller groups would be intentionally created to include specific members who are "model language learners" and can serve as resources for other students. This response is similar to students' suggestions for creating Spanish reading groups. These findings show that some school staff members may believe that model language learners should serve as resources for other students learning the language, but, in a way, such beliefs can result in assumptions that Latinx students have more Spanish knowledge than other students. This assumption could be problematic (and even harmful) as it could perpetuate a dominant narrative that Latinx students inherently know how to read, write, and speak in Spanish (a racial assumption being made by students, in this case). Although adult stakeholders and students agree on creating class groups based on ability, students also shared that they wanted to be together (i.e., integrated) and the reading assessment data shows that when this happens, learning also improves by comparison to segregated groups.

Roots of Separation

There were two notable discoveries that emerged in conversation with the education professionals who participated in this research. First, Cypress Elementary had a long history of separating Spanish language classrooms into two groups: students from Spanish-speaking families and students from non-Spanish speaking households. The second discovery was that while participants expressed a belief that inclusion is the preferable approach, there is the belief that groups should continue to be created based on ability, which has been documented to maintain the current structural separation practices.

Historically Separated. In our interviews, staff members (education professionals) explained that students at Cypress Elementary were historically placed into Native or Non-Native Spanish class groups based on, “how their parents identified them on some documentation from Kindergarten.” This same staff member added that, “when we dug down deeper, we realized it was just if they were Hispanic, they were in one group; if they were White, they were in another group.” When I asked about the effectiveness of this grouping process, another school staff member shared, “I don’t think it should be in English only and the native Spanish speakers because some [students] may have more exposure than others.” They then added that an outcome of separation, “...based on what [students] identify as is evidence that’s not necessarily based on... assessments that help us figure out what their gaps are and what they need...that’s not following the data.” These adult stakeholders agreed that separating students into two racial groups is ineffective in targeting areas for student growth in Spanish language instruction.

Integrated Separately: Desire for Integration, But Maintaining a Practice of Levelled Groups

These conversations about the school's historical practices led me to ask staff members and a parent the follow-up question, "how should our students be grouped?" The responses surprised me. One school staff member, Shelly said, "I like your idea of mixing them. There can be like a whole group lesson, and you have guided reading and targeted groups." The phrase "targeted groups" made me feel uneasy because it suggests that the student group composition should be based on measuring student deficits. Reading groups at Cypress Elementary are currently created based on reading levels and measures of student deficits. Another staff member, Rebecca, added that it is important to "group them on what their needs are." A parent, Fiona, suggested that "you could have a daily lesson for everybody and then, based on you know what each group needs to work on....that assignment could pertain to their weakness." These findings show that these adult stakeholders believe students should not be separated by race, but should always be grouped based on student reading abilities that are identified through formal assessments and data analysis.

Conflict and Hope for Resolution

In the interview session, Shelly used the phrase "targeted groups" and later said "we're doing kids a disservice. We are not teaching them to be bilingual. How do we capitalize on those assets for students to be successful?" This seems to contradict the beliefs shared among the school staff members and the parent. The primary language used by the school staff does not suggest an asset-based grouping model because, in practice, the preference seems to be separating students based on achievement and language acquisition levels. However, the question offered by this education professional is important to consider. It was heartwarming to hear this later comment and question because it shows that they intend to have a Spanish

program that strives for an asset-based approach of teaching. Now, the work becomes to recreate systems that put this vision into action and practice.

Conclusion

The creation of smaller groups within the large inclusive group based on language acquisition level, creates further segregation within the integration. The initial segregation was based on race and now it's based on ability in language acquisition and achievement. The students in my class have shown that they have internalized this notion. And, the adult stakeholders have maintained this ideology with their student grouping vision that is based on student deficits and needs. Thus the initial integration efforts are absolved and replaced with different forms of segregation. Despite these findings, my students and the adult stakeholders have a preference for an integrated Spanish classroom environment. The findings showed the experiences of students when they were placed in a linguistically inclusive Spanish class. The experiences being that students prefer to be in an integrated Spanish class group. It was also evident that students achieved reading growth in an integrated group setting. This study also addressed the second research question where the perceptions of students, a parent, and educational professionals on ability-based groups were revealed. The revelation being that these three participant groups, the students, parent, and educational professionals prefer that students be placed in an integrated class, but one in which there are smaller levelled groups with a balanced amount of students with the knowledge of Spanish.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The findings from this study document the positive experiences and an increase in Spanish reading comprehension of students who were placed in a linguistically inclusive Spanish classroom. The study also revealed that the students and educational professionals prefer an integrated grouping system, and within the groups, to have a balance of students based on abilities. The final finding was that students and educational professionals revealed their views on the abilities and potential roles of Latinx students in the Spanish classroom. The findings from this study connected with those from the literature, especially with respect to student tracking and CRT.

The idea to create ability based groups within the integration, shifts the type of segregation from race to ability. This reinforces the finding from Barnes and Torres (2018) because this situation has been proven to maintain tracking, similar to SFUSD, where students were placed into groups based on their math abilities and researchers later discovered that their Latinx and Black students were disproportionately impacted and typically always placed together. Although the Spanish reading groups can integrate Latinx and White students, ability based grouping creates a different opportunity for students to be segregated. This aligns with Gandara and Orfield (2010) who found that students can be triply segregated. If one form of segregation is removed, it is important to ensure it is not replaced by a more implicit and different type of segregation. The ability based segregation still stems from the initial racial segregation because the students and educators want to create Spanish groups where Latinx students serve as Spanish resources, which maintains the ideology that Latinx students are more knowledgeable in Spanish due to their background. Thus, the racial tracking at Cypress Elementary becomes replaced by tracking through ability, which reinforces the racial segregation.

This study revealed the educational structures that maintain the dominant narrative about students learning Spanish. Initially, I was looking to solely critique the placement system that placed students into Native or Non-Native Spanish groups at Cypress Elementary. This is because in CRT, the researcher critiques the educational structures that maintain a dominant narrative (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). My research found that a major symptom of the structure that maintained the dominant narrative that students from Spanish-speaking families know how to read, write, and speak fluent Spanish actually came from my students and the educational professionals at Cypress Elementary School. This finding revealed how impactful and serious tracking is in the Spanish program at Cypress Elementary and how ingrained the stigma associated with the Latinx students is prevalent amongst the students and educators.

The perceptions of the students about the role of Latinx students in Spanish classes, that they should be used as a resource for Spanish knowledge, and the fact that the Latinx students in my class supported this notion, connects with Matias (2013), who found that when the majority stereotypes someone in a certain way, that person will perceive themselves in that way. The tracking in the Spanish program at Cypress Elementary has led students and educators to create an environment where people are conditioned to believe that Latinx students are inherently knowledgeable in the Spanish language compared to their White counterparts. This assumption has set a precedent about the expectations and capabilities of a Latinx student at Cypress Elementary which correlates with Ballard (2018), who identified how tracking sets expectations about how groups of students look and behave.

Student success in the Spanish reading group was influenced by the contributions students made during the reading sessions. This connects with Rumelhart (2017) because my students had to tap into their schema to access the readings and engage in discussions. The

variations in student schemas during the Spanish reading sessions would have probably been much narrower if students were taught in segregated groups. This is because the opportunity for students to share about their cultural and linguistic backgrounds become minimized when they are placed with peers who have shared interests. Oakes (2005) and Ballard (2018) similarly found that tracking can minimize student opportunity to expose others to their backgrounds and for others to experience their peers' perceptions, ideas, and experiences. Since students' schemas reveal notions about their cultural backgrounds and personal experiences, the integrated group created the opportunity for students to showcase themselves in our Spanish reading sessions, which built and maintained relationships across my students' cultures. These experiences correlated with the increase in the class's reading comprehension. This relationship shows that when students access their schema in reading, they are able to access and engage in a text and progress in reading. The impact of detracking is that integration produces results in the Spanish classroom.

Implications for the Literature

The findings show that a linguistically inclusive Spanish classroom is capable of providing a counter-narrative about Latinx students. The counter-narrative being that not all Latinx students know how to read, write, and speak in Spanish. It also creates a space for students from other backgrounds to become contributors in an assumed Latinx dominated setting. The increase in F&P reading levels and reading comprehension shows that more learning is achieved in an integrated setting. It furthers the research on detracking because it provides information about the assumptions and attitudes towards Latinx students that are perpetuated through student tracking. It also shows that student learning and reading progression can be achieved in an integrated language class setting.

Implications for Practice and Policy

The process of detracking can create linguistically inclusive student groups in Spanish classrooms. Districts can adopt detracking policies that dismantle student groups based on race, gender, ability, socio-economic, and other forms of segregation. It is important that districts view their student groups through a critical lens because students can experience multiple forms of segregation due to their intersectional identities (Gándara & Orfield, 2010).

The findings inform classroom and teaching implications because they are a response to the direct outcomes from the research. It is vital that classrooms detrack student groups and that teachers teach those groups integratively. This work can result in the creation of counter-narratives where there is a common understanding and collective effort that minimizes assumptions of students and the ways they should be grouped.

Detracking my Spanish classroom can encourage other Spanish programs to reflect and reconsider their tracking practices. The findings from this research can also translate to other programs and schools that are tracking students and offer a different approach, such as detracking. Engaging in critical thinking conversations with students and other stakeholders about assumptions regarding groups of students will help deconstruct narratives that perpetuate stereotypes and stigmas. Although learning environments can be detracked and physically create integrative groups of students, it is important to continue the work and detrack assumptions.

Within a detracked classroom, the educator must further the detracking work and teach integratively. Just because a class has a detracked space, it does not necessarily mean that the teaching practices from the educators are integrative. One way to teach integratively is to group students based on their common interests. A teacher can ask students to close their eyes and raise their hand if a statement resonates true for them. For example, a teacher can ask “raise your hand if you prefer hot weather over cold weather.” The students that raise their hands can then be

placed together and have a conversation starter to begin the process of building community and relationship within their group. A teacher can ask questions with the purpose of placing students into groups based on their common reading interests. For example, a teacher can ask students to raise their hand if they are into graphic novels or stories that involve dragons. This creates interest-based groups where community and relationships can be established because of the common interests and can serve as an entry point into the reading lesson or story the group is going to read.

Although desegregated classroom spaces and integrative teaching practices can meet the criteria for a detracked school, there needs to be simultaneous facilitation of conversations about biases and assumptions with school staff. The shift towards the counter-narrative occurs with the evaluation of values shared amongst school staff about their attitudes and assumptions about the students they teach. The uncovering of biases can be facilitated through professional development workshops. An ideal workshop would be on ways to minimize microaggressions. Staff can be taught the impacts of language and assumptions on the way they teach and perceive students and how other staff and students perceive those staff. A workshop on this topic will also serve for staff to reflect on current practices they enact that are based on poor assumptions about students. Professional development on bias and related topics can help further the progression towards a fully detracked and integrated school.

The literature proves that student tracking is an inequitable educational practice. The findings from my research showcased the impacts of detracking a Spanish classroom, which was a progression in student reading levels, revelations about student and staff beliefs about the gravity of tracking, and student and staff preference for integrated groups. This informs educational policy because it calls for educational institutions to detrack their classes and

pedagogies. As a result, this can further our work in educational equity, where students are placed in classes where they can learn from each other and where students and educators can dispel misconceptions about racial groups.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

While the research and findings are substantial, it is important to consider the limitations of the research and areas where future research can occur. The limitations include timing, the participant and sampling procedure, the positionality of the researcher, and the geographical setting of the study. Future research can extend to include an array of subjects where tracking exists, a multitude of experiences from a diverse participant pool, and ventures into other grouping strategies.

Limitations of the Study

This research only included the experiences of eleven students from one elementary school where the two primary languages spoken were Spanish and English. This limits the applicability of the findings such as the efficacy of the linguistic model on student reading levels and the replicability of the study on other diverse groups, where different and more languages are spoken and where students are from different grade levels. I wonder the impacts on students if they were to experience this same study in a different language, where the relationship to English is more abstract or inaccessible. This study was conducted within a month's time and it would be interesting to see it done for longer periods of time, such as an entire school year and across years. The study was situated in Marin County, California and it would be interesting to see it replicated in a different community such as San Francisco. The study was done in a single classroom, with the researcher as the teacher. It would be interesting to see this study replicated in a variety of Spanish classrooms and shown through the lens of multiple Spanish teachers. The perspectives shared in this study only came from eleven students, three educational

professionals, and one parent. It would advance the findings to hear about the experiences and perceptions of more stakeholders, in order to create more defined triangulation. I also wonder the variation in results if this study was done at different schools within the same school district. It is evident that this research study should be replicated in a variety of settings and situations, as to further the research about student tracking in the Spanish classroom.

Future Research

In the future, research can be broadened to include the experiences of students from different grade levels, language and cultural backgrounds. The results may offer greater acuity if the research took over the course for a longer time period. Rich research can be produced if the participants studied consisted of a larger, more linguistically and culturally diverse student body from a border range of grade levels. It would also be interesting to examine the participants' growth in reading comprehension over the course of a longer period of time. Research could also critique ability based groups through interest-based reading groups. I wonder about the most effective grouping strategies to address the other intersectional identities of students. It would be interesting to extend research into other subject areas and to gain more understanding from the perspectives of other Spanish programs and Spanish teachers.

Conclusion

This study found the impacts of a linguistically inclusive Spanish reading group on student learning outcomes. The impacts include student, parent, and staff preference for linguistically integrated groups, the efficacy of this model on student reading levels, and student, parent, and educator internalized perceptions of ability based on race. These findings formulated implications for school policy, which include schools to detrack their physical classrooms and educators to teach integratively in tandem with professional development training. In addition, this study offers areas of focus for future research such as following tracking in more Spanish classes and in other subject areas and to investigate other types of grouping strategies that address intersectional identities. It is evident that detracked Spanish classes result in positive outcomes for students and educators. It is my recommendation that schools detrack their student groups and teaching practices, as to allow the opportunity for counter-narratives to surface, to dispel misconceptions about student groups, and for our kids to learn from each other and in a supportive school environment, where they are known more for the identities they shape rather than based on our assumptions about them.

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Appendix A:
Reading Interest Inventory

1. Make a list of the types of genres you enjoy to read (nonfiction, fiction, graphic novels, realistic fiction, fantasy, poetry)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
2. Make a list of the types of topics you enjoy to read (animals, history, adventures, magic, mystery, friendships)
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
3. Make a list of words you want to learn in Spanish.
4. Make a list of the books that you have read in English that you want to read in Spanish.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.

Appendix B
Student Focus Group Survey Questions

1. Share what you think about your group.
2. What was your favorite book to read?
3. What are some words you feel excited to have learned?
4. What is one thing you learned about yourself when studying Spanish?
5. What was your favorite part of learning Spanish?
6. What do you wish we could do more of or differently?
7. How do you feel about reading in Spanish?

Appendix C:
Adult Interview Questions

1. What are your initial thoughts on learning Spanish in school or elsewhere? Is it fun? Are there benefits? What has been your experience?
2. When thinking about elementary age children, what do you think is most helpful for them with learning? What about with reading and language? With Spanish?
3. (What do you think about students working together, how students interact, the classroom community? What are the benefits or drawbacks that you see or imagine?)
4. What kind of Spanish program do you envision at your school site?
5. How do you think students who are learning Spanish should be grouped?
6. Do you have any other thoughts or ideas?