HOLDING OUT FOR A HÉROE: A BOOK CLUB STUDY OF RURAL MIDDLE SCHOOL LATINAS

by

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ABSTRACT

LAURIE DYMES. Holding out for a héroe: A book club study of rural middle school Latinas. (Under the direction of DR. MARYANN MRAZ)

Literacy provides people with intellectual tools to question, challenge, understand, disagree, and arrive at informed perspectives and is a reflection of cultural values and meaning-making for adolescents within their community. By understanding the development stages of self-identity in adolescence, reading material provides the implicit and explicit narratives of acceptance, value, and preference to a reader about societal norms. The purpose of this study is to examine how a group of middle grades Latinas, in a rural context, interacted with ethnically diverse protagonists featured in an extracurricular book club and the intersection of text, dialogue, and identity. This study is influenced by the analytical frameworks of Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors and Reader Response Theory to support the best practices in rural education research. A qualitative case study design was used to conduct this study over five weeks during the spring of 2019. This study was conducted in a middle school classroom with six students in rural North Carolina. Data sources include interviews, observations, and a collection of student responses. The data was analyzed using a combined methodology of discourse and thematic analysis to better understand the influence of diverse characters on student identity and cultural connections as evidenced in their discussion. After analyzing the data, Latinx culture, cultural challenges, familial relationships, and educational perspective emerged as themes to answer the research question about the Latinas experience with a Latinx-centric Book Club in the rural South.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to six rural Latina students who helped me view literacy and friendship through their understandings and have trusted me to tell about their experiences. It is also dedicated to my husband, Christopher, and two daughters, Keara and Meghan, who have encouraged me to be more than the sum of my own experiences and have believed in all of my dreams.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Literacy provides people with intellectual tools to question, challenge, understand, disagree, and arrive at informed perspectives. This practice serves as a reflection for cultural values and meaning-making represented by shared cultural models (Barody, 1984; Gee, 2015). With a growing diversity in the schools of southeastern United States, reflecting the identities of learners through text selection can validate the contributions of authors and characters of ethnic diverse backgrounds and those same students within learning institutions (Agosto et al., 2003; Bishop, 1990; Everett, 2018; Kochlar, Suro, Tafoya, & Pew Hispanic Center, 2005; McNair, 2008; Sciurba, 2018). Furthermore, the diversity explored through instructional text choices offered a platform in which conversations took place to intellectually extend to and understand the larger community (Asher & Womack, 2016; Janks, 2019).

Purposeful text selection addresses literacy practices to support adolescent readers, who are diverse in background and learning needs (Hurst, Franklin, & Scales, 2010). The authentic reading experience takes the form of discussion that develops as participants contest their perceptions of the book's particulars with a peer group (Broughton, 2002; Park, 2012). Through this exchange of ideas, the initial understanding of the text evolves for the individual readers, while simultaneously meeting the need of socialization for adolescents (Alvermann, Young, Green, and Wisenbaker, 1999; Korobkova & Collins; 2018; Luke & Freebody, 1997). This participatory effort is separate from the experience one receives from reading the book independently, especially if the essence of the main character is reflective of the members of the group (i.e., gender, racial, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.). If this authentic experience is the

pinnacle of book sharing, why are text experiences in middle school an isolated or standardized question-focused exercise? Instead, literacy instruction in the classroom can be the platform to expose students to different perspectives, voices, and interpretations by modeling group collaboration and therefore validating a narrative that does not necessarily reflect only that of the dominant culture.

Instructional texts for middle grades that are selected by educators for use in the classroom remain only on the fringe of topics for literacy research (Del Nero, 2018; Fisher & Frey, 2015; Jesson & Parr, 2017; Jimenez, Roberts, Brugar, Meyer & Waito, 2017; Jogie, 2015). While there has been an increase in ethnic inclusiveness publishing over the past two decades (Agosto, Hughes-Hasseel, & Gilmore-Clough, 2003; Grice, Rebellino, & Stamper, 2017; Lopez-Robertson, 2017; McNair, 2016), texts selected for classroom use that are reflective of the school community require further research.

Cross-culturalism literature not only builds connections between students, but it also builds connections with the individuals and their school communities.

Giovanelli & Mason (2015) described authentic reading experiences as the textual interpretation generated when students are permitted the freedom to experience the text on their own accord rather than experiencing the text as it is imposed on them by other readers (Atwell, 1998). Reading experiences can be transformed through thoughtful pedagogical decisions in literacy that engage learners and motivate readers through platforms such as Book Clubs. Daniels (2006) documented the classroom reading groups that paralleled an adult Book Club for naturally occurring discussion surrounding a shared title.

Through passive reading engagement, students expect to receive meaning from the text rather than utilizing active reading strategies (Hynds, 1997; Rosenblatt, 1978; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). One challenge for adolescent readers is the overreliance upon the teacher as an authoritative "interpreter of the text rather than a reading guide" (Franzak, 2006, p. 226). Furthermore, since the majority of the teaching force comes from White, middle-class backgrounds (Darling-Hammond, 2010), this single-lens interpretation creates a dissonance from an ethnically diverse adolescent reader. Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1978) emphasizes that meaning is created through a process of interpreting the text by the readers. The cultural references within the text for an instructional novel may lead the adolescent to identify with the protagonist (cultural insider) or feel estranged from the character's experiences (cultural outsider) (Fox & Short, 2003). Utilizing a culturally-driven text for an adolescent Book Club, the participants actively co-construct the meaning of the novel, drawing upon each participants' experiences and understanding (Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

The purpose of this study is to examine how a group of middle grades Latinas in a rural context interacted with ethnically diverse protagonists featured in an extracurricular book club and the intersection of text, dialogue, and identity through small group discussions.

Statement of the Problem

English Language Arts classrooms acquire reading lists from various sources (Common Core, 2012). The canons currently in use in secondary education are typically selected by interest groups or critics, and are made based on many factors: political

agendas, curricular goals, personal interest, and tradition (Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, & Petrone, 2014). Most often these texts are representative of the dominant culture, featuring characters who are deemed accurately portrayed by readers from such an environment and neglect the representation of authors of color or topics that are cross-culturalist in content (Moss, 2013). Forty-one states in the American education system had adopted The Common Core as the standard for ELA curriculum (Common Core, 2018). The text exemplars in Appendix B of Common Core had been interpreted as a prescriptive set of text selections that were the basis of the curriculum instead of a teacher's guide (Caillouet & Sanford, 2014). The criteria were based upon how well the student will be able to derive and apply strict literacy strategies to the text, leaving a holistic approach that addresses diversity and cultural components as collateral consideration for a diverse student population. With this narrowed focus on text selection, students miss out on robust materials that not only address literacy lessons but incorporate the diversity of all learners. Rather, some districts permit the use of the instructional texts that are locally adopted, even teacher selected, and can address issues that are pertinent to students' realities based upon region.

Teachers, who are knowledgeable about their students, are able to select materials that are culturally relevant to their particular classroom (Sharma & Christ, 2017). Through content, characters, and situational experiences, diverse texts allow readers to interact, identify, challenge, and support beliefs of themselves, others, and the world, while developing the middle-grade student and classroom community. Furthermore, the inclusion of characters and contexts from a variety of backgrounds allow all readers to experience a reflection of identity and also witness cultural experiences that are not as

common to their own lived experiences (Sims-Bishop, 1990). The problem the study sought to address is how demands for adolescent literacy learning have changed but the instructional texts in which rural middle grade classrooms utilize may not have.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine how a group of middle grades Latinos in a rural context interacted with ethnically diverse protagonists featured in an extracurricular book club and the intersection of text, dialogue, and identity, as demonstrated through small group discussion. This study examined this experience through the Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors cultural text lens offered by Sims-Bishop (1990) and integrated Reading Response Theory (Rosenblatt 1978) and discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2008) in which language, as presented as a social context, exists in a rural English Language Arts (ELA) classroom. These lenses, in which the study was examined, are further detailed in this chapter.

Regardless of cultural, academic, or socioeconomic variables, adolescents, as a group, struggle to remain engaged with literacy practices (Beers, 1996; Greenberg, Gilbert, & Fredrick, 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). At a time in their lives where self-identity is being formed, embedded messages about societal norms are being perceived through reading material (Lewis, 2002). These can vary depending on the community in which the student identifies. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of underrepresented groups students participating in a Book Club, as they examined the complexity in identity (Greene & Abt-Perkins, 2003; Holmes, 2018), built student self-efficacy to engage in authentic reading experiences (Jocius & Shealy, 2018; Venegas, 2018), and navigated the connections made in group discussion to real-life

understandings. Books can be utilized as sources of power "to entertain, foster a love of reading, and inform, while also affirming the multiple aspects of students' identities by exposing them to the values, viewpoints, and historical legacies of others" (McNair, 2008, p. 375). When single narratives are shared in the classroom, this source of power is implicitly diminished for all learners.

Research Question

This study sought to understand the influence of instructional texts featuring a protagonist of a diverse background on students' identity and as a community of readers as evidenced in their Book Club discussions over a period of five weeks. The research was guided by the following question:

1. In the context of a North Carolina rural middle school, how do adolescent Latinas experience a Latinx-centric novel in an extracurricular book club format?

Significance

This study explored the use of instructional texts that feature protagonists of diverse background on students' identities and as a community of readers. This study is significant because it investigated the Book Club in a rural middle school where the greatest diversity of the student body is socioeconomic and not by ethnicity (Center for Public Education, 2018). Southern rural schools are increasingly becoming more diverse (Cuadros, 2006; Kochlar et al., 2005; Rong & Hilburn, 2017), yet the instructional texts that are utilized in the middle school classroom are not (Agosto, Hughes-Hassell, & Gilmore Clough, 2003). The current standard-based practices for literacy development in middle grades education is concerned primarily with "rigorous, focused, academic content and performance expectations" (Massell & Perrault, 2014). Books that develop a

positive and healthy sense of racial identity could play a key role in adolescents' positive self-efficacy development (Asher & Womack, 2016; Frankel & Murphy, 2018; McNair, 2008). The content of literature for adolescents contends with the exclusion of particular narratives and preference of others; these practices silently validate the social and cultural definition of identity norms (Everett, 2018; McNair, 2008), demanding a closer examination of the elements of selected texts and their messages for classroom use (Sims-Bishop, 1990).

In a like manner, this study is significant because it suggests an alternative to the increasingly monoethnic narratives found in middle school instructional text selections (Agosto et al., 2003; Banks, 1990; Landt, 2006), advocating for a curriculum that validates student diversity by supplying texts that offer relatable material to all learners (Beers, 1996; Colby & Lyon, 2004). Gough (2000) identified curriculum as "the collective story we tell our children about our past, our present, and our future" (p. 78). Additionally, by providing text materials that show perspectives that reflect the backgrounds and cultural identities of all students; this not only validates the individual's experiences but also promotes a discussion of diversity within the classroom (Hughes-Hassell & Cox, 2010; Myers, 2014). Yet, current books that are mainly found in classrooms portray stories primarily centered on White, middle class, cisgendered, abled characters (Dyches, Prater, & Jenson, 2006; Golos & Moses, 2013). Likewise, stories that reflect non-White characters and culturally specific themes are rare and are typically only seen in the background as support to the White characters (Koss, 2015). This study is timely, because the rural South is being redefined through the lens of the New South and growing Latinx demographics. In the larger political context of the United States, the

effects of immigration and assimilation on Latinx family and community are beginning to increase through current textbook publications (Morales, 2018; Salas & Portes, 2017), podcasts (Block, 2018; Rao & Stasio, 2015), documentaries (Johnson, 2018; Vittles Films with Southern Foodways Alliance & Bouloubasis, 2015), and in the local newspapers (Armus, 2019; Gergen & Martin, 2016). This study was designed to add to the existing work that values diversity for all learners in the classroom and validates the backgrounds of all students in a rural community.

Analytical Framework

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence an ethnically diverse protagonist will have on the experiences among rural Latina middle school students in a small Book Club. The primary claim was that adolescents benefit from a pluralistic literacy experience, one that validates ethnic roots and simultaneously acts as a window into a culture otherwise unexperienced. When a wider range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds are featured within the instructional texts of classrooms, the new socially constructed ideologies are constituted in the ways of diversity to empower all groups of learners. Using a lens guided by the concept of Sims-Bishop's (1990) Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors, this study not only focused on the selection of literature used in learning environments, as relationships of power and domination of culture, but also utilized the counternarratives within text selections to validate students' identities.

Mirrors, Windows, Sliding Glass Doors

Literacy through this lens encourages the inclusion of texts, authorship, and featured protagonists that allow for readers from all backgrounds to have a diverse reading experience. The concept Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors (Sims-

Bishop, 1990) suggested that students should encounter text that "mirrors" the background and cultural understandings they have. Likewise, this framework suggested that readers should be provided with texts that allow for a "window" into a culture other than their own. Lastly, this concept encouraged texts that readers can imagine stepping through a "sliding glass door" into a world that is unlike their own (Sims-Bishop, 1990). The inclusion of texts that are culturally diverse provides validation to lived experiences of all members of a community (Banks, 1999; Tatum, 1997).

This seminal work by Sims-Bishop (1990) placed emphasis on the reader and his/her interpretation of text and how it is interpreted through the reader's previous reading and lived experiences (Johnson, Koss, & Martinez, 2017). This reader-centered approach drew from Rosenblatt's (1978) Reader Response Theory. Rosenblatt understood reading to be a transaction that was performed between the reader and the text. The full comprehension and experience of the text could not be fully embraced without the reader drawing from individual background knowledge, beliefs, and the act of reading. This is applicable to this project, as the reflection artifacts were created by the participants. In turn, the experiences of the participants were revealed in how each individual interpreted the text and how aspects of each chapter were identifiable in their lives.

Reader Response Theory

Likewise, Rosenblatt's transactional theory of Reader Response was not intended to be centered on isolated reading experiences. Instead, Rosenblatt's work focused on how individuals negotiated the reading within social terms. The ongoing conversation between the reader and the text and the negotiation of meaning as the literature developed

supported the transactional theory. Students in this project discussed each chapter as they interpret it. The discussion supported the transaction of meaning across the social terms within the bounded system of the Book Club.

Through meaningful discussion, the Book Club integrated literacy curriculum through authentic reading experiences because it allowed the small group of participants to interact with the text and co-construct meaning from the text within this social system (Daniels, 2002). Each student contributed unique perspective that drew from individual read or lived experiences. Each member of the group contributed to the shared understanding of the group (Beers & Probst, 2013). In the context of this project, the students examined what aspects of the featured protagonists are identifiable and relatable to their lived experiences but also are asked to place value on the stories being added to the mainstream curriculum for all students to have exposure. This empowerment of literacy practices developed the "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" metaphor to students from all backgrounds.

Critical Literacy

Critical literacy draws from the theoretical framework of Critical Theory to utilize texts in an active manner that is intended to help unveil unequal power relations and transform lives through the empowerment of literacy (Luke & Dooley, 2011). From this perspective, all forms of critical literacy education are social and political acts (Morrell, Dueñas, Garcia, & Lopez, 2013; Norris, Lucas, & Prudhoe, 2012; Rogers, 2014; Wink, 2005). The reader is challenged through critical literacy to derive meaning from explicit and implicit messages instead of merely comprehending the words (Poulus & Exley, 2018). Utilizing the methods of Rosenblatt (1968), and the concept of using reading as a

means for exploration, Reader Response Theory places an emphasis on the role of the reader to actively construct and interpret text to discover deeper meaning rather than passively accepting the text as a literal object. Through this critical meaning-making, readers learn to "question, explore, or challenge the power relationships that exist between authors and readers" (Norris et al., 2012, p. 59) and identify hegemonic practices that perpetuate dominant ways of understanding the world (Freire, 1970).

Critical literacy examines how texts are used to reproduce domination. Moreover, it challenges access for targeted audiences that confront issues of diversity and inclusivity. Freire and Macedo (1987) emphasized that education empowers people with the ability to read both the word and the world for transformation. As a result, students become literate in the ways of the world beyond text and are positioned to advocate for texts that offer a "mirror" of their own lived experiences.

Middle school students need to continue to develop their independent reading skills and critical literacies skills simultaneously, but there is a discrepancy between this expectation and the instruction in secondary classrooms (Allington, 1994; Bean & Stevens, 2003; Stanley, Petscher, & Catts, 2018; Wood, Soares, & Watson, 2006). It is essential that the curriculum be adapted to what is important for middle school students' reading instruction and align it to how such instruction is being implemented by selecting texts that are meaningful for students of diverse backgrounds.

Definition of Terms

Latinx

The term Latinx replaced the binary and gender-specific form of Latino and Latina. Hispanic has implications of reference to those whose ancestral origins are that

of Spain or Spanish-speaking countries, and Latino makes reference to those from Latin American communities. Both terms imply exclusion to a larger portion of people, who identify with similar cultural backgrounds wishing to be represented as part of a larger collective identity. The term has since been politicized and gained recognition in advocacy groups. Other forms of Latinx that have become acceptable by the respected communities are Latin@ and Latine. For the purpose of my paper I will use Latinx and Latinxs to represent the community at large but will use Latina when I am speaking specifically of my female participants.

Book Club

Book Clubs and Literature Circles serve a similar purpose for the content of this paper. Both instructional methods make the reading process a social one (Straits & Nichols, 2006). In addition, they both create a classroom of learners that are united by a single text experience (Beers and Probst, 2013). For this research, I have selected the use of Book Clubs because there are not multiple titles being used by multiple groups at the same time (Daniels, 2002) and the participants will not be required to perform a role throughout the reading experience prior nor during the group discussion (Daniels, 1994; Daniels, 2004; Morris & Perlenfein, 2003). "'Literature circles' is not just a trendy label for any kind of small-group reading lesson – it stands for a sophisticated fusion of collaborative learning with independent reading, in the framework of reader response theory" (Daniels, 1994, pp.17-18).

Reader Response Theory

The main argument centered in Reader Response Theory is that the reader is an active participant in making meaning of the text and is not merely just the receiver of

information (Rosenblatt, 1994). This theory rejects the structuralist view that meaning is solely dependent upon the words in the text. Instead, the text creates an experience between the reader and the words, and when the reader brings lived experience to the text, a deeper level of understanding transpires. Rosenblatt (1982) connects the efferent-aesthetic continuum to Reader Response Theory and the reader's stance. The efferent stance is when the reader is extracting information from the reading to have some knowledge to take away. On the contrary, when the reader reads with an emotional investment, this is more heavily leaning on the aesthetic stance (Rosenblatt, 1978). Both stances have purpose in Book Club readings and group participation, as the student monitors comprehension and makes literary connections to his/her personal life.

Conclusion

In the following sections, I intend to assess the experience of Latina students through the study of a book collection of short stories, featuring young Latinx protagonists, in relation to their identity in a rural middle school, as an advocate for minorities in education, and how participating in group discussions influences the connections the students make as readers in their own lives.

Middle school readers are "preoccupied with seeking equilibrium in their perceptions of who they are and what they are becoming" (Broughton, 2002, p. 5). Their academic interests do not always steer them towards literacy self-enrichment, yet middle school students are on the cusp of an age where having input about what they learn empowers their development (DaLie, 2001). Adolescents are entering an age of cognitive ability to make judgements and connect abstractly to their personal lives (Caskey & Anfara, 2014). To foster the sense of self identity, access to multiple perspectives within

adolescents' reading experiences matter. This subtle validation to the students and to that of their peers provides a platform for an integrated social context that builds the complex identity for adolescents.

Summary

The purpose of this study is to examine how a group of middle grades Latinas in a rural context interacted with ethnically diverse protagonists featured in an extracurricular book club and the intersection of text, dialogue, and identity through small group discussion. Through this study, students in a rural middle school in North Carolina participated in a Book Club, corresponding activities, and discussions that connected them to Latinx protagonists. Reader Response Theory helps students to use personal interpretation and experience to analyze the text (Rosenblatt, 1968). Using Windows, Mirrors, and Sliding Glass Doors (Sims-Bishop, 1990) as a theoretical lens, I worked with students to understand the experience of engaging with such a character in instructional texts, using a combined methodology of discourse and thematic analysis.

Chapter One defines the purpose, provides background, presents significance, introduces the theoretical framework, and establishes the basic principle of this study. Chapter Two presents a context of the research concerning rural classrooms, student identity, and instructional text selections. The definition, history, and effectiveness of Reader's Response Theory are also reviewed. Student discussion and the ability to connect to ethnically diverse protagonists through naturally-occurring, small group discussion will be brought together through a transactional approach to literature as it applies to literary criticism and its use in the classroom.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the influence novels featuring ethnic minorities had on student identity and textual connections as evidenced in a rural student Book Club. Adolescents are entering a stage of cognitive development that makes them aware of societal values and how as individuals they can identify with the structural values. Ethnically diverse characters are not proportionately present in the public-school canons. This absence affects the ways in which literature can be a "window, mirror, or sliding glass door" (Sims-Bishops, 1990) to the human experience and validate one's contribution and synchrony to the larger human experience. The Book Club study featured protagonists who are ethnic minorities in which the participants had shared cultural experiences thus connecting adolescents' reading perceptions, school literacies, and identity through the readings and book discussions. To foster the sense of self identity, group discussions with peers from similar ethnic backgrounds and literary experiences provided a platform for an integrated social context that built the complex identity for the participants. For this study, research conducted with the last 30 years was thoroughly examined, with particular consideration given to those studies carried out in the United States within the last ten years. It was necessary to consider research with earlier publication dates due to curriculum adoptions, instructional text selections, and a raised awareness of the reflection of diversity that is implicitly stated by these decisions.

This literature review focuses on five major areas that define concepts, promotes an understanding of its significance, and explores theoretical applications. The

first section demonstrates how the literature defines the history of diverse texts in the United States. The second section explains the psychology, issues, and challenges during adolescence. The third section applies the issues of ethnic and racial identity to the adolescent rural student, emphasizing influential factors that make them unique both as students and citizens of their communities. The fourth section defines the changing rural South and the implications this has for the selected instructional texts used in classrooms. Using Sims-Bishop's (1990) lens of Windows and Mirrors, the fifth section explores the implications of seeking out heroes within literature that is inclusive of all students.

American Curriculum

In the late 1800s, the purpose of American education was divided into two main philosophies: college preparatory and a people's school. The National Education Association appointed a Committee of Ten in 1892, which was mostly comprised of educators. The committee's primary function was to recommend a standard curriculum. The recommendation report outlined important knowledge within each subject area to guide curricular agendas (Tyack & Tobin, 1994) and all selected authors were White, Anglo males. Despite the diversity of today's student population, the literature choices have changed very little since the required reading list issued by the National Education Association in 1894 (Bissonnette & Glazier, 2016).

The concept of literary canon originally referred to "books of holy scripture authorized by religions leaders" (Johnson, 2005, p. 201). The reference to canons in the 21st Century, however, most commonly addresses the selected texts used in classrooms for instructional purposes. While these canons are more commonly fixed across high schools and college settings, there is flexibility found at the middle school level for text

selection. With this autonomy in decision-making, systems must determine criteria of what is deemed most important for students by following the standards for the state-adopted curriculum (NCDPI, 2018), which omits any explicit provisions for text diversity in instructional texts.

The literary canon still refers to the list of literature of instructional texts that have been determined part of a curriculum. These are specified by national or local curriculum documents for institutions. In contrast, many local curriculums are designed by a *de facto* canon, which is not from a prescribed list but arises from what the teachers are really using as instructional texts (Fleming, 2007; Thompson, 2014). Likewise, some counties or schools may make suggestions for thematic incorporation of texts or author studies but allow the specific titles of the materials to be selected by the educator. Guidelines that assist educators in selecting materials based on complexity and rigor (Fisher & Frey, 2015) are available but without mention of diverse content for secondary classrooms.

The canons currently in use in secondary education are typically selected by interest groups or critics, who judge texts based on their own agendas or critical perspectives. At the middle school level, there are three strong, guiding forces that create canons: Newbery Medal Winners, Printz Award winners and the textbook and testing companies. The Newbery Medal books tend to favor historical fiction, featuring white and abled protagonists. Printz Award: explore topics of interest to their young adult readership, such as coming of age and diversity. The textbook and testing companies also have their own agendas. Thein, Breach, & Fink (2013) state these entities, “hold significant sway in shaping context and instruction to make context choices for financial

reasons and based on teacher familiarity with certain texts" (p. 11). This ambiguity has ramifications in creating reading lists that align with the mandated curriculum without the transparency of such decisions for state standards.

State Standards and Suggested Texts

Common Core was launched in 2009 by state leaders in forty-eight of the fifty states. The Common Core initiative provided a framework for educators to design a curriculum for literacy standards (About the Standards, 2018). In 2013, forty-one states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) had adopted the Common Core State Standards (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). Proponents of the Common Core support the Common Core standards as a rigorous curriculum to prepare students for college-ready material. Opponents of the Common Core standards prefer to have the standards decided locally instead of federally to best meet the needs of the students within a region. While seventeen states have not made any changes to the standards as of early 2017, twenty-one states have completed revisions to the standards, and eight states have completely repealed or withdrawn from the Common Core initiative (Norton, 2017). North Carolina has replaced the Common Core for ELA with a Standard Course of Study that was adopted in April of 2017 for implementation in the 2018-2019 school year. According to North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2018), text selection and curriculum development is left as a district-level decision. As a state that relied on Common Core documents and initiatives for the past eight years (Achieve, 2013), many educators have relied on the complimenting documents to devise ELA curriculum for their classrooms. With few changes in the state standards, many classrooms across North Carolina will

share in stories that were utilized for teaching the curriculum while Common Core guided the instructional decisions.

North Carolina, like many states across the nation, has had educational budget cuts that directly affect textbook purchasing. For example, textbook funding went from $68 per student in 2008-09 to approximately $15 per student in 2014-15, making a 78% reduction in funding (NCDPI, 2018). This leaves many of the same text materials from the Common Core era applicable during the transition phase into North Carolina State Standards, since the funding limitations for a change in materials. During the Common Core State Standards imitative, the Department of Public Instruction offered educators a list of exemplar texts (Appendix B of CCSS). These texts offer examples of instructional text containing rigor but also highlight authors that may be beneficial for particular grade levels. According to Common Core State Standards Initiative's (CCSSI, 2010) Key Points in English Language Arts, there is not a prescribed reading list. Instead, the offered titles create a common understanding of complex texts. Common Core has a model of Text Complexity for educators to use for text evaluation: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Reader and Task (Appendix A of CCSS). Common Core also suggests that educators use a combination of "classic and contemporary literature as well as challenging informational texts in a range of subjects, students are expected to build knowledge, gain insights, explore possibilities, and broaden their perspectives" (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010).

The text exemplars for Common Core were chosen by the recommendations of teachers, educational leaders, and researchers who had experience with the particular texts and specific grade levels. Book quality, breadth, and text complexity were all

considered in their choices (Moss, 2013). According to North Carolina Public Schools (NCDPI), the state does not endorse decisions about texts and text adoptions are made at the local system or school level. There are grade-level decisions made about what students should know and be able to do with Common Core, but instructional material decisions are left for the system, school and classroom, particular to state specifications.

In one southeastern state, a county noted the process for selecting textbooks. The committee members for the county-wide adoption should "represent the grade level and subject area of the textbooks being considered and should base their decisions on the following criteria: alignment of content with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study; readability of the content; and content's integration with other subject areas" (Beaufort County Schools, 2017). The aforementioned criteria for text selection, however, negates representing the diverse student population in the classrooms. The authors of the middle grades text exemplars in Common Core State Standards Appendix B of Common Core State Standards represent the ethnic background of White (72%), African American (12%), Hispanic (7%), Asian (5%), Native American (2%), and Multi-racial (2%), which does not reflect the diversity of the American classroom.

History of Diverse Texts

In 1965, The Council for Interracial Books for Children (CIBC) was created with the goal "to promote literature for children that better reflects the realities of a multicultural society" (Social Justice Books, 2017). For the past 30 years, CIBC has been collecting data on diversity in picture books. The organization has noted a large discrepancy between the diverse populations in schools and the reflective response of books and authors addressing the diversity. According to CIBC (2017), more than half of

the children in American schools are people of color but less than a quarter of the books published in 2016 reflect this population. The organization critiques texts by considering who writes the book, how the characters are portrayed, and considers topics of activism and power relations.

Sims-Bishop (1990) published her seminal essay titled “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors,” coining a metaphor that has since been used throughout the world of literacy when referring to diversity in texts. The message is simple: “all young readers need more books with characters of all ethnicities and backgrounds, having a diverse range of experiences” (Bloom, 2017). Sims-Bishop (1990) began:

> Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection, we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books. (p. 1)

Not only was Sims-Bishop advocating for diverse text sets that mirror every student, but she was also campaigning for these titles to provide windows in which students could explore the realities of others, connecting the human experiences and commanding “respect, diversity, discovery, authenticity of voice and empathy” (Coughlan, 2014). The

metaphor continued with sliding glass doors to enable readers to step into the worlds in which authors create.

Children from dominant social groups have had the privilege of finding their mirrors in the books they have read rather freely. There has not been much effort exerted in placing themselves within the story lines and imagining the worlds that were created by the authors for the White protagonists. White dominance is inherently placed in the pages of the books for subtle messages about the societal value of race and ethnicity. According to Sims-Bishop (1990), books allow readers the ability to explore topics featuring characters unlike themselves. Children are "socially isolated and insulated from the larger world" (Sims-Bishop, 1990, p. 1) where racism still exists. If the children from the dominant groups continue to only see mirrored images of themselves in the text, they risk developing a sense of unsubstantiated importance, which is a dangerous quality of ethnocentrism.

Children's Books

In 2018, Tyner reported that the highest amount of brown-skinned characters appeared in children's books. This reference did not include characters where their race and/or ethnicities were explicitly stated; instead, the publishing companies are receiving more characters whose race and ethnicities are ambiguous. Determining if this is a positive or negative direction for an influx in cross-culturalism content is still being debated because of the unclear message of simply brown-skinned people. The reader's ability to recognize the race or ethnicity of a character might be subtle, but it can offer an opportunity to validate one's identity and experience the story from another perspective (Schwartz, 2016).

Style (1988) stated, “If the student is understood as occupying a dwelling of self, education needs to enable the student to look through window frames in order to see the realities of others and into mirrors in order to see her/his own reality reflected” (p. 1). As young children begin to learn to read and understand how society functions through storybooks, the lack of minorities within the picture books takes a toll on the developing psyche. The children are left wondering where they and their loved ones fit into the world of reading (Bronson, 2016; Style, 1988). When the images they do find are “distorted, negative, or laughable” (Bishop, 1990, p.1), they are simultaneously learning a lesson of society’s values. In turn, their spirit of reading is diminished, as they do not encounter characters who look like them. The low publishing statistics recorded on ethnically diverse literature or children and teens means that there is a long way to go before one can assure that the literature and literacy canons are accurately reflecting the perspectives and experiences of America’s rich diverse communities (Janks, 2018; Sciurba, 2014).

Fitts and McClure (2015) explored prime Discourses and language ideologies as they pertain to the Latinx community within North Carolina. The authors examined the underlying belief systems about language and immigration in acknowledgment of these Discourses that creates cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) with communities as they contend with these beliefs and the shifting demographics. Festinger’s (1957, as cited in Aronson, 1997) cognitive dissonance is experienced when two cognitions (beliefs, values, and opinions) are inconsistent with one another. At its root, the theory of cognitive dissonance is a theory about “sense-making: how people try to make sense out of their beliefs, their environment, and their behavior” (Aronson, 1997 p. 129). This

affliction to balance can root oppressive systematic policies and ideologies surrounding language.

Language ideologies, as a framework, extends beyond belief systems and reveals deep-seeded oppression. This can be found in "educational opportunities [that] influence language maintenance and loss, and shape relationships between different language communities" (Fitts & McClure, 2015, p. 233). Gee (2015) specified that institutions are deeply entwined with "the attitudes, values, norms and beliefs (at once social, cultural and political) that always accompany literacy and schooling" (p. 87). Institutional practices draw from these normalized practices in order to explain and justify hegemonic language ideologies that preserve power structures. Likewise, the explicit inclusion of characters that are representative to the school community sends a message to the diverse populations and to each child "that she/he has value and worth in our society" (Mabbott, 2017, p. 511). This validation supports the psychological development of adolescents, as they discover their identity and place within society.

Adolescent Identity

From a psychological perspective, adolescence is the period of transition in one's life between childhood and adulthood. Erikson (1968) noted the primary challenge of this period is *identity versus identity confusion*. There is a desire to understand who they are and how they fit into society. There are many influences that contribute to the formation of identity: parents, school, social groups, church, and even popular culture. Likewise, adolescents begin exploring career paths, relationships, and personal style. These avenues of exploration can be validated or challenged through the exposure to characters within texts. Rollins (1948) believed that when children saw positive

images reflected of their own race in texts, these positive messages resonated within the individual, leaving the child feeling optimistic. Those who find commitment of identity at this stage, feel a sense of resolution. On the contrary, adolescents who have difficulty successfully forming an identity may find themselves testing out different identities, find it difficult to mature relationships, and feel uncertainty about the future which Erikson calls *role confusion*. Culturally responsive texts that reflect the racial and ethnic backgrounds of the classroom can support identity formation for adolescents.

According to Erikson (1950), adolescent identity is developed as a result of the biological, cognitive, and social changes that occur. A developmental progression from a child's sense of self, which is primarily dependent upon parental beliefs (Selman, 1980), to an adolescent's sense of self that is based upon personal experiences and discovery (Erikson, 1968) lays the groundwork for the exploration of one's ethnicity/race and how this understanding aligns with the developing identity (Phinney, 1989). Gleason (1983) provided a conceptual development of identity as it related to various disciplines following the impact of Erikson and through the impact of ethnic identity. Such conceptual and empirical research has found the concept of identity as an influence in academic studies (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004). Ethnic-racial identity (ERI) formation is an age-appropriate progression for adolescents (Douglas, 2016). For immigrant and minority groups, ethnic-racial identity development may be particularly complex (Azmitia, Syed, & Radmacher, 2008). This is intricate because adolescents are navigating the intersections of personal and social identities, as they relate those to their ethnic and racial identities. In this way, adolescents can be validated in the classroom as they examine race.

Adolescent Understanding of Race

According to the 2018 National Center for Education Statistics (Hussar & Bailey, 2018), public school enrollment reflects an increasing diverse student population and projection into 2026 for Blacks, Hispanics, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and students of two or more races. These projected changes are dramatic considering the large diversity changes in the 2014 report (Hussar & Bailey, 2014), which already projected an increase of 64 percent between 2009–10 and 2022–23 for students who are Hispanic. The newest report projects that by 2026, White students are expected to account for 45% of the students in our classrooms, as the enrollments of minorities continues to increase. Between 2018 and 2026, the Center projects a 6% decrease for students who are White, a 1% increase for students who are Black, a 17% increase for Hispanic students, a 18% increase for Asian/Pacific Islander students, and a 12% decrease for American Indian-Alaskan natives. Further, between 2014 and 2026, the Center projects an increase of 19% for students who are of two or more races.

Latinxes are the largest and fastest growing ethnically diverse group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), but they are also at the center of contentious immigration debates (Chavez, 2013). This complex sociopolitical climate, exasperated by language and employment, makes the process of identity development for Latinx adolescents more complicated (Schwartz et al., 2016). The continued increase of classroom diversity warrants the selection of instructional texts featuring diverse protagonists that are reflective of the student population. The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) released a report regarding children's book by and about people of color from its 2017 data (Tyner, 2018). The number of diverse books published has

reached 31%, the highest since 1994. There are resources readily available offering guidance and suggestions of titles to implement into the 21st Century classroom to increase social awareness for identity exploration and validation.

During adolescence, youth begin to engage in socialization efforts independent of family such as social time with peers, afterschool activities, and social media (Umana-Taylor & Fine, 2004). These opportunities for socialization and experimentation for ethnic/racial identity exploration also increase through ethnic clubs, culturally diverse peer groups, and exposure to social media content (Phinney, 1996). As adolescents acquire more agency in identity formation, they are constantly comparing new information and experiences to those of familial traditions about ethnic and cultural messages (Douglas, 2016). Feeling connected with those who share similar identities, specifically strong and constructive ethnic identities, can help foster and promote positive self-esteem (Brown, 2017). From these commonalities, group identities begin to form during this time in adolescence (Phinney & Tarver, 1988). By early adolescence and in middle school, many ethnically diverse adolescents experience discrimination through school and among peer groups from group identity (Brown, Alabi, Huynh, & Masten, 2011).

Collective Identity

Group identity, or collective identities, can be an important developmental milestone for adolescents in their development of self-identity (Erikson, 1968; Phinney, 1990, 1996; Quintana, 2007). Positive group identities have been associated with higher self-esteem, optimism, and positive academic performance (Chavous et al, 2003). Adolescents whose collective identity belongs to an ethnic group can experience bias

and/or loneliness (Roberts et al, 1999). The terminology for collective identity can vary based upon the discipline (personal identity, relational identity, social roles, collective identity) (Ashmore et al., 2004). Based on the work of Simon and Klandermans (2001), a collective identity is one that is shared with a group of others who have (or are believed to have) some characteristic(s) in common. Such commonality may be based on ascribed characteristics, such as ethnicity or gender, or on achieved states, such as occupation or political party (Ashmore et al., 2004). The participants all share in a common collective identity. Identifying as Mexican-American, Costa Rican, and Latina in a predominantly White rural Southeastern middle school has provided them with shared characteristics and relational identity.

Melucci's (1989) work of collective identity requires an "interactive and shared" understanding of opportunities and obstacles by the collective individuals (p. 793). This negotiation of boundaries for the group can be fluid depending on the environmental stimuli, such as within the context of an educational institution. Collective identity is a multidimensional concept (Ashmore et al, 2004). Not only is collective identity key to positioning oneself within a group of other individuals who share characteristics, beliefs, and lifestyle, it is also key to assimilating or challenging stereotypical labels of the group, and affiliating with a group; it also offers emotional support to face those who contest or attempt to limit the collective group. Collective identity, as it is variously used, can also be influential in the language usage ascribe by ethnic collective groups.

Ethnic and Racial Identity Through Literacy

One's identity development is an essential part of the stage of adolescence, and there are many aspects to the identity, making it a complicated process. The formation of

identity draws from previous experience and growing beliefs and can be interlaced with religious, cultural, and national influences (Little, 2012). Ethnic and racial identities are important aspects of how adolescents view themselves and others.

Ethnicity refers to the membership one attaches to a particular cultural, national, or racial group that shares elements such as culture, religion, race, language, or place of origin (Little, 2012). Race is a socially constructed term that refers to characteristics possessed by individuals and/or groups (Haney-Lopez, 1994). Even the classifications are fluid and change over time. For example, race was once based upon ethnicity or nationality, and today's society often classifies people into different races primarily based on skin color and assumptions (Little, 2012).

The formation of identity is important for many young people, as it provides them with a sense of belonging to a particular group or groups. It also connects them to others with shared commitments and values. When texts either ignore or misrepresent racial or ethnic groups, this can become personal to the reader, who identifies with the character. Likewise, when ethnic minorities are represented fondly through texts, the reader who is mirrored to the character recognizes a hero within. It also allows for those outside of the ethnicity to see heroes possessing diverse attributes, rebranding who the heroes are in society.

Literacy Practices in the 21st Century

Purposeful text selection provides a platform for middle-grade students to explore rich topics of diversity. Students examine threads of American culture by analyzing counter-narratives than those they are accustomed (Ketter & Buter, 2004). Middle school students have generated a stereotype of not being interested in reading and are seen as

spending little time engaged in literacy (Greenberg, Gilbert, & Fredrick, 2006). This transition of reading attitudes coincides with a time in the students' educational careers where students are expected to reading increasingly complex materials but utilize strategies that have been ingrained throughout elementary school (Alvermann & Moore, 1991). Despite knowing that reading is good for their overall academic improvement (Battraw, 2002), during the middle school years, reading attitudes show a decline along with occurrence of pleasure reading (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Ley, Schaer, & Dismukes, 1994). The reiteration of societal values through the ethnic representation of characters and authors may play a role of engagement (Sims-Bishop, 1990; Style, 1988). Through literature, children learn implicit messages of society, and few of these distinctions are recognized through literary awards. Not all of society's essential implicit messages are captured through these traditional canons.

The Caldecott Medal is one of the most known awards for children's books. The distinction is awarded annually by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children. As a middle school reader, the books that have received the honor of Caldecott Medal winners are common in the school library. Upon review of the past 25 years of recipients, 71% of the main characters in the Caldecott Medal books are White, 19% Black, 4% Asian, 1% Latino/a, and 1% biracial (Koss, Martinez, & Johnson, 2016). Literature is a reflection of society, and young adults obtain the messages implicitly and explicitly present in the novels they read (Thirumazhusai, 2018). The students of all demographics are affected by the contents. Bishop (1990) noted:

> Literature functions as a major socializing agent. It tells students who and what their society and culture values, what kind of behaviors are acceptable and appropriate, and what it means to be a decent human being. If [students of all races] cannot find themselves and people like them in the books they read and have read to them, they receive a powerful message about how they are undervalued in both the school and society. (p. 561)

Literature that implicitly presents messages about the values society functions as a socializing agent. Students will recognize the significance found in selected text for instruction within the classroom from all types of school district communities.

Rural South

In rural districts, schools are comprised of a variety of cultures and languages, academic learning needs, familial economic hardships, and exposure to violence. Furthermore, in this typical learning environment, it is a daunting task to motivate young readers, especially if those readers are adolescents. Middle school readers are developing their identities of who they are becoming. Middle school students' academic interests do not always steer them towards literacy self-enrichment, yet middle school students are on the cusp of an age where having input about what they learn empowers their development (DaLie, 2001).

The New South

As Cuadros (2006) explained, for over two decades there has been a "silent migration" of Mexicans and other Latin Americans into the United States. This migration caused and has continued to create enormous debate about immigration. According to Cuadros, the very roots of this issue can be found in the free-trade policies

of the United States that enticed poor farmers from Mexico and Central American to migrate in an attempt to take care of their families. Between 1990 and 2000, the South experienced robust growth in the economy, adding jobs for both Latinx and non-Latinx workers in excess to the national average, drawing the migration to southeast states. Six Southern states documented the population growth of Latinx and had surpassed the national average between the censuses of 1990 and 2000.

In the South, Latinx, White, and Black populations are increasing, but the Latinx population grew faster in these southeastern states (394%) than in any other part of the United States (Kochlar, Suro, Tafoya, & Pew Hispanic Center, 2005). Counties with a large non-metro manufacturing base throughout such states are most affected by the shifting demographics. For example, according to Kochlar et al. (2005), one particular urban hub in the southeastern states had an increase of 500% of Latinx population growth, while other counties exceeded 1,000%. In a nearby rural county, which lies just north of the aforementioned, the community has experienced a 22.71% increase in its overall population between the years 2000-2010. According to the census data (U.S. Census, 2011), in this same community, the population of Latinx origin increased 43.7%, higher than Black (5.65%) and Whites (21.46%). Overall, small rural communities in the southeastern states were affected by the influx of population and experienced new business growth and opportunity (Cuadros, 2006). However, the adjustment to the migration has not always been simple for the Latinx and the long-time residents of these southern communities.

A positive economic shift coincided with a new Latinx influx, yet the southern region was countered with a “resurgence of national and regional sentiment” (Portes &

Salas, 2015, p. 428). This “national myopia” (p. 433) that Portes and Salas deconstructed has left even U.S. -born Latinx regarded as foreigners. This notion is indicative within the educational systems, whose instructional text selections continue deficit thinking models explicitly or implicitly with the absences of such diverse heroes for students to identify. The nationwide prescribed text selections for school systems are irrelevant for individual communities, especially those of small rural areas, with diverse populations.

The purpose of using Gee’s (2008) Discourse lens is to make the argument that language exists in a social context, which is represented with the capitalization. Discourses extend beyond language and become the ways of “behaving, interacting, valuing thinking, believing, speaking and, often reading and writing” (p. 4) that are a part of one’s cultural identity. Gee (2008) referred to “discourse” as “stretches of language which ‘hang together’ to make sense to some community of people, such as a contribution to a conversation or a story” (p. 129). In this way, the Discourses are utilized to interpret the K-16 experience for immigrant students to better understand the challenges and achievements of their “story” in education. These social situated identities help identify how one group is alike to another group of people and how individuals fit into the larger world. Ironically, the same Discourses that function to unite groups are used in the academic institutions to “divide and sort” (p. 4) people and groups. Moreover, Discourses, as understood through the work of Gee (2008), are used to examine the shifting demographics of the U.S. South and the intersection of immigration in K-16 schools.

Book Clubs

The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) was established in 2002 through the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) at the U.S. Department of Education. The goal was to provide research-based information on educational pedagogy and resources through stringent evidence criteria that would become a trusted source for educators, policymakers, researchers, and the public (What Works Clearinghouse, 2010). What Works Clearinghouse (2010) investigated "Book Clubs" as effective adolescent literacy practices and determined the following:

> No studies of book clubs that fall within the scope of the Adolescent Literacy review protocol meet What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) evidence standards. The lack of studies meeting WWC evidence standards means that, at this time, the WWC is unable to draw any conclusions based on research about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of book clubs on adolescent learners (p. 1).

In 2010, What Works Clearinghouse identified 284 studies that were published for adolescent learners utilizing Literature Circle paradigms from 1989-2009. Many of the program proposals that were identified used strategies that resembled Literature Circles or Book Clubs, but omitted key elements of intended design, leaving them as book clubs (lowercase). However, none of the studies fell within the review protocol of WWC evidence standards to validate the research about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of book clubs on adolescent readers (WWC Intervention Report, 2010). This study, however, used the intersection of Book Clubs, and a collective grouping of Latinx adolescent females, and draw from the discussions inspired by the book collection

of short stories, *Us, In Progress: Short Stories About Young Latinos* (Delacre, 2017), featuring young, Latinx adolescents with whom the participants may identify.

There have not been studies conducted in rural North Carolina that have met the requirements set forth by WWC to substantiate the effectiveness of Book Clubs in middle-grades classrooms; therefore, this study utilized Book Clubs as a space to examine the highly contentious issues of Latino immigration in rural North Carolina. This study examined the experiences diverse narratives of underrepresented groups protagonists have on ethnically diverse students in a rural community.

Summary

There are many factors that remain influential to the identity development of ethnically diverse students. When situated together, the limitations of canonical texts to be inclusive of diverse adolescent readers constitutes an examination of the effects of featuring diverse, reflective protagonists in a novel study. This research aims to view literature through windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors, evaluating the experience of character identity with a group of rural middle school Latinas.

In the K-12 American education system, there is a myth surrounding the adage, "Learn to read" then "Read to learn." While this may be helpful in breaking apart the cognitive age-groups of the beginning stages of more complex literary practices, those teaching middle grades are keenly aware of the pitfalls that exist for some students bracketed in this second phase of "reading to learn." Secondly, the myth is further fabricated by separating these decoding skills and comprehension skills so starkly from the aesthetic factors that educators hope to mature in learners. Beers (2003) cautioned that "Simply improving the cognitive aspects of reading (comprehension, vocabulary,

decoding, and word recognition) does not ensure that the affective aspects of reading (motivation, enjoyment, engagement) will automatically improve" (p.13). By providing reading materials that are reflective of all individuals' identities and explore the narratives of others, the message received by readers is that each child fits within the larger concept of society. In a rural community where diversity does not come in the form of ethnicity, providing readers with access to mirror texts, students are able to see that their narrative is valued. With access to window texts, students have opportunity to learn from the narrative of others. Likewise, stepping through sliding glass doors permits the reader to empathetically step through and experience the character's life or moment. The message that is sent to all learners in a community, who are exploring diverse texts, is that the family structures, dialects, cultural traditions, gender roles, and stereotypes of communities may differ, but the underlying need for hope, dreams, aspirations, and love are central to every story, in and out of a book.

Chapter Three addresses the methodology of the study. It contains a research plan, describes the sample and the setting, and discusses data collection and analysis, while addressing ethical issues, and the validity and reliability of the study.

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of this study is to examine how a group of middle grades Latinas in a rural context interacted with ethnically diverse protagonists featured in an extracurricular book club and the intersection of text, dialogue, as shown through small group discussion. As the researcher, my goal was to create a space in which the participants felt safe to discuss their experiences and connections to the identity of the protagonist in our Book Club study. This study served to understand the experience of featuring diverse characters in instructional texts and to connect to an ethnic inclusive protagonist through naturally-occurring, small group discussion through a transactional approach to literature, as it applies to literary criticism and its use in the classroom.

This study will focus on the following question:

(1) In the context of a North Carolina rural middle school, how do adolescent Latinas experience a Latinx-centric novel in an extracurricular book club format?

In order to answer this question, I designed a case study to explore how the participants provide insight into the book collection of short stories that features Latinx protagonists within the bounded system of the Book Club.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) described qualitative studies to include understanding "things in their natural settings, attempt to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). The classroom serves as the participants' natural setting, as they make sense of a character's portrayal of ethnicity by using insight from their own lived experiences. A qualitative research design can be used in studies such as this to move in the process of research from philosophical assumptions,

to interpretive lens, and they applying the discovered meaning to social or human problems (Creswell, 2013). Inductive qualitative studies build patterns and themes by organizing data into abstract units of information. Furthermore, it requires the researcher to work collaboratively with the participants to shape themes that emerge from the study to better understand the influence of texts in the secondary classroom (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is relevant to public policy and has influenced it as such (Ezzy, 2002). Using the concept of Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors (Sims-Bishop, 1990) as an analytical lens, I worked with students to understand the ways in which they interpret the characters in a shared novel study, using a combined methodology of discourse and thematic analysis.

The chapter first explores the design of case studies and the methodology including the descriptions of the procedures, materials, and instruments of the proposed study. The chapter also presents ethical issues and researcher bias in addition to the limitations of the study.

Case Study Design

Case study research seeks to understand a single case or problem using the case as a specific situation (Creswell, 2013). The case study is bounded within a specific time or place to study a particular phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998). Creswell (2013) described this qualitative approach as a product of inquiry in which the researcher explores a real-life case through multiple sources of detailed data collection to report themes generated by the case.

Creswell (2013) reported on the several defining characteristics of case studies. The first is that case studies begin with identifying a specific case, which could be “an

individual, a small group, an organization, or a partnership" (p. 98). Second, case studies describe the intent of the case study, distinguishing between an intrinsic case (Stake, 1995) that is unique and an instrumental case (Stake, 1995) that would best help to understand a problem. Third, an in-depth understanding of the case is necessary by collecting many forms of qualitative data. Fourth, while the data analysis per study may differ, they are inductive (Merriam, 1988). This analysis involves a description of the themes or issues the researcher has identified during the case study. Finally, case studies end with conclusions the researcher has determined provide meaning from the case (Yin, 2009).

Because this is a case study, as Creswell (2013) defined, I analyzed my collected data through holistic analysis, examining the entire case through the thick description, including the chronology of events and day-by-day interactions with the participants. I examined the key issues within the case, "not for generalizing beyond the case, but for understanding the complexity of the case" (p. 101). Through this examination, I looked to identify key themes that transcend the case. The intent of a single instrumental case study is to focus on one issue or concern and utilize the one bounded system to best understand the issue (Stake, 1995). Thus, instrumental case study is essential to understand this study. This qualitative case study investigated the lived experiences and perception of rural Latina middle school students, as they interacted with a text that features Latinx protagonists that may mirror individual cultural experiences (Sims-Bishop, 1990). The concern within this bounded system is the dearth of ethnically diverse protagonists and authors that are present in the curriculum (McNair, 2008; Sims-Bishop, 1990). The majority of reading that middle school students experience feature

Eurocentric protagonists. This reading is different, as it features Latinx protagonists encountering and resolving conflicts that the author believes are relevant to Latinx adolescents. This case study focused on one middle school Book Club group where I worked with participants as a facilitator of the group discussion, highlighting the nuances of race and ethnicity as presented by the author. The findings are presented through the analysis of the multiple sources of information, including discussions, interviews, student writing, observations, and my research journal.

Research Context

Description of Setting

The study was conducted at Gearing Middle School (a pseudonym), located in the rural outskirts of a mid-sized metropolitan southern U.S. city. There are 79,783 people residing in the county: 85.3% White, 7.05% Hispanic, and 5.09% African American. There are 7.71% of the people in the county who speak a non-English language, and 96.7% are United States citizens. The median household income for the community is $49, 283 and the average property value is $153, 500. In addition, the poverty rate is 15.1%, which is slightly higher than the 14% rate at the national level. There are 14 elementary schools, four middle schools, four high schools, and one alternative learning center that houses grades seventh through twelfth. The school site for this project draws its students from the neighborhoods of lower-income to higher-income, making the socioeconomics of the students its greatest diversity. There are 710 students enrolled in this rural middle school and 88.5% of the student population identify as Caucasian, 6.3% as Hispanic, 1.4% Asian, 1.7% African American, and 2.1% identify as bi- or multi-racial. At the school site, 100% of the teachers identify as White, and 29.8% of the

student body are eligible for the Free and/or Reduced Lunch program. As of 2017, 68.9% of the students pass the end of year standardized tests in math and 73.7% passed the reading assessment, which is significantly higher than the state average at 55.8% and 57.5% respectively (NCDPI, 2017).

In addition to the location of the school, a middle school setting was purposefully selected. The range of ages for a middle school student is 10 to 14 years old. The research intended to capture the narrative of the participants, as those who have had a monocultural literacy experience in regards to authorship and content. Due to the self-awareness required for the response, the participant needed to be able to articulate past experiences connected with literacy, assess self-reading engagement, and recognize strengths and challenges of selected materials for him/her as a participant.

I have chosen this site because I had access to the participants in a broad range of all grades represented. I have worked as a teacher at this middle school for 15 years and am well acquainted with the principal, teachers, students, and community. Because I have spent a large portion of my professional and personal life in this county, I am familiar with the surrounding community and its demographics. This school can attribute much of its success on its surrounding community: families who place high importance in education, dedicated faculty, students who are willing to work together for common and individual goals, and a Parent Teacher Organization that pales to none other. This is all significant because Corbett (2010) and Shelton (2005) explain a rural school's success is contingent upon the dedication and commitment of the teachers and educational engagements of the community.

Participants

In designing this study, I began with purposive sampling (Patton, 2002), as two Latinas were former students of mine and were willing to participate in the study. I explained my study with the two participants and the time it required. In selecting the setting and participants for this sample, my approach was purposeful in that I knew the community, the school, and am familiar with the daily schedule that allowed some flexibility to meet with my participants during the school day without affecting their ability to participate. However, in an effort to be transparent, my participant selection was also one of convenience (Merriam, 2009), as I have worked with the two participants two years ago and understand their strong connection to identifying themselves as Mexican-Americans. When these two students were in sixth grade, it was evident they preferred to surround themselves with peers from other underrepresented groups. This was noticed by staff members, as this group would openly speak Spanish throughout the hallways together. Part of the inspiration for this project came from my year with these two girls, as they were always asking about the author's race or ethnicity when we began a new story. My familiarity and proximity with the participants and context of the school community had given me an existing repertoire and trust with the participants that otherwise may have taken years to develop. I also believe that my knowledge of the school's mission statement and current curriculum constraints allowed me to better understand how the literacy strategies included in a Book Club project aligned with academic goals of the participants. I emailed the teachers of the participants to get a better understanding of how these individuals are portrayed by their teachers (see Table 1).

Sampling Procedures

To create the rest of the group of participants beyond the first two, I used snowball sampling (Merriam, 2009), relying on the recommendations of the first two participants for others, who would meet the criteria of the project. I have worked with some of the adolescents at the site, and I relied on their previous exchanges with me, prior relationships with one another, and vocal statements about their ethnic identity. In conjunction with the students who fit the criteria, I asked educators at the site if they wish to recommend anyone for the group, who also met the pre-selected criteria based on the research question (Patton, 2015). The criteria for selection included:

1. Students who are middle school-aged
2. Students who identify as Latinx
3. Students who identify as female

Below, I have reported the pseudonyms of the participants, how they reported their ethnic identity, and also the descriptions offered by the participants' teachers to provide some classroom insight into the girls they recommended.

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Pseudonym		Nationality	ELA Teachers' Descriptions
Brisa	Female	Mexican-American	She is very intelligent and behaves well in class. She does not seem motivated to earn great grades. Speaks Spanish frequently during class and associates more with other Latinx students.

Ibby	Female	Mexican	She is quiet in instruction but concerned with peer relationships. She works hard towards understanding and completing tasks. At appropriate times, will speak Spanish with peers in class.
Jade	Female	Puerto Rican	She is friendly, respectful, and outgoing with friends. She hangs out with lower academic students. She takes good notes, does average on tests, but does not volunteer to answer questions.
Abril	Female	Costa Rican	She is a very strong student in all areas. She participates in class, and others see her as a leader. Abril seems to lack some confidence and often speaks negatively about her academics. She is quite social with a group of girls and enjoys playing sports.
Katia	Female	Costa Rican-American	She is one of the top students, who actively participates in class. She is not afraid to speak her mind or ask questions. She will stand up for herself and others. She struggles with some vocabulary, which hinders her comprehension at times.
Neiva	Female	Mexican	She is highly motivated to earn good grades in class. She is a quiet student but very focused on the task at hand. She is being differentiated from the regular English Language Arts curriculum with advanced work.

Rationale for Selection of Criteria

The rationale for selecting the first criterion was twofold. Adolescents are becoming more metacognitively aware of society and identity (McKown & Strambler, 2009). The cognitive development of a student in this age range would allow for independent group discussion and also allowed the researcher to ask interview questions that are metacognitive in nature (Jocius & Shealy, 2018). The metacognitive awareness was necessary as the Book Club explored the concept of "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Doors" (Sims-Bishop, 1990). Identity is an influential factor in adolescence (Hudley, 2016) and this was a developing concept through the Book Club and discussions. The second criterion reflects the previous concept developed by Sims-Bishop (1990) that marginalized characters are absent from the public-school canons. Our Book Club featured such protagonists in which the participants were mirrored. The third criterion built from the second criterion in an absence of mirrored heroes in instructional selected texts (McNair, 2008; Sims-Bishop, 1990).

The research question centered around Latinas at the middle school level; all ability groups were considered. I sent invitations to all recommended students with a brief meeting explaining the Book Club and its purpose. I also explained to them the commitment consideration for the project, which is a minimum of four weeks and answered any questions they had. At this point, I had participant letters ready for them to bring home to their parents, requesting any acceptances within the week to begin planning. The Book Club group was created based on the interest level of the potential participants. I chose the sampling procedure because I wanted the students, who met the criteria, to consider participation, and I felt that hearing about it from peers, whom they

trusted, gained their consideration better than an adult they may view as an outsider. I am a White female from a middle-class background, in my fifteenth year of teaching, finishing my Ph.D. in a local research university.

Study Design

This study took place over five weeks. Students were already in routine with their regular academics and can handle any disruption to their regular schedule. Thus, they understood the expectations of their core teachers, providing me with confidence that their participation would not negatively affect their academics. Students read and listened to *Us, In Progress: Short Stories About Young Latinos* (Delacre, 2017), responded to the text through natural-occurring discussions (DaLie, 2001), made connections to their lives personally and as readers (Williams, 2001) to the protagonist in the story through guided questioning, and debated the authenticity of texts (Ladson-Billings, 1994) that represented ethnic characters. Reading Response journals were reviewed during each discussion in student notebooks. Student interviews took place at the beginning and at the end of the five weeks. Additionally, I acted as a participant observer to better understand the participants' discourse by using observation, natural conversations, and unobtrusive methods (DeWalt & DeWalt, 1998).

Us, In Progress: Short Stories About Young Latinos (Delacre, 2017) is a 256-page book featuring 12 short stories that are all based on true events from the perspective of adolescents. Each short story is independent of the rest. The selections represent adolescents from diverse Latinx home countries. In a separate section of the book, the author has included a brief explanation of the original stories in the text to offer context to the readers. The book itself is full of timely narratives given the political awareness

surrounding immigration policy, highlighting the challenges and cultural inclusion of the Latinx community, such as immigration, deportation, racism, prejudices towards the Latinx community, obesity, relationships, language, bully, and health concerns In addition to the short stories, the author had also included a mixed media portrait of the main characters. The author purposely shared that the artwork is intentionally incomplete to represent the ongoing development of the youth the art represents. An equally important supplement to the text is the inclusion of a *refrán* for each story; these are translated in the back of the book along with a glossary of Spanish terms that are used by the characters. Both features further give voice to the Latinx community. Delacre (2017) utilized this collection of short stories in a way that is conducive to the concept of Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass doors (Sims-Bishop, 1990) to offer Latinx readers a reflection (mirror) and non-Latinx an opportunity to better understand (window) what it is like to be Latinx in the United States today. The book has won several awards: *A Kirkos Best Book of 2017, A New York Public Library Best Book of 2017, A Los Angeles Public Library Best Book of 2017, A 2017 Malka Penn Award for Human Rights in Children's Literature Honor Book,* and *A Booklist Top 10 Diverse Fiction for Older and Middle Readers.*

In designing this study, I addressed my research question. In order to answer the research question, *In the context of a North Carolina rural middle school, how do adolescent Latinas experience a Latinx-centric novel in an extracurricular book club format?*, I conducted interviews to better understand how the students identify with the Latinx culture and what attributes they associate with being a part of the collective group. Throughout the study, I continued to take notes during the book discussion and upon

review of participants' written responses to ensure that I accurately represented what the students shared and how it related to the construct of collective identity for the participants personally and how they associated these attributes in engagement with the ethnic protagonists. To further understand how the participants recognized the cultural relevance portrayed by the author, through observations, audio-recording of the discussion groups, and reflection projects I continued to document the ways in which the participants determined the authenticity of texts that represented ethnic characters. As a participant observer, I was a part of the group discussion, as a facilitator when necessary. My primary role during the discussions, however, was to document anecdotal notes and record observations from the book club. The text is rich with cultural and ethnic stereotypes (Betz, 2012; Betz, Ramsey, & Sekaquaptewa, 2013), which the participants used to discuss the authenticity of such portrayed characters. In addition to Book Club discussions, the participants submitted a written response to the chapters' discussions. I used post-interviews to solicit the participants' cultural insight to the benefits of including instructional texts that featured ethnic protagonist at the middle school level and to better understand how this book club experience, including the discussion and projects, was similar and unique from what they have experienced in their English-Language Arts (ELA) classrooms. While much of this project was based around existing empirical research, it would be beneficial to add a layer of practicality in utilizing the students' past and present personal and literary experiences to inform resource selection for curriculum design.

Phase I: Planning

After I spoke with all interested participants, I reviewed the time commitment with the school's principal and each participant's core teacher to preemptively address any questions that arose. At this time, I also asked the participants' ELA teacher to provide a profile for each student to better understand how the girls are viewed by their core teachers when relating to literature in the classroom (see Table 1). The participants met in an unused classroom at their middle school with me for the first 30-minutes of the school day. Typically, the school uses this time period for a school-wide reading initiative where students are heterogeneously grouped among grade level peers in a small group setting to read independently. This allotted time began five years ago when the school first applied for their "Schools to Watch" recognition. By using this time during the school day for other literacy practices, I am confident that we still met literacy goals set forth by the school and participants' English teachers.

Phase II: Data Collection

Data collection took into account three sources: student interviews, written responses, and my reflexive journal of anecdotal notes and observations. Data was collected consistently over the five-week period to allow for individual and group responses to be compared and contrasted.

Data was collected through the use of an interview with each student, and collection of audio-recorded group discussions, Reading Response journals, and anecdotal records dictated in a reflexive journal from my daily observations. Students responded to daily prompts in a journal. These prompts were designed to delve deeper into the relationship of the text and protagonist to real-world examples provided by the

participants sometimes including written responses or project activities that encompassed the chapter. These written responses and activities were used to begin the next meeting. In addition, the discussion groups were audio recorded to ensure authenticity to the conversations, including verbal and nonverbal responses. At the conclusion of the Book Club, I conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant, documenting her Book Club experience as a participant.

During the first week, I conducted semi-structured interviews (see Appendix A) with each participant. The interviews took place in an open classroom on the 6th-grade hallway, where no other students are present to disrupt the interview. I scheduled a 30-minute window of time during the first week of the research to meet with each participant. This took place during the school's dedicated Silent Sustained Reading (SSR) block from 8-8:30 am. According to Seidman (1988) there are three phases to an in-depth interview. The first phase is *Focused Life History*, which helped me better understand each participant by asking them questions to gather information about themselves in relation to the study (Latinx). The second phase of questions is *Details of Experience*. These questions focus primarily about the participants' experience with the research topic (Latinx Identity). The final phase, according to Seidman (1988) is *Reflection on the Meaning.* In this phase of questioning, I asked students to reflect on their interpretation of experiences, inciting emotional and intellectual connections to experiences that related to the study. While I included some of the phase three questioning in the pre-interview (Appendix A), I saved the majority of the reflection and proposing for the post-interview (Appendix F), after the experience. Overall, the questions regarded their experiences with school and home literacies prior to beginning

the book. Topics such as race and identity were addressed throughout each phase. These responses were audio recorded and transcribed, which then were used for comparison to the exit interview (see Appendix F) after completion of the book. The exit interview was scheduled in 30-minute windows for each participant in the same classroom as the pre-interview. These semi-structured interviews were also audio recorded and transcribed. Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004) combined a set of elements that are representative of existing theoretical approaches to identify individual-level elements of collective identity (table 2). I used this construct to cross-reference the participants' responses to best understand how students identify with the Latinx culture and what attributes of their culture they felt most connected.

Table 2

Elements of Collective Identity as Individual-Level Constructs

Element	Definition
Self-categorization	How do you ethnically identify? How does this relate to the larger student population at Gearing?
Placing self in social category	Describe your group of closest friends. Describe to me your immediate family.
Goodness of fit/perceived similarity/ Prototypicality	In what ways would you say you are like other *Latinx*? In what ways are you different?
Perceived certainty of self-identification	How can you be sure you are a part of the larger *Latinx* population?
Evaluation	The positive or negative attitude that a person has toward the social category in question

Private regard	What are the positive aspects of being *Latinx*?
Public regard	How do others regard *Latinx*?
Importance	The degree of importance of a particular group membership to the individual's overall self-concept
Explicit importance	How is being *Latinx* an important reflection of who you are?
Implicit importance	What is one thing you would want others to know about you?
Attachment and sense of interdependence	The emotional involvement felt with a group (the degree to which the individual feels at one with the group)
Interdependence/mutual fate	In what ways do you think how *Latinx* are viewed will affect your own life?
Attachment/affective commitment	In what ways do you feel connected to other *Latinx*?
Interconnection of self and others	When people make derogatory comments or judgements about *Latinx,* would you feel as if they said it directly about you?
Social embeddedness	The degree to which a particular collective identity is embedded in the person's everyday ongoing social relationships
Behavioral involvement	What cultural activities do you participate in that make you proud to be *Latinx*?
Content and meaning	
Self-attributed characteristics	The extent to which traits and dispositions that are associated with a social category are endorsed as self-descriptive by a member of that category

Ideology	Finish this sentence: "*Latinx* people should…"
Narrative	Will you please share a memory of when you first recognized race or ethnicity?
Collective identity story	Will you please share a memory of when you first began to identify with others because they may have shared a racial or ethnic characteristic with you?
Group story	Can you share with me a time that you remember a character in a story having similar racial or ethnic characteristics as you?

Note. Adapted from "An organizing framework for collective identity: Articulation and significance of multidimensionality," by R. D. Ashmore, K. Deaux, and T. McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004, *Psychological Bulletin, 130*, 80-114. 2004 by "American Psychological Associates, Inc."

Each participant was provided with a journal to reflect on the selection by completing a response or activity (see Appendix C) after each session. The reflections were collected to document the personal experiences of each participant during the next meeting and again at the conclusion of the book study. Participants completed the response or activity after each session to prepare for the next Book Club meeting. The group began each sequential Book Club meeting by sharing their response or activity from the previous chapter.

All book meetings were held in a classroom on the 6th-grade hallway that is not being used during the Silent Sustained Reading time in the beginning of the school day. Each book meeting discussion was audio-recorded to document the discussion and provide reference for any field notes I made during the Book Club. These audio recordings were then transcribed and reviewed for accuracy. Both the audio recordings

and observational field note components were essential to ensure the implicit and explicit responses were recorded for analysis, including, but not limited to, verbal and nonverbal reactions.

One semi-structured interview was conducted with each student upon completion of the book (Appendix F). Each interview was completed in the same classroom that the book discussions took place on the 6th-grade hallway to ensure consistency and an element of familiarity for the students' candidness. These interviews lasted approximately 30-minutes during the Silent Sustained Reading Time designated by the school. Audio tapes were used in interviews, transcribed, cataloged, and indexed to access critical events.

Three types of data collection can be used for qualitative findings observations, interviews, and documents (Patton, 2002). I used all three to inform my analysis of my collected data. Observations were used, as I audiotaped the Book Club discussions. The use of audiotape allowed me to go into more detail when I transcribed the discussions, as I had the ability to play and replay the conversations as they happened. I took field notes during the discussions to capture body language to reveal implicit responses as well as the verbal explicit response from the group. This encompassed verbal and nonverbal reactions. Data analysis included whole-part-whole reading of the transcripts and constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) of the racialized encounters and interpretations in the discussion transcripts, audio recordings, and field notes. My intent was to be able to sit with the girls in a small group formation, as they listened to one another read the book and discuss the elements that they found important. The interviews (pre and post) were also transcribed. Lastly, like Patton (2002), I used documents to

contribute to the analysis of data. I collected the girls' Reading Response journals and transcribed each entry.

This project focused on the 12 discussion group sessions during one 5-week Book Club. I transcribed each interview, session, and reflection journal generated during the project and used these transcriptions to triangulate these data. These discussion groups were comprised of six rural Latina middle schoolers. The girls met four days a week for three weeks, during the first thirty minutes of the school day, which is the time the school has designated for Silent Sustained Reading (SSR). The discussions during SSR explored issues surrounding Book Clubs, connections in the girls' lives personally and as readers, and perceptions of identity in this and other texts. These discussion groups started with sharing from the previous meeting and permitted each girl to share any reflections that surfaced after the discussion group. This analysis focused on the group as they discussed the book *Us, In Progress: Short Stories About Young Latinos* (Delacre, 2017). This book includes twelve short stories, featuring young Latinos. The author used the characters to better understand the complexity of Latino youth in the United States.

This book was chosen for its Latinx protagonists, who collectively use a holistic approach to examine the complexity of identity as a young Latinxs in the United States. Other titles that were considered were dismissed for this project, as the literary culture tends to frame Latinxs with a single narrative centering on the challenges of immigration. While this is one aspect that needed to be considered for an all-inclusive representation of the challenges Latinxs and other minorities face, I did not want to use a novel that was dismissive of the other important facets that also represent the identity of the Latinx students in this rural middle school, and around the nation, in the twenty-first century.

Data Analysis

I used holistic analysis to examine the entire case through thick description. This was completed utilizing the chronology of events as they synchronized with the order of the chapters. The primary goal of this portion of the analysis was to retain the chronology of each participant's experience within the overall book club (Yin, 2009). I reread the transcripts and aligned the points from each chapter's discussions to the pre- and post- interviews with the participants. This is organized in chapter four chapter by chapter.

Discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Gee, 2008) focused primarily on the lens of Sims-Bishop's (1990) Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors inclusive literary practices. Specifically, I identified the chapters from the book that lent themselves well to each concept of Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors. Through this, I was able to group similar discussion points from the group conversations and through the individual interviews that related to each inclusive concept from the participants' perspectives.

Case study analysis consists of in-depth detail of the case and its setting (Creswell,2013). To do this, I collected transcripts of the participants' verbal responses during the Book Club. I further collected in-depth details of the participants' responses through their Reading Response journals and by analyzing the activities after selected chapters from the book (see Appendix C). The first step of the data analysis was creating and organizing these data files through description (Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough, 2003). Secondly, I read through the data files looking for words, phrases, and patterns of the participants' responses as they began to repeat. I made notes as I read and began to form

the initial codes from the data files. As a strategy for qualitative analysis, I continuously cross referenced the data files for answers to my research question.

For the first step in my analysis I used Fairclough's (1995) framework of analysis used a three-tiered system: description, interpretation, and explanation. Drawing from this work, I began by transcribing the actual discussions of the participants surrounding the book. These conversations became the focal point to realize the girls' understanding and experience with identity and how this is affected by ethnically diverse protagonists in a shared book collection of short stories. In description, I used a textual description as outlined by Creswell (2013) to understand this case study.

For the second step in my analysis, I moved from analysis to interpretation. To analyze the data, I read the transcripts for clarity. After collecting the participants' Reading Response journals, those were transcribed as well, I looked to their responses as further data to understand the participants' experience. Both the discussion and interview transcriptions were uploaded using Atlas.ti.8.0. Additionally, all field notes were uploaded to Atlas.ti.8.0. to ensure a robust collection of data to interpret the overall experience. The array of data was reexamined using a spiraling effect where data is revisited in analytic circles.

Once all the data was uploaded into the project, I developed a coding scheme based off of any significant quotes from the transcription. I then coded my data, according to the above research question. Once coded, I created reports across all data sets to look for emerging themes in the experience. Likewise, Atlas.ti has options to create webbed concept maps, and I planned to examine a visual version of data for

relating experiences. I used a constant comparative analysis to go over the data numerous times to ensure consistency and to refine codes as necessary.

Finally, I continued following Fairclough's (1995) model towards explanation. I organized my results and discussion to present the experience of the Book Club with its participants, using direct samples from the interviews, discussion, and Reading Response journals to provide an explanation of the participants' experience with identity and how this was influenced in the shared novel that featured ethnically-similar protagonists. The analysis in this phase of explanation also informed my research question through themes.

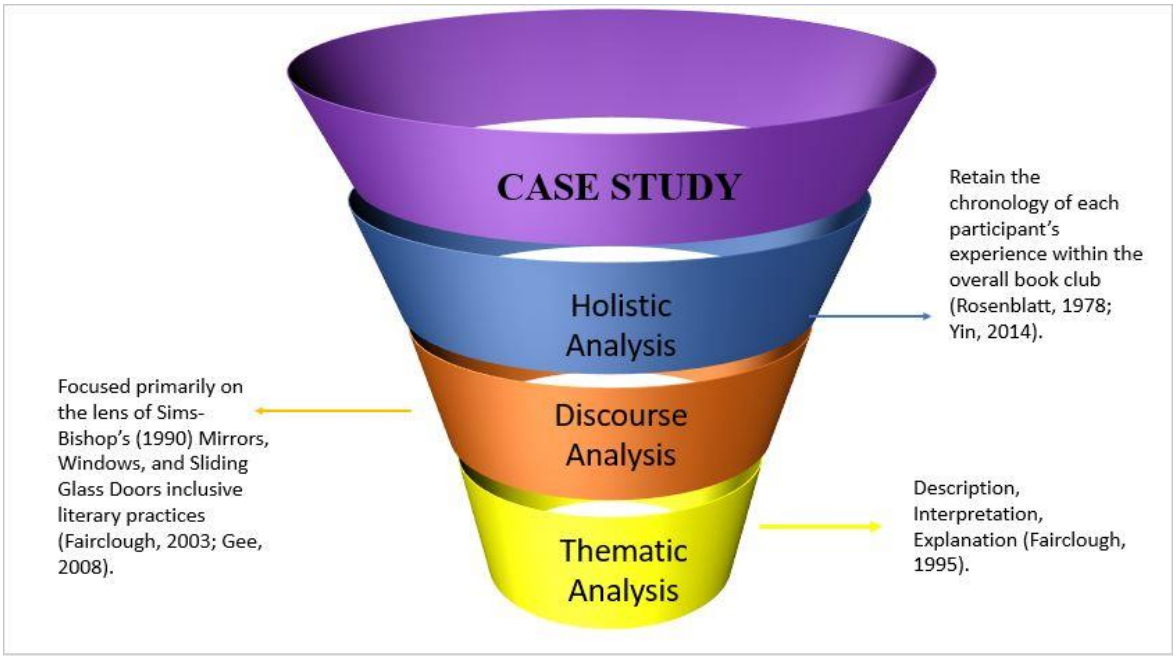

Figure 1. Funnel diagram of data analysis performed in order.

Role of the Researcher

I have been a classroom teacher for the past 15 years at this school site. As an insider to the school culture and the school community, I understand the commitment the teachers have made in their students' education and that I must maintain the literacy goals

for the participants during the school day, while they are in this Book Club. In addition, I worked to build a transparent environment for the participants' core teachers in this regard by communicating the timeline of the project and literacy strategies that the project employed. In designing this study, it was paramount that I respected the educational time of the students, while also honoring the confidential cultural discussions within the literacy environment. For analysis of data attained in an environment in which I am keenly embedded, it was essential that I was able to analyze the data without being overinfluenced by my environment. The essence of my strategy for this was to focus on the participants' experiences within the school and community. Since I am not personally a part of their Latinx identified communities (social and familial), the objectiveness of analysis was not difficult to attain when I was able to analyze the participants' experiences separately from my own.

Ethical Consideration

This study followed the guidelines for human research as determined and outlined by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants and guardians were informed of all intentions and practices prior to the research project and had the option to review consent forms. As such, all participants signed an assent form and their parents or guardians signed consent forms in their first language. Data was kept confidential. All participants and identifying markers were given pseudonyms that were used in place of actual names. Audiotapes were destroyed before the expiration of the study. Collected data remained in a locked file cabinet that only the researcher had access. As a teacher familiar with the students, community, and other influencing educators, I understood the importance of creating a safe learning environment from the beginning to ensure open

dialogue within groups. Likewise, the participants selected for this research did so willingly and had the opportunity before and during the project cycle to not participate without consequence.

Limitations

A limitation of a study design is disclosure of the elements the researcher did not or could not control and thus could affect the results (Price & Murnan, 2004). My study was limited by the sample size. While my participant number is sufficient for the case study, it does limit the experience of only one ethnicity and not all students from the site who identify as Latinx. Similarly using Sims-Bishop's (1990) concept of windows and mirrors as a lens for ethnic protagonist texts, this research design is limited by not collecting the experiences of participants from other ethnic backgrounds, who would use the text as a "window" instead of the "mirror." I wanted to ensure an environment that would be free and comfortable for the participants to share authentic reactions to the characters, as it relates or contradicts their own lived experiences. I was concerned that by selecting a mixed group of ethnicities in the study, somehow the group dynamics might inadvertently silence the open discussion. As it stands, I hope that the students felt comfortable speaking openly in my presence, as a White, adult female.

Patton's (2015) suggestions for coding qualitative data, which include "identifying patterns and themes, creating typologies, determining substantive significance, and reporting findings" (p.654), were utilized through constant comparative analysis of multiple forms of data collection. To further ensure credibility, I used member checking, a process in which participants verify data and analysis after each layer of the data (survey, discussions, journals, preparation materials, and interviews).

This was done to preserve the voices and narratives of the participants as accurately as possible.

Subjectivity Statement

I came from a generation that was not stigmatized by standardized testing as a central component of our curriculum. Reading served two main functions: enjoyment and as a means to further my education. I came from a family of readers, and although reading was not my favorite pastime, I felt confident in my abilities. My favorite books of my youth all featured characters in which I could identify, living lives that were similar to my own reality, or not beyond what I could imagine. I could learn from their lessons and personalize their tales, and those closest to me were always eager to talk about what I had been reading. These exchanges of reading experiences were common in the cafeteria with my friends, at my dinner table with my family, and especially while working in the front garden with my mom.

It was not a far stretch of my childhood imagination to find that my calling was in education. It was how I played in imaginary roles, even in my own elementary years. I could not wait to help others unveil a love for learning. Unfortunately, as a middle school teacher, I have had front row access to students who have experienced a reduced interest and positive attitude towards reading, only to see it worsen into high school. Students experience greater testing on reading and are provided less time to engage in authentic reading experiences that mirror the activities of the real reading world. Students have become unfamiliar with the authentic conversations with peers that generate from engaged reading experiences and instead equate their level of comprehension to one of five standardized scale scores.

My research topic centered on what adolescents can discover about themselves and one another by engaging in authentic reading experiences that reflect the lives and environment in which they live. The educational settings of the rural south generally provide a wide array of economic and cultural diversity, which is very different than from where I grew up in a small, rural, mid-western town. Texts featuring global issues that reflect the cultural and ethnic diversity of the classroom can become the medium in which to heighten self-efficacy for students, challenge biases, and support a global perspective that is often missing from the mandated curriculum.

Summary

Informed by the review of related literature, and based on the essence of the research question, a qualitative case study was implemented. According to Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales (2007), case studies are beneficial when the research question seeks to develop "an in-depth understanding about how different cases provide insight into an issue or a unique case" (p. 239). It provides an in-depth method to intentionally cover contextual conditions of the study, as they are highly pertinent to the study (Yin, 2003). Furthermore, the case study explores cases within the bounded system of the Book Club (setting and context). One group was the focus of this case study and the six participants in the group were the focus of the individual case study.

This research sought to inform the existing literature by providing valuable information connecting adolescents' reading perceptions, school literacies, and identity. This knowledge could be used by educators, parents, literacy associations, publishers, textbook committees, and educational researchers, as they continue to find

innovative ways to be inclusive in all educational practices, especially decisions concerning instructional resources.

In Chapter Four, I describe the context of the Book Club. This chapter also provides an outline of the study. I explain the analysis that I used to examine the experiences of the participants within the Book Club. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary concerning the impact of diverse books with rural students.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

Overview

The purpose of this study is to examine how a group of middle grades Latinas in a rural context interacted with ethnically diverse protagonists featured in an extracurricular book club and the intersection of text, dialogue, as shown through small group discussion. I created a space within a rural middle school that supported a Book Club format for six Latinas from three different countries: Mexico (3), Costa Rica (2), and Puerto Rico (1) in order to read, share, and discuss a single book collection of short stories that highlighted the students' experience of interaction with a text that featured Latinx protagonists. Through our book study, the girls were engaged with literacy practices that are standard for the school and county mission statement set forth by the state standards.

The following question served to focus the study:

1. In the context of a North Carolina rural middle school, how do adolescent Latinas experience a Latinx-centric novel in an extracurricular book club format?

Chapter One introduced the study through an overview of its purpose, description of the problem the study addressed, and an explanation of the research question the study was designed to answer. Chapter Two explored the existing research and arguments relevant to the themes of the study. It included discussions regarding the historical contexts of American curriculum, an overview of adolescent identity and age-appropriate understanding of race and collective identity, and the concerns of the framing of ethnic and racial identity through current literacy practices. Chapter Three explained the design

of the case study and addressed methodology. This chapter describes the methods of discourse and thematic analysis and the details of the tools used for data collection and examination. It also notes the ethical considerations and limitations present in the study.

In Chapter Four I describe the setting of the Book Club and the participants. This chapter also includes an outline of the sequence of the study. I explain my discourse and thematic analysis and the resulting coding system that I used to capture the experiences of the Latina group during the Book Club. I use the research question and constant comparative analysis to ensure consistency to guide my analysis. This chapter concludes with a summary concerning the impact of a Book Club text selection featuring ethnic-protagonists with rural Latina middle school students. All students and the school itself were assigned pseudonyms to help protect the anonymity of the participants.

Study Description

This study took place during five weeks of the Spring 2019 semester. I worked with six Latinas in a Language Arts classroom in a rural middle Southeastern United States school. The sequence of the project was designed to help the participants view the Book Club space as safe with one another and with me. The pre-interview questions were designed to help me better understand how the students identify with the Latinx culture and what attributes they associate with being a part of the collective group. The interviews provided a context of family, ethnic identity, language, and familial hardships of each participant throughout the project. The activities that followed each chapter were designed to challenge the participants' ability to connect to the characters of the book collection of short stories, *Us, In Progress: Short Stories About Young Latinos* (Delacre, 2017). The participants' connections to the text provided insight into Sim-Bishop's

(1990) concept of Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors by asking the girls to reflect on aspects of the characters' experiences.

During the first week, the participants and I created a schedule for pre-interviews that would be least disruptive of their school day before the actual Book Club began. The girls took turns meeting me in the morning during the school's dedicated Silent Sustained Reading (SSR) block from 8-8:30 am. This schedule was shared with all of the homeroom teachers, elective teachers, who buddy read during this modified schedule, and the administration team. Meeting the girls individually allowed for me to better understand each participant before entering into group discussions. The participants each ethnically identify differently than the majority of the students at Gearing Middle School, which is predominantly White. Two participants identified as Mexican-American. One seventh-grader simply said she identifies as Costa Rican, while another seventh-grader stated, "So I identify myself as Hispanic. [Be]cause pretty much I grew up in Costa Rica and, I moved here when I was like 11." The other two participants had personal reasons for dropping the "American hyphenation" to their identity: one was adamant that she only identifies with her Puerto Rican heritage, dropping off the "American hyphenation" despite her grandmother's wishes, and another participant explained why she chooses to ethnically identify solely as Mexican:

> I was in 4th or 5th grade, and I was thinking that I was Mexican-American back then. But then I started looking and I saw, like, I'm not American at all. Why am I calling myself Mexican-American? None of my family members are? Not my mom. Not my dad. So, from there I started to call myself Mexican and that's all.

The participants had rather complicated views of race and what qualifies the "American" extension to their identities. For some, racial and ethnic identities are a part of the conversations at home, and are multi-generational, as mentioned above, while some had not really considered a preferred ethnic identifier. Prior to the Book Club, the six participants collectively did not really know each other beyond recognition in the hallway. The three eighth-graders were in class together in sixth grade, and two of them, Brisa and Ibby remained close friends throughout the three years in middle school. The two seventh-graders, Abril and Katia, both from Costa Rica, have class together this year, but admittedly are not more than acquaintances. The only sixth-grader, Neiva, rides the bus with Brisa. The project's success also depended upon the dynamics of pulling a group of Latinas together, who merely share a similar experience of checking an ethnicity box on a form.

After reviewing the initial interviews, I started fine-tuning the activities for each chapter that allowed for the participants to share their experiences of being Latina in a predominantly White middle school and featured ways for them to better understand and connect with the characters in the stories. The following table illustrates the flow of the chapters and relating activities. The summaries of each chapter and corresponding reflection activities can be found in Appendix C.

Table 3

Short Stories, Summaries, and Reflection Activities

Number and Title of Short Story	Summary	Reflection Activity	Mirror, Window, or Sliding Glass Door

1. The Attack	Emilio and Jose, mama's miracles, put their feelings aside to support the family's decision to move back to Mexico after Tony's incident with the paramedics and police officers.	What example can you provide of a selfless act one of your family members has done to support another family member?	Mirror A reflection of family support
2. Selfie	On picture day, Marla notices a ring around her neck becoming darker. This line was indicative of her declining health leading towards Type II Diabetes. The doctor warned she needed to eat better and exercise to take care of herself. The story begins with picture day and ends with a photograph at the end of a bike race. The two images are in stark contrast of who Marla was and who she desired to become.	Create a mask that represents all aspects of you. All art mediums are welcomed	Mirror A reflection of multiple roles within a diverse society
3. G*üera*	The main character has lighter skin and features than other Latinx in her family and community. Sometimes she struggles to prove that she belongs.	Write an Identity poem, using one of the two templates provided	Window An opportunity to see through others' eyes
4. Burrito Man	Alex reluctantly spends the day with her papa at his burrito cart for "Take Your Child to Work Day". Alex originally finds herself wishing that she	Discussion: Has there been any time in your life where you wish your experiences more closely reflected those of a different part of the	Window An opportunity to see the similarities

	was going into a lawyer's or doctor's office instead. She learns through observation how significant her father has become to the community and hears second-hand how dearly rod he is of her. When Papa passes away, the reader learns how special that day was for Alex and how she is making her papa's dream come true for herself.	community only to later realize the worth of your own experiences/culture/loved ones?	across the diverse populations
5. Band-Aid	Alina's father was recently deported, leaving her Mami worried about the fate of Alina and her siblings if she, too, were to be deported.	Create an Acrostic Poem using either the word "immigration" Or "deportation" to explain what these two concepts mean within the Latinx community specifically.	Window An opportunity to see through others' eyes
6. Firstborn	Luci comes to the realization that her older sister, Brigida, has been bullying her, which was not easy to recognize such behavior, since the word "bully" is not in the Spanish language. When Luci witnesses the target switch to their younger sister, Ani, Luci finally stands up to Brigida.	Write a letter to one of the characters in this story.	Sliding Glass Door Step into the lives and decision of the character
7. Cubano Two	The conversation between two middle school students, Monster and Rascal, in the school's newsroom is recorded.	Write a letter to educators about what they need to know about teaching Latinx.	Sliding Glass Door Invite educators to step into the

	The light-hearted banter between the boys is indicative of their closeness and the way they can joke with each other.		lives of Latinx students
8. Peacemaker	Wilfred and his younger sister, Blanca, live with their parents and abuelos. When Wilfred's parents argue, it upsets Blanca. His role in the family has been to be the peacemaker at the end of the arguments by going to each parent, softening the message, and delivering to the other. One final argument leads Wilfred to take Blanca to their aunt's restaurant, drawing the end of his role. The parents, recognizing things have gone too far, come to get the children and leave holding hands.	Take a photograph of something that symbolizes each member of your family.	Mirror A reflection of family influences
9. The Secret	Carla and Esperanza are sisters. When Esperanza is offered a role dancing as a paid role, their mother has to explain to Esperanza that she does not have a social security number, which is required for employment. This is because Esperanza was born in Mexico and brought to the United States illegally as an	Make a playlist for a DACA or DREAMer.	Window An opportunity to see the challenges and emotions of DACA and DREAMers

	infant. Esperanza has a very difficult time digesting this information and relating it to her already-established American identity. Carla does some research about the process for DACA (Deferred Action for Children Arrivals) and DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) and supports her sister during a Dream Rally at a nearby pier.	
10. Pickup Soccer	Two neighboring groups of Latinx show up on the soccer field at the same time, unwilling to share the space, yet they share a friend, Hugo. They both look angry at Hugo for this confrontation, but Hugo's answer is to respond in a large announcer's voice the typical beginning of a soccer game, causing the tension to break and sparking a willingness to play together.	In what ways do you see Latinx as one group and how are the groups within the Latinx community different? What are your experiences with society's grouping and stereotypes?
11. Saturday School	Sandra's mom has found a Spanish-speaking Saturday school that reiterates correct Spanish for students. Even though this is not how Sandra wants to spend her	Discussion: What part of your culture is important to your family that you retain?

	Saturdays, she knows the retaining of her spoken culture is very important to her mom and Abuela. When Sandra goes the first day, she feels completely out of her element. The students make fun of her Spanish, and the teachers consequently makes her feel dumb. At the end of the day, when Sandra's mom picks her up, Sandra tries her new *correct* Spanish. Mom learns that the school is teaching Argentinian Spanish, not Puerto Rican and decides not to take Sandra back.		
12. 90,000 Children	Frank's dad works on the Border Patrol and listens to the negative rhetoric from his grandfather about Mexicans who illegally cross the border. This narrative becomes ingrained into Frank's conscience, which has removed the human story from the immigration story, until he meets a young girl named Romina. This encounter opens Frank's heart to consider "how hard it must be to travel alone, not speaking the language, afraid of the Mexican gangs that at any	Using a voice recorder app, discuss any Latinx topics that you feel are missing from this book that would be beneficial for diverse audiences if it were included.	Sliding Glass Door An opportunity to step into the complexity of Latinx lives beyond immigration and deportation

> moment could hurt you,
> extort money from you, or
> even kill you…she was
> courageous" (p. 208).

Note. Adapted from *"Us, In Progress: Short Stories about Young Latinos,"* by L. Delacre, 2017, New York, NY: Harper Collins."

After the interviews were complete, and into the second week, we began meeting as the larger group during the same block of time. These meetings continued through weeks three and four, totaling fifteen days of large group discussion. The girls created a SnapChat group that they all became active members. Later, they added me to the group, which I remained an observer to the "streak pictures" (daily images meant to maintain "streaks" with friends on this particular social media). There was not a lot of discussion on SnapChat, but they were learning about one another in this 21st Century social media platform.

Holistic Analysis

As outlined in Chapter Three, I began to analyze my collected data through holistic analysis, examining the entire case through the thick description, including the chronology of events and day-by-day interactions with the participants. This allowed me to examine the key issues within the case as they built upon one another naturally through the progression of the book chapters. Below is the holistic analysis.

Chapter one: The attack. The girls were very quiet during the first discussion reading. There was a lot of prompting done by the teacher and only one participant, an eighth-grader named, Brisa, responding for the first several minutes. It was not until

Ibby offered a personal connection to the characters in the text. This connection helped the other participants feel comfortable:

> Like I had a family member, well not a family member, it was a friend of ours. He got in a car accident, and it was him and a cop that [sic] he crashed and the friend of ours he was Mexican. And he died. And they were trying to see whose fault is it. They automatically said it was like the friend of ours; it was his fault, and they didn't press any charges on the cop. And it was like his fault, too, for causing the accident, and they didn't do anything to him.

Once she opened up about this experience, the other participants began to share more freely what was on their minds. While the discussion was not necessarily rich, the girls were participating and acknowledging one another through laughs. When I first asked the group, "Who would like to begin?" they all laughed aloud. This was followed by Brisa finally nominating Katia by pointing at her and exclaiming, "You!" Katia, rather outspoken in her regular ELA class, was willing to get the conversations going and began the discussion of the chapter's activity. This rotation of turns continued with more pointing, more nominating, and more "uh, huh" comments from the group before obliging. It appeared that they were most comfortable listening to each other than they were posing their opinions and connections to the group at this point. There were many supportive head nods and responses of "yeah" and "no". This first story, and the shared opinions of it, were useful in fostering a safe space where the girls began to recognize their similarities extended beyond race and identity. Katia finished our discussion by stating, "Kind of how we're all similar," referencing the small group of Latinas in the room.

Chapter two: Selfie. There was a different energy with the girls for the second Book Club discussion. The girls were more relaxed in their body posture, and from the onset of the discussion, they all were contributing. Five of the six girls had all participated within the first minute of recording. This was different from the first chapter, where the beginning of the discussion was dominated by one student and me. The girls expressed that this story was relatable on many levels: the mother/daughter relationship, Latinx culture, health, and stereotypes, which is perhaps why it was easier for everyone to contribute to the discussion.

The participants had two days during Book Club and a long weekend to complete masks that represented the two sides of their personalities: at home versus at school. There was little preamble required, and the girls picked up the supplies and began working among some background music. In reflection, I would have moved this activity to a later chapter, because I feel that it required a lot of trust from within the group to share the feelings of being a minority at school. While this did come up in discussion, the conversations about this theme were much richer in later chapters of the Book Club, making me believe that this may have been revealed more richly if the timing had been different. However, the timing of this project did build trust through listening to one another in a space that was becoming safe. Likewise, through this activity, there was a lot of agreement amongst the girls. They were able to further recognize their school experiences, as minority students, were similar. This conversation was opened up with by Brisa:

> I feel like it is an automatic, just, like, if everyone, or majority is White and you are one of the few Hispanic kids, I think it is hard to go on in school like

> without…because like you can't really talk to them [White students] or relate to them the same way you would Hispanic people. So, going through a school where it's mainly White people, it's kind of hard to come out of your shell or be as outgoing as you would be at home.

This was one of the first participant-initiated conversations about race. The girls were not accustomed to the open format of racial discussions, probably in front of the White researcher. The hesitation to finish her first thought, "I think it is hard to go on in school like without…." Was clearly intended to be a demographic observation of her school's population indicated by her follow-up sentence, which included "them" instead of stating a race. Once, Brisa began this dialogue, she was responded to and reassured with "Preach," Yeah," "Yeah, totally," and the nodding of heads towards the idea that as Latinx, representing a minority at their home school, it can be challenging to find ways to relate with the rest of the student population.

At this point, the girls had identified the space they created within the Book Club, and with each other, as "a space that we can talk." This was important for me to hear, as a researcher. I had been working with the girls for over a week and was reflecting on the discussions in the evening. I started questioning if some of their minority status awareness was due to the Book Club, or if the Book Club offered them this space to express it with one another. The girls willingly shared this perspective and awareness that they have had since starting middle school at Gearing three years ago. I did not want the Book Club and the conversations about race and ethnicity to highlight the demographics of the school and create a sensitivity that would not have existed without

the project, so I was grateful to hear them share what the Book Club space was already meaning to them.

Chapter three: Güera. In the very beginning of this chapter's discussion, two girls, Neiva and Katia, mentioned that their favorite parts of this story were the embedded Spanish words to the text. Code-switching is a linguistic process of shifting from one language code to another. It is often observed by members of minority groups by providing a context of belonging to a larger community (Mabule, 2015). Neiva had said, *"*My favorite part of the story is when the girl called the dude *chaparro*, which means *shorty* in Spanish. It was just funny." This was followed by a comment by Katia "My favorite part of the story was when like she said, 'My name is G*ü*era,' and something like she stood up for something. Because G*ü*era means something [Mexican term for "blonde girl" p. 219] there." While Brisa picked up this point and made a connection how the other character did not realize that this light-skinned Hispanic could actually understand them, I could not help but wondering if the first two girls simply enjoyed the validation of their first language in a story.

The girls related to instances of language assumption going both ways: Spanish to English and English to Spanish. The first example was how Abril's dad's friend did not realize Abril could understand the Spanish, and the second example was from Brisa and her sister becoming embarrassed because they realized their "private" conversation could actually be understood by the patron in front of them at the grocery store. While these two instances reflected on assumptions about Spanish comprehension, the reverse has had negative impacts within the community of one participant's family. She recalled a family dinner at a local restaurant where the server was speaking abnormally slowly and simply

to converse with the participant's Mexican-American family. Ibby shared the family's reaction, "And I, I don't know, it's offensive. And my mom and everybody was like, 'Why is she doing that? We speak English, too.'" This example alluded to other emotions that the girls hold about bilingualism that have come across as racist by non-Latinx.

Chapter four: Burrito man. The participants opened this discussion with their appreciation for the space to speak openly again, stating they "appreciate this book club because it like allows [them] to embrace who [they] are" and that they "don't have the same opportunity throughout the rest of the day either." Statements like these provide insight into the work of small group discussions in literature and allowing open conversations without the risk of saying something offensive. The girls touched upon new topics in this chapter.

One subject was the high expectations from Latinx families for the children to have a better life. Ibby provided insight by stating, "Usually every person that crossed the border wants a better education for their child. Like, wants a better future than they did. Wants, like to go to college, you know, have a career." This reflected the hard work Ibby has witnessed her parents do to put Ibby's older siblings through college on minimum wage. Abril understood the selflessness and love of parents and shared,

> How our parents work really hard to try to give us a better future and for us to make our own paths, so not to have the same path as them. To not like work in factories or like not have to do stuff you don't want to do. Like you can choose what you want to do when you're older.

She appreciated what her parents have sacrificed to make this life for her and her brother.

Another topic that was discussed was this sense of embarrassment or pride of being Latinx. Some girls related to the character's embarrassment that her father ran a burrito truck, but then also understood the character's guilt when she realized that her father was using the burrito truck as a platform to share his pride for his daughter and generate additional income for his daughter's future college dream. The girls extended this text connection to being a minority in this school setting stating,

> If you ask them if they are Hispanic, they'll tell you yes. But they won't like full on tell you like, "Oh, yeah, I'm Hispanic." And they won't like really, for the most part I feel like they try to blend in with White people here rather than like, you know, like, understand that they are not the same, they are different, and like, I feel like at times they are ashamed of it, because they want to blend in here.

While this conversation related to the challenges of being a minority in a predominantly White, rural middle school, it also spoke of the girls' desire to be proud of their Latinx heritage.

Chapter five: Band-Aid. This was an emotional chapter for the participants. The topic was centered on deportation, which are hushed conversations, I discovered, even among close friends. Ibby's parents both came to the United States on work visas and felt the political pull with the new presidency to follow the path to citizenship. Ibby's mom was the third in her family to sit for the citizen exam. During Ibby's pre-interview, she recalled how the family was involved in helping her mom prepare who would sit for the citizen exam,

> But every day I have to teach her. Like Every. Single. Thing. Like It was all my sisters. We would all help. But it would be that I teach her the writing, like how to say it, and then all the 100 questions. But she somehow got it.

Not all the girls had happy endings to their deportation stories though. During this chapter's discussion, Neiva revealed her dad's deportation truth, "He got deported." The girls all offered sympathetic nods, and some averted their eyes from hers, in a way that I interpreted as respectful. Katia also offered her personal experience with deportation. Katia recalled the effects that her mom's deportation and immigration process had on her. The girls felt connected to the words "immigration" and "deportation" on a personal level. In some instances, it was their own story, and sometimes it was that of a close family member. Each participant had a connection to this. Ibby finished our discussion with her acrostic poem about "Deportation":

> "D" Depression, and for "E" Everything you have is gone. "P" Puts family in a hard situation. "O" Obviously things will be harder to attain. "R" returning to place where born. "T" Taking your American Dream away. "A" Always living in fear. "T" To never be able to have like a good amount of money. "I" It's heartbreaking. "O" On your way to where there's no hope. "N" Never seeing your family again.

The acrostic poems that were shared further strengthened the ways in which the girls were learning to trust one another and the space of the Book Club by sharing emotional responses to these words.

Chapter six: Firstborn. This chapter offered the girls an opportunity to share and connect with one another about the relationships they have with their own siblings. The

participants also determined that this story was not affected by the race or ethnicity of the characters, which led the group to discuss why the author includes such stories. In later conversations, the girls determined it was to make the stories relatable to all readers, not only those with similar cultural backgrounds.

Chapter seven: Cubano two. This chapter asked the girls to speak directly to educators about what diverse student populations needed from them. The resounding response from the girls was language:

> I believe they should have a basic background on at least how to speak some of it [Spanish]. I mean they're not always going to have White students who can all speak English, and sometimes they're going to have moments where they can actually have to help out…. At least try to help them out. Like if they actually knew something, they'd be able to help them out.

When asked about teachers from schools where over 70 languages are spoken, the girls did not have a response. This is mostly because that is not the type of school in which they are accustomed. In the girls' rural middle school experience, they have perceived the work that the classroom teachers do with new English as a Second Language (ESL) students is give them materials and expect the student to learn the content independently from the teacher. For example, in Katia and Abril's seventh-grade year, there was a newcomer. The classroom teachers were unsure how to bridge the language gap, so Abril was frustrated that the teachers "just give her papers and if she knows how to do it, she knows how to do it…like my teacher didn't really explain to her how to do it, she just gave her a booklet." This caused sympathetic nods from the group as well.

Further frustrations were voiced about language and education related to students feeling comfortable speaking their first language. Neiva believes, “just like speaking more Spanish than English, and some people don’t feel comfortable speaking English too much, that much at school…. they should at least let them speak their native tongue.” Ibby and Brisa recalled a few times through middle school where the educators had asked them to speak in only English. Brisa shared, “But then sometimes, they have those moments where they’ll actually get mad about it. Um, they were saying, ‘Don’t speak Spanish, don’t speak Spanish around me, because I don’t know what you’re saying.’” The girls laughed it off together in front of the group, but the underlying notion of language and identity had already been set from previous discussions.

Finally, the girls addressed diversity in classroom materials and in the school environment. The girls touched upon content and variety and connected their observations with what they want educators to know about teaching Latinx. Brisa added, “that there are some students who aren’t White and are feeling left out and that they should work on it and at least try to help them improve on that.” The girls, and other members of the student population, are listening loudly to the messages that are implicitly and explicitly being stated by their educators about diversity, education, and even the text selection for instruction.

Chapter eight: Peacemaker. This chapter discussion was much more light-hearted than the past couple. The participants shared pictures that represented the people in their family. Katia observed that the project for this chapter just showed “how we’re all similar.” The shared images elicited laughter from everyone at one point or another. The girls were vulnerable when discussing the relationships at home. The girls have

learned to trust one another through this process. They have even used some images stored on their social media accounts and laughed at non-related images together, speaking comfortably in Spanish to one another, “Cuando estas comiendo y ves que la señora que anda haciendo la comida se anda rascando la cola”. They all start laughing uncontrollably, and Brisa paused to help me understand by translating, “so there is a picture of this kid eating, and it says, ‘When you are eating and see the lady, making the food, start scratching her butt,’” which caused the laughter to roll over again, but this time I was enjoying the joke with the girls. The girls used this time to “friend” one another on Instagram and “follow” each other’s stories. More proof that the friendships here might outlast the Book Club.

Chapter nine: The secret. This chapter took a day longer than originally planned, as the initial conversation about DACA and the DREAMers was not too familiar to the girls. They had heard parts and were mixing up other facts. We decided to pause the audio for the day and spent the morning reading profiles of DREAMers (Appendix E) to get a better understanding of the terms for this chapter. When we reconvened the next day to create a playlist of songs for DREAMers, the girls were emotionally connected to the sisters, parents, and grandfather from reading the story the night before.

By asking the participants to share songs that they felt would be inspirational for DREAMers or DACA individuals, the girls were able to use media to acknowledge the challenges they read about in the immigration profiles and make text to media connections by empathizing with those in these situations. The following songs for our DACA/DREAMer playlist were discussed: “Fight Song” (Platten, 2015, track 1), “As Good As You” (Brown, 2018, track 2), “Try Again” (Aaliyah, 2001, track 1), “Better”

(Khalid, 2019, track 4) ("It's like the same thing like as the other one, like being new"), "Perfect Strangers" (Blue, 2016, track 3) ("because they, like. where they're from, we still come together"), "Try" (Pink, 2012, track 3), and "Try" (Calliat, 2014, track 4). This was another opportunity for the participants to connect with the issues of the character in the book, but also for them to create something tangible through media as an outlet.

The participants found themes within the songs that repeated themselves. The girls used phrases like, "so inspirational," "being there for you," "wanting a better life," and "give hope to that person." Their understanding and ability to relate to the DACA and DREAMers' situations were found in words such as "where they're from, we still come together," and the reasoning for selecting particular artists exceeded the two-day conversations we had in the classroom,

> It's a song about like someone being there for you, or you being there for someone and like you wanting to make their life better. Because like they [DACA/DREAMers], because it's going to be hard for them to like do stuff like along…. And they need that emotional support.

The discussions about song choices demonstrated the participants' understanding of the challenges faced by DREAMers. The group suggested they should create a real album to inspire others.

Chapter ten: Pickup soccer/Chapter eleven: Saturday school. Chapters 10 and 11 were not discussed in the Book Club, as originally planned. Perhaps this was due to the end-of-year timing of the project or the comfort levels of the small space towards the end, but I began to feel that the girls were not as engaged in the process as they were in the beginning. They were coming late to Book Club, which became detrimental since we

only had 30 minutes in the morning together, sometimes unprepared, and often with the giggles. A lot of the discussions we were having in chapters eight and nine began sounding very similar, which led me to believe we had reached saturation of data. I told the girls at the end of chapter nine that we would skip and read chapter twelve as our last group discussion, but I encouraged them to finished the book in its entirety independently. They all agreed they would, except Neiva, who had already read ahead and finished those chapters along with twelve earlier. This change in pace actually helped us maintain our timeline because we had lost a day with creating masks (chapter two) and another day learning about DACA cases (chapter nine).

Chapter twelve: 90,000 children. In this chapter's discussion, the participants brainstormed any other aspect of Latinx culture that could be added to this book to make it more complete. Brisa offered,

> They should have a story to where it shows a character being proud of their race, because if there are any Latinx readers, they know they shouldn't be ashamed of where they are from or who they really are. Just because of like, like, say like this, like [laughs] like we go to a school where it is full of White people, but you see just because of that, I'm not going to try to hide who I really am, because what I really am is Hispanic. I'm not going to try to hide that.

She wanted to give other readers an example that assured them it is good, and even healthy, to be proud of who they really are. While this message may have been embedded within the text implicitly, it appeared the girls wanted it to be an explicit message from the characters.

The participants also thought that a story that reflected the many reasons of immigration might be beneficial because some people only hear one version of it. Katia believed it would be helpful to include because,

> We actually, actually do go through stuff, like we didn't just all come here because we wanted to, we come for better stuff. I think what Ibby and Abril have talked about, I mean Brisa, like, all we have talked about, we don't just come here *just* to be here, but we've come here because we actually want a better future.

The girls felt this message was important for all readers to be exposed to, as they believed it will help people better understand diversity and debunk stereotypes.

Final participant reflection. This was the final chapter and meeting for the girls as a whole group, so the final chapter project allowed them an opportunity to reflect on the topics within the book and all of their discussions to determine if anything had been left unsaid. One by one, I brought them back to me for their independent post interviews and asked them each about their most memorable part of the Book Club, what stood out to them from group discussions, what they learned about one another through this experience, and what it was like reading this book together.

The parts of the Book Club that stood out to them the most were dependent upon "How some of the stories were good; how she [Delacre] knew how to write the stories to make us believe that like that stuff happened in the world," according to Abril. Some of the specific topics that were written well affected the girls in a positive way and others in a negative way. For example, Neiva and Katia were shocked that in the last story the character used the term "illegal aliens". During our book discussion, we stopped for several minutes, as this was the first time any of the girls had heard that phrase. To them,

this phrase was removing the humanity from these individuals. Neiva felt compared to a being "from another planet." For Katia, the other memorable part was when the group members allowed themselves to become vulnerable, "It's like when we did that poem thing. It was kind of emotional. And I can kind of relate to the immigrant part."

The group discussions made an impact on the girls, as they were still able to articulate the activity and associated conversations from it. Ibby's biggest take away from the group discussions was that the participants had a lot in common. She said, "I guess that we all agreed on so many things about the book." While the discussions helped Brisa understand confusing parts better, "It's a good thing because you get to see how others are thinking about it, but other times I would get confused, and 'how did they get *that* from the question?'" Katia's experience with the discussion allowed her to feel closer with the girls. She said, "I felt like every, like I've never saw [sic] those students open up before. Like some of us were not this close. I didn't know they considered me their friend." This trust and friendship were echoed throughout many of the interviews and could be seen more clearly in the body language of the girls. As they became more familiar with one another, they laughed together, their posture relaxed, they would call on each other, make light jabs when someone's work wasn't complete, compliment what was shared, and they would even interrupt one another, which indicated they were more comfortable with one another than in the very beginning.

Through this experience, the girls learned about one another. Abril, Jade, Ibby, Katia, Brisa, and Neiva all said they learned so much about one another through this project. Even relationships they may have had with one another prior to the Book Club were further developed. Abril said, "Like I know Brisa because I live like a minute away

from her, so it's like we, I didn't get to know her as much, but now I know how she feels and stuff like that." Likewise, now in eighth grade, Brisa and Ibby have been close friends since the beginning of sixth grade. They spend a lot of time together in the hallways, always sit together at lunch, and purposefully choose the same electives to stay together. If you need to find one of the girls, just look for the other, yet Brisa shared,

> It was cool to be able to hear like certain different experiences, even though some were sad; I think it was a very comfortable space to be able to tell that. I don't know it was just nice to be able to talk about and to hear. Like some things that Ibby had said, like me and Ibby are constantly laughing, like constantly laughing, so sometimes we don't really have conversations that go deep into that, so seeing a like a different point of certain people in the group, I was like, "That's really cool." Like I kind of got to know them a little bit better.

As an outsider to their friendship, even I was unaware that some of the details the girls shared in the meeting were new between them. One may have assumed that in a long friendship like theirs, many private and personal conversations are shared. Yet the content of some of the group discussions allowed a space in which these topics were not only safe but comfortable.

Finally, the Book Club made the experience of reading the book "more clear" for Abril and provided "different perspective about the story" for Neiva. Katia felt like the people in the group could relate to her connections to the text, and Neiva thought it "was really cool…each of our different perspectives and knowing different people's perspective can change what you think of a story." Together, as a Book Club community, they supported each other's meaning-making through the whole process and

each participant recognized the others' contributions to this experience by reading this book together.

Discourse Analysis

Qualitative research is an activity that connects the observer to the world and makes interpretative practices visible. This approach attempts to makes sense of experiences of people (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is appropriate for studies such as this to move in the process of research from philosophical assumptions, to interpretive lens, and then apply the discovered meaning to social or human problems (Creswell, 2013). This inductive qualitative study built patterns and themes by organizing data into abstract units of information. As outlined in Chapter Three, this study combined discourse and thematic analysis to better understand the influence of diverse characters on student identity and cultural connections as evidenced in their discussion.

My analysis sought themes that occurred during data collection. I examined data from the interviews with the participants and the discussions during Book Club in an effort to understand the situated nature of participants' experiences and meanings (Ezzy, 2002). In order to understand the Latinas' experiences with this Latinx-centric novel, I first had to look to their subjective experiences. Within discourse analysis, it is the assumption that there are multiple constructed realities coexisting. This approach emphasizes various aspects of the discussion, language used, and social context by each participant. These themes are applied to the collected data to support the researcher in the analysis of the context of the study. This form of analysis does not provide a tangible

answer to research questions, but instead this strategy shows how findings within similar contexts will often bring about the same interactional results (Goodman, 2008).

Thematic analysis is not for generalizing beyond the case either but to assist in understanding the complexity of the case (Creswell, 2013). In the first stage of thematic analysis, the researcher uses an open coding process to create a set of categories based on the examination of data. This form of analysis offers flexibility, but this same flexibility can lead to inconsistency of research data through interpretation (Holloway & Todres, 2003). This open coding allowed me to name and categorize the phenomena through examination of the data. After the exploratory process, the coding schemes became more developed, and I began to note emergent themes. As the themes became more defined, I used the process of constant comparison to identify codes that had similarities and differences for grouping themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Axial coding involved specifying a category that would encompass the experiences of the participants within the Book Club and identifying major themes of the project.

The strength of this study is how it used discourse and thematic analysis together. Using them to complement one another through the data analysis, addressed the limitations of each. To incorporate this form of methodology in my study, I began my inquiry with discourse analysis. In order to provide context of the language the participants were using in the Book Club, I first had to analyze the discourse to determine the social identities of the girls as individuals and as a group. Using the themes that I had found in the literature, I looked for categories that provided context of the cultural models of minority students within a mainstream education culture. Then I used the discussions of the students to better define these categories. Next, I applied my assumptions to the

data to create larger categories for holistic understanding of the context. This enabled me to find the codes that were supported by the literature, thus adding strength to my analysis of the text within the framework of Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors (Sims-Bishop, 1990).

Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. Sims Bishop's (1990) theory of Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors provided a literacy framework for educators and readers alike, prefacing the necessity of including books by diverse authors, inclusion of diverse characters, for diverse readership. This multiplicity within the texts featured in classrooms validates the culturally diverse nature of the world; likewise, according to Sims-Bishop, the diverse representation in books allows for all children to see themselves and others within the pages.

Mirrors. The students circled around the concept of "mirrors" in every unit, but the overall purpose of the activities in chapters one, two, and eight were designed to create the space for them to each discuss how the topics and themes of these chapters directly mirrored their experiences of being Latinx. Instances where the participants found the characters' experiences to mirror their own dealt with the lighter and darker skinned tones of the Latinx community, educational desires, hard work of their parents, variations of cultural pride, and language. Through the concept of "mirrors" the participants also discussed the lack of ethnic characters they have been exposed to in their K-8 experience so far. Characters that reflected the participants ethnic backgrounds ranged from non-existent to "I think I read one once," to less-than-flattering stereotypes about farm working.

Windows. The concept of "windows" was evident in nearly every unit, but the overall purpose of the activities in chapters three, four, five, and nine were designed to openly discuss what these stories not only offered to the Latinx community as readers but to the non-Latinx readers at the middle school level as well. The participants discussed what parts of each chapter acted as a "window," allowing readers to see into a community that otherwise they were not privy. Along with this line of thinking, the girls also discussed the authenticity of the characters' experiences and how these characters' challenges could affect the reader's perspectives on the Latinx community. Examples of where the participants found that the characters' experiences serving as a window into the lives of the Latinx community dealt with topics such as immigration, deportation, being undocumented, and the emotions of a family in these situations. Likewise, the girls also discussed situations from the text that offered different perspective such as overall challenges of being a Latinx minority in a predominantly White environment and how these insights can also serve as a window to diverse readers.

Sliding glass doors. The notion of "Sliding Glass Doors" was embedded within every unit, but the overall purpose of the activities in chapters six, seven, and twelve were intended to frame the characters' experiences in a way that the participants could see the ways in which readers could figuratively walk through the experiences within the text to become a part of the world that the author had created. Occurrences where the participants found that the author had created a space that allowed the reader to imaginatively step into the Latinx character's world and related to the challenges or triumphs were topics such as bullying, discrimination, and racism. The participants also mentioned emotions such as strong connections to family. Furthermore, there were

personal experiences that the participants shared that they felt would have allowed non-Latinx peers an opportunity to relate to being a minority in middle school that were shared within the space of the Book Club.

Analysis

Themes

Theme identification is important in qualitative research to understand the complexity of the case. Themes come directly from the collected data and organization of the codes into comprehensible units that provide an overall analysis of the data. During data collection for this study, four themes emerged: Latinx culture, cultural challenges, familial relationships, and educational perspectives. These themes were obtained through data collected in pre- and post-interviews with each participant, Book Club discussions, and chapter-related activities. These four themes fit into the research question, as participants experienced the Latinx-centric novel and the ways its concepts connected to their lived experiences.

In the beginning of this study, participants were each interviewed to better understand how the girls identify with the Latinx culture and what attributes they associated with being a part of the collective group. Each night the girls would read the designated chapter from the common book. In addition, there were activities that were associated with the context of each chapter that the participants used to guide their focus for reading (see Appendix C). The next morning the participants came to Book Club prepared to discuss the chapter, including the ways they had connected to the character, and shared the products of their activities with one another. At the end of the experience, each participant was interviewed again. Collecting and analyzing this data allowed for

the triangulation of results to ensure a more thorough understanding of the participants' experiences with the Latinx-centric book collection of short stories in the extracurricular book club format.

Latinx culture.

The first theme that emerged was that of Latinx culture. Each candidate made reference to the way(s) they associated with being a part of the Latinx collective group. The participants defined belonging to this larger ethnic identity but also wanted it to be understood that not all Latinx are the same. They addressed stereotypes and how most Mexican traditions are linked for all Latinx cultures, believing this is stemmed from a larger percentage of Latinx represented by Mexicans than from other Latinx countries. The Latinx characters in the selected book, Us in Progress: Short Stories of Young Latinos, negotiated through several issues of identity, including discrimination, challenging stereotypes, and becoming better people through adversity. The girls related to many of these topics as Latinx adolescents and were able to build trust with one another through shared experiences.

Katia, from Costa Rica, recognized that others "put us [Costa Ricans] with, like, a Hispanic stereotype, but, like, it's pretty much more like Mexican." The participants also addressed how not all Latinx look the same. There are variations in skin tones and eye shape. Neiva, thankful the conversation of race was brought up, felt the repercussions of assumption in racial features stating, "I'm thankful that they are at least asking. They're not like actually assuming my race, but I don't like it, because, I mean, I don't know…. they're my eyes. It doesn't mean that I'm actually Chinese." Likewise, from Abril's Identity Poem, she remarked how her skin tone, that of which the group called "light-

skinned," was not what her identity was entirely comprised of when she stated, "The skin doesn't always show me. The real me is happy, loving, and caring," making implications that looking Latinx could have negative stereotype attachments.

The theme of Latinx culture also allowed the participants to articulate their expectations of identifying as a part of the Latinx culture through language. This became a non-negotiable criterion within the group. They associated examples in which Latinx students cannot speak Spanish and spoke of individuals not being proud of their heritage. One day, when Jade was absent from school, Ibby and Brisa shared their first reactions to learning that Jade would be in our Book Club group. While the three girls, all eighth-graders now, have known each other since sixth grade, Ibby and Brisa were not sure if Jade would feel like she belonged because she was the only one of the six who does not speak Spanish, nor can she understand it. Ibby stated, "She didn't like, you said, like speaking Spanish. And you didn't have to speak it, but to be honest, it was a main part of it, because if you don't speak Spanish, then I don't know…then your whole life is different." Brisa added, "You struggle more with being able to identify." The idea of bilingualism made the concept of language more complicated though. While five of the six girls spoke and understood Spanish as well as English, their ability to read and write, to be fully literate in Spanish, was lacking. Abril remembered the decision point to let her Spanish reading lapse when she said, "I just thought it was going to be too hard. And remembered both [English and Spanish] and stuff like that, so…and now if I want to learn it, I'll have to catch up with everyone else." Abril does plan on taking Spanish classes at the high school to become fully bilingual.

The girls all ethnically identified as Latinx, with a focus on their home countries. Some chose to embrace their nationality hyphenated with "American," and others did not. Jade preferred only to identify as Puerto Rican, and Neiva recently reverted back to identifying solely as Mexican when she had a realization last year:

> I ethnically identify as Mexican. I don't like begin called Mexican-American but there's a reasons [sic]. Because I was only born in America, I wasn't born, like, I wasn't born American. I don't have any family members that are American at all. I'm only Mexican. That's all I have in my blood.

Whether they chose to hyphenate their ethnic identity or not, a constant sense of pride remained amongst them relating to their Latinx identity. They wanted to represent their race well, they wanted their accomplishments to reflect their heritage, and they wanted to be instruments of change and inspiration for the diverse cultures of the world. Brisa felt the sense of pride and is still trying to articulate her feelings when she said,

> I feel like if I accomplish something, and like something big, I want my race and my ethnicity to be involved in that because it is something like important to me and like what I grew up with and like who I am as a person. I feel that is a big part of like who I am. And I can't just like forget that, and I can't just like, not mention that in certain things. And I feel like, I don't know, I just feel that it is important to me. Where I come from. Or like how I was raised. Or what things I believe in. As being like, you know, Mexican-American or like not White.

Ibby also explained part of her motivation to be a high-achieving student when she said, "I always try to get good grades so whenever I get 'A Honor Roll,' I like to show Americans, White, that also Hispanics can get As, like 'A Honor Roll.'" Her ethnic

identity has remained a part of her motivation. Ibby added, "I did it for myself and to represent." Likewise, Katia felt "proud because like if I do something really good, I can show my race that I'm actually capable of doing something." It is challenging for the girls to understand why other Latinx students choose to not represent their culture. Jade offered, "They [Latinx students] should be more like out there. 'Cause [sic] like sometimes they don't really think that they like belong, but they do." The girls would like to see all students celebrate their diversity and uniqueness. Abril believes diversity is worth being proud for when she stated, "I feel like happy because I know I'm different and that makes me feel better because I'm unique!" There is a strong link between pride and ethnicity within the group.

Cultural challenges.

Another theme that emerged through the Book Club experience with the six participants was the theme of cultural challenges. The group spoke about topics of challenges facing groups of Latinx in general and sometimes spoke personally of how these and similar challenges have affected them and their families. This theme covered a breadth of topics that the girls overall felt that the majority of students in their home school were completely unaware, so the space that was created in the Book Club allowed for discussions of stereotypes, immigration, and racism to take place. Two characters' stories openly discussed immigration and illegal aliens, so the girls were able to use these characters' experiences to share their own narratives. A few of the other chapters challenged the protagonists with different acts of racism and discrimination, which, again, allowed the girls to connect and empathize with the characters' situations.

The girls openly discussed the negative stereotypes of being Latinx that they have heard on the news or witnessed in person. Abril has heard people say, "You don't belong here because you're not from here," without even understanding her family's background. Abril feels that the Latinx community is viewed as though they "don't belong here," as "traitors," or even "drug sellers". She is concerned with the assumption by outsiders that she and her family are "bad" simply because that's "how like most people view us". Ibby added, "Mexicans are usually seen as criminals, drug dealers, or, like I don't know, people who just do bad stuff here," and she finds it frustrating. A line from Ibby's Identity Poem addressed this as it reads, "I also feel frustration for those who don't treat people fairly." Neiva's perspective of Latinx being presumed "bad" is similar to that experienced by Ibby. She rhetorically asked the community to not assume because "some Mexicans do something, that all Mexicans are going to do it." Katia is concerned about how the Latinx community is portrayed on the news. She has seen how media depicts "people that [sic] are coming over here, and are here, to mess up the country." Neiva found it unfair that because of being Mexican she is grouped into a category by society of acting badly. She stated, "Some people say that Mexicans are like really like bad…. that's only *some* people, not me, or like other people. So, don't assume because *some* Mexicans do something that all Mexicans are going to do it." Katia wanted people outside of the Latinx community to understand, "We actually don't come here to be lazy; we actually want something like at least to do something better. We have to." Brisa was concerned with the lasting effects on individual's thinking with negative stereotypes. She commented, "People are like 'they're just here to take jobs or they're here illegally,' and that kind of sinks into their head and kind of automatically think that,

or just stereotypes in general, have them think a certain way." The long-term effect of the negative rhetoric is concerning to the Latinx youth.

While none of the girls have identical stories regarding immigration or deportation, each of them was connected to the emotional, mental, and familial toll of these topics. Brisa talked about the unknown when living in the states undocumented; she said, "Yeah, you constantly just live in fear. About the risk, you know, about getting deported." The girls' candidness with this topic spoke loudly for the trust they had built in one another for the Book Club. It started when Abril shared that her family story of deportation goes back two generations with her grandmother. "My grandma…. she got deported…. She was over her time and she got a warning. And then when she got that warning, she didn't want to come back [Costa Rica] because she was older and stuff. She didn't want to travel back, so she just stayed there." Neiva added, "I can relate to it. Um, I really don't tell people, but remember when I said my dad left our family? He technically, kind of, did. He got deported. I was not even a year old yet. I was like a baby." The group echoed sounds of support and connections, mostly knowing how vulnerable Neiva's declaration made her feel. Soon, Ibby added, "Well, I got like family members who like I, I don't know, they could like, I don't know, right now they're going to court and everything. And they don't know if they are going to get deported or not. I mean there's some process." The girls were respectful and offered more nods and looks of acknowledgement. Abril wiped at her eyes. Katia had shared that she is new to the United States from the beginning of our sessions. She repeated, "I left the United States when I was six months old, and I came back when I was ten and a half. So pretty much, I

immigrated into the U.S. and [these were] hard times for my mom." Katia continued, filling in pieces to her immigration story that were unknown,

> Like my mom got punished 'cause [sic] of like she came to the United States, met my dad, and like she had a certain amount of time, like the Visa had a certain amount of time, and she stayed over the time. So, when she came back, she got punished...Um, and like, I remember those trips my mom used to make so she could come back to the United States. Because she got punished for like ten years, or something like that. You cannot come back and you need to redo your passport and all this stuff. And like she had to go like all the way to the capital of Costa Rica, and sometimes we had to stay with my mom's friend and like, just like, my mom gets to be, and me and my brother, my brother got his first passport. And I had to redo mine 'cause [sic] they had my baby picture.

Not only were the girls able to personally connect to the characters facing immigration and deportation scenarios, they were able to empathize with situations they had not experienced firsthand. Katia recognized that people "actually have to have the courage and the bravery to go through, like, go all the way to there, all the way to the border, where like anything can happen to you." Brisa continued with Katia saying, "I think like a lot of people try to come over here to overcome and escape that because it is like a really scary thing, but it is also they have to have the courage and bravery to actually try crossover here." Then added that for an immigrant child "that's really scary for like a child having to go through that just to come here." The group spoke about the emotional aspects of immigration and the secretive family stories that are unique to each situation yet connected on cultural level across many countries.

At no more than 14, the girls were way more experienced in the topic of racism than most of their peers. The girls have been subjected to comments like, “Get out,” “Your people are not meant to be here,” and “You’re an immigrant! You aren’t supposed to be here! You’re supposed to be at the other side of the border!” From an eighth-grader’s perspective, Brisa told the group, “I feel like sometimes they don’t even see it as people, just see them [immigrants] as things that are here trying to take jobs. They don’t acknowledge the fact that we’re people, too.” Brisa also eluded to the political tension that surrounds immigration reformation when she said, “for Latinas, in general, it’s not that easy right now with what’s going on.” The ramifications are felt across the generations. Some of the girls agreed when Brisa said they have gotten to a place emotionally where the “never let it bother” them. They advised that “If you let them get to you, it’s going to bring you down constantly.” On the other hand, Neiva accredited some of the racial-instigated behavior from fellow students as a catalyst to moving “to this county’s schools”. They agreed that overall their county’s schools do a good job addressing explicit racism, but even within the community the girls have experienced situations that make them “feel sad or really angry”. The girls are learning to take the power back from the individuals in the community who cast negativity and racism, knowing “that there’s people who, you know, thought differently in a negative way, and for the most part, that like wasn’t going to change if they choose to believe that, and I can’t change that so I just might as well not let it affect me.” Others have spoken up when they feel they aren’t being “treated well enough” or feel like they “are down-graded”. Brisa shared an example at a restaurant where a man was making remarks about how slowly she was moving. Brisa overheard their conversation, and when he

disregarded his companion's advice to be more kind, he retorted, "She can't understand you." Brisa told the group that she found the courage to look directly at him and reply, "Actually I can," before walking away. While I do not wish the girls to ever get accustomed to racist remarks, the group was inspired by the collective ways each person is learning to handle the negativity. They admitted "it still sucks" but they see the ignorant people as a reflection of only those individuals and are learning to not let the comments of the few become reflections of themselves.

Family relationships.

The third theme, family relationships, varied across the participants, as expected. Just as the characters in the story all came from different home and family situations, so did the girls. From high expectations to the challenges of long-distance relationships and hints to substance abuse cycles, the girls shared more than connections with the characters, as they discussed more ways in which they were similar and allowed themselves to be vulnerable to a group of fellow readers.

Three of the girls spoke at length about the high expectations their parents have for their education. While at times, it feels like "a little bit of pressure," no one questioned what was behind those expectations. All three of these girls have seen their parents' selflessness for a better future for the children firsthand. Ibby knows her parents want her to have a good future and see that path through education. They do not want Ibby and her sisters to "suffer as much." Neither of Ibby's parents have high school diplomas, and it has only been in the past five years that all members of her family have become United States citizens. Both of her parents work long and hard to support the older two sisters' college tuitions. Ibby said, "Sometimes I see my parents and they like

work a lot just for us to have money to pay my sisters' college and you know give us food and everything. Every single time I see they're always really tired…. I'm just like okay, they always told us to go to school, so like we don't have to go through all that." Ibby has seen firsthand the sacrifices her parents are willing to make. Abril has had similar perspective watching how hard her parents work "to give us a better future and for us to make our own paths." She appreciates the work that they have done and the foundation of wanting more for her own future. Likewise, her parents have given her time to be a kid and not worry about adult situations. She felt like her parents "want [them] to learn from [their] mistakes, and not like, to teach if that is wrong…. but to learn that it is wrong." Katia's family's expectations are a little different than her other two peers. Katia has felt a lot of positive pressure to remain close to her cultural identity of language and ethnicity. She has heard they do not want her "to lose the Spanish language," "you're representing our country" when she does something outstanding, and she knows she is "expected to be a good student". Neiva's mom and step-dad's parenting style is most noticeable to Neiva as "overprotective of me. They're scared that something might happen to me. So, that's why they have those rules". She understands why there are rules in place, but calls her family "really strict". She gave the example that she still cannot have sleepovers until she is much older, but despite her unhappiness with that particular decision she admitted, "But they're actually pretty cool. They're actually really nice."

The Latinx community is stereotyped in the ways that their homes are open to all family members, which the girls referred to as "hospitable". Through the conversations with the participants, we heard many examples of how family takes care of one another

from falling hard on luck to immigration status to substance abuse assistance. Ibby had two family members join her family in the United States to help them get situated. One was when she was five or six years old, and her mom offered for an "aunt to come live at the house because she was about to give birth. She wanted the twins to be born in the U.S." The second situation was of another family member from Guatemala,

> He was sent over here because of all the violence going on over there. He didn't finish high school because like he didn't have, well, his parents, he doesn't have anyone here. Like literally, he is all by himself….and, he needed money to be able to pay all of his stuff, but it's really hard for him to find a job, because he doesn't have any social security or anything like that, which is really sad.

The girls never discussed how situations like these changed the dynamics in their home or increased their own family's challenges. Instead, all situations were just a matter of fact, as how things are handled with family. Later in the Book Club sessions, Neiva opened up about living with her grandma,

> My mom couldn't take care of me because she used to do drugs. So, she couldn't get the addiction away. But she's over it, yeah. So, my grandma helped my mom and took me in when I was one year old."

As a group, the girls were happy Neiva is back living with her mom, stepdad, and baby brother, whom she adores.

Just as important as the family under each of their roofs, the girls shared the long-distance relationships that are also a part of their family tree. Most of the girls still had grandparents in Costa Rica and Mexico. Only one of the participants, Jade, has her grandparents living right next door, which she loves. Some of the girls admitted their

long-distance communication varies from “don’t talk much” to talking “to them like time to time.” One of the girls uses Skype to stay in contact with her family in Mexico, and another participant relies on a social media app called WhatsApp, where most of the extended family maintains a group chat. Katia laughed and admitted she’s “the least active one. I look at my phone, my WhatsApp, and there’s like 67 messages. And I’m like, ‘God.’ I thought I was supposed to be the one who is like addicted to talking.” With Brisa’s family spread across two countries, she knows she has “only met a little part” of her family. It’s difficult for her to engage in the long-distance relationships with her extended family with only access to them by phone. She said, “I will talk to them from time to time. Like whenever my dad will call to Mexico. They’re all like, ‘Come talk to them.’ And I’ll talk to them.” Whether the family members are close or far away, Abril summarized that family is important because “if you ever are in need of something, you can talk to your family.”

Educational perspectives.

The fourth and final theme that was seen through the data collected was the educational perspectives of the group. The data that comprised this theme was not as much in conjunction with the girls making connections to the characters as it was topics that were discussed naturally within the Book Club. The girls each had their educational experiences to draw from, and for some of them, those are a shared experience. It was easy for the conversation to circle back to what they had in common, and while doing this, topics such as being a minority at school, the school population, and the Book Club itself came up frequently.

With less than twelve percent of the school populations identifying other than Caucasian, and with the Book Club text featuring Latinx protagonists, it was inevitable that the girls would discuss race and ethnicity and the way those topics intersect with their school experience. It took the girls several meetings to become comfortable with racial identifying words, as they pertained to the context of discussion. Even in pre-interviews, the girls would get to a racial identifier such as "White" or "Black," and they would stumble or mumble over the word, being cautious to not offend. It was only when they heard me confirm and validate their responses as additional identifiers, that they had determined these words were safe in this space, as long as they were being used appropriately. Brisa admitted that her friends do not openly talk about race and ethnicity, "especially at this school, going to a mainly fully White school…. there's not really any Hispanics who are actually open to talking about it [race/ethnicity]."

A noteworthy amount of discussion was dedicated to the girls' perspective of diversity at their school. The girls find the lack of ethnic representation to be obvious, as it is one of the first things they realized when beginning this new middle school. Brisa said, "Yeah, just walking in." Ibby added "You see it just walking in." "Yeah, just in the hallways, even at Open House I noticed like there's only White kids. I didn't see like one Hispanic kid." Laughing, Ibby confirmed, "There's only one, like maybe three, Hispanic kids." "And, so, I was like, 'What?'" Ibby nodded and added, "Because you see it's all the same people, like it's just White all the time." The girls felt that it is difficult to "relate" to the mainstream population at the school. While they "try to get along with everyone," Ibby observed "lots of groups of White people interacting within each other and very few Hispanics, either being alone or with other people of their race. Like if we

were oil and water, always separated." While this may not be in the intent of the school, or even something that the adults are aware, the minority students are very cognizant of the separation. Even with language, for those who are bilingual, the girls believe this is an element of culture that unites the minorities at school. Most of their peers, Latinx, Black, and White, think it is "so cool" that these girls know "a different language," but they revealed that they have had teachers in their K-8 experience say, "Don't speak Spanish; don't speak Spanish around me, because I don't know what you're saying." Reliving these conversations from educators, Brisa and Ibby laughed it off, but they admitted the comments were ridiculous because the last thing they really wanted to talk about was the staff. If the girls are offended by the teachers' requests, it does not outwardly show, but the rest of the girls in the group nodded solemnly, as if they were not surprised. Neiva spoke up about using her "natural language" in school. She claimed that she's "not that good at English" because she sometimes "get[s] mixed up with words".

Beyond the school's demographics, Brisa critically examined the teachers' diversity curriculum,

> I feel that overall educators are showing the lack in being inclusive in what they are teaching. Because even though there isn't, this school isn't a majority of Hispanics, but there is still going to be some students. It isn't going to be all White students, and I think they should do a better job at *trying* to at least to start to include some more things.

In the regular English Language Arts class, the girls admitted that sometimes the topics that teachers tried to include about diversity, felt "forced." The girls recollected Black

History Month and Hispanic Heritage Month but criticized that the only lessons were about the historical events, “It was like teaching history; it wasn’t like actually like teaching about them [diverse cultures],” said Brisa. Ibby only remembered Black History Month being recognized in elementary school. Neiva added, “Yeah...In February. Just that one month. That was the only month we would talk about it.” Ibby’s deduction was that “I think we only talk about Black History Month because I guess they’re the only ones who have, or think they have a background. They are the only ones that have a background with slavery.” The isolation of diversity to a particular month, and lessons that feel forced, do not go unnoticed by the minority students. When Abril was younger, she remembered questioning where people of her race fit into the racial/ethnic narratives,

> I asked a question when I was younger, because I asked my parents when we were learning about it [Rosa Parks], and I was like what about other people other than Blacks and Whites. Like where would we have sit [sic]? Like if we didn’t have a car, we would still have to ride the bus.

With a growing diverse demographic in our region, schools have an opportunity to be vigilant in validating the inclusion of the backgrounds of all students in and out of the classroom. Brisa’s observation was “They [teachers] need to know that there are some students who aren’t White and are feeling left out and that they should work on it and at least try to help them improve on that.”

In addition to the inclusion of more diversity within the curriculum, the girls also broached the subject of ESL (English as a Second Language) services, either as students themselves or as observers to classmates. Their underlying concern was that teachers appeared unequipped, “some teachers don’t know like where to start,” or unwilling, “they

can't just leave the student out," to assist ESL students within the mainstream classroom. The language barrier for less English proficient students is challenging in the classroom. The girls asked for educators to not just "give us a paper and expect for us to know what is on it." To the participants this is an act of "leav[ing] the student out" and the rest of the classroom sees this exchange. Brisa suggested that schools should capitalize on the language diversity within the school building to allow peer learning where "all of us could come together and like help the person, that student out." Katia proposed providing a more inclusive language environment in the school building, too. She has encountered many peers "who want to learn a certain language that are not able to learn for economic reasons," and if more students were speaking dual languages, there would be validation of bilingualism as a school culture and also create opportunities for others to "communicate with someone who doesn't speak English." Ibby, Abril, and Brisa all have had peers ask them to teach them Spanish. The girls felt like the school system is missing an opportunity to be more inclusive.

Book Clubs make the act of reading social. By reading novels in Book Clubs and having the time to discuss one's impressions or interpretation of the text with others, this environment mimics authentic reading experiences beyond the classroom. The perceptions shared with peers often allow group members to consider other perspectives than had the book been read independently. The group learned a lot about each other in this manner, and Brisa's experience was meaningful hearing from her peers,

> I think being able to read it in a group was a lot better. Because had I like read it by myself, like yeah, it would've been cool. I would've been like, yeah that was a really cool book, because I had never read a book like that. But being able to

> have the group discussions, and we are able to talk about it and share our own experiences, I thought, it was [sic] just made the experience itself better. More enjoyable.

Through this act of book sharing and discussion, especially for the amount of time and sensitive topics embedded within the book collection of short stories, the group began to build trust with one another, which carried over beyond the Book Club and into social media. Katia shared how close she felt to the girls in the group from the beginning of the discussions when she said, "I didn't know them, and I felt like got to know them in like a week. First discussion, first week, I knew them already for a long time." While the girls were familiar with one another as classmates, it was through this experience that they learned more about one another and discovered that they had more in common than just their ethnic identities. Abril and Brisa, one grade level apart, have lived nearby for years, but Abril said it was through this Book Club that she really got to know Brisa. Abril shared, "I know Brisa, because I live like a minute away from her, so it's like we, I didn't get to know her as much, but now I know how she feels."

Reader Response Theory suggests that the reader is an active participant in making meaning of the text, and the individual is not merely just the receiver of information. With this text being riddled with cultural nuances and ethnic protagonists, the participants co-constructed meaning of the book and made connections with the text. For Brisa, she can only recall one story with an ethnic protagonist from her early elementary years,

> I remember in third grade specifically, going back to this moment, having only read one story to where I could ethnically share or relate to something, it wasn't

something I wanted to relate to because it was only about the stereotype that doesn't really paint Hispanic people, or Latinx people, in a positive way.

The girls co-constructed new meaning with one another about what books with ethnic protagonists might be like. There was a lot to learn from the way this book collection of short stories featured diverse characters. Jade felt that it was hard "to explain it. But I learned a lot from them [the characters]." The participants have had limited exposure to ethnic characters in the past. With a lack of background experience with ethnic characters, it made it challenging for them to make literacy connections between books, but Brisa shared, "This was a really, really nice experience being able to read those stories and like talk about them and just being able to relate….I thought it was a really cool experience." Reader Response was intended to focus on how individuals negotiate the reading within the social terms of the group. The discussions that occurred for each chapter supported this transaction of meaning. Often the girls found it useful to hear others' perspectives, like Abril's example," There were a couple times I looked at the chapter one way, but then someone would say something that I didn't see it like at first," and other times it could be challenging to have so many opinions: "it's a good thing because you get to see how others are thinking about it, but other times I would get confused." The girls naturally created social terms within the Book Club, allowing each reader to bring personal background to the interpretation of the text. As a group, they created meaning of each chapter and the corresponding activities that asked them to think beyond the book. Neiva appreciated the complexity of many different perspectives of the same story, "It was really cool that each of our different perspectives, and knowing that [sic] different people's perspective, can change what you think of a story."

Book Clubs can be a space to safely examine highly contentious issues, such as that of Latinx immigration, inclusion, and school diversity. Throughout the Book Club the girls mentioned that this is "a space that we can talk" and "we don't have the same opportunity throughout the rest of the day," quickly making it the highlight of my day, too. The girls noticeably became more comfortable coming into the room (the time we would begin seemed to be getting later and later), they were more comfortable with the recorder on (they would talk over one another and code-switch into Spanish, usually eliciting laughter), and they allowed themselves to be vulnerable (sharing personal feelings and experiences openly). For Brisa, the Book Club became many things,

> I did kind of think, I thought it was cool to be able to hear like certain different experiences, even though some were sad, I think it was a very comfortable space to be able to tell that. I don't know it was just nice to be able to talk about and to hear. We don't really have conversations that go deep into that, so seeing a like a different point of certain people in the group, I was like, "That's really cool." Like I kind of got to know them a little bit better.

This is said of classmates that Brisa has been in school with since kindergarten. Some of the conversations surprised even the participants. Neiva shared,

> I learned about how their life is. At first, I was judging people and saying, "They have such a good life" and stuff. But now I know they actually experience sad and horrible moments in their lives about their family, being Latinx, and stuff. And racial comments…. I actually never knew that. So, I learned that from them.

The Book Club discussions allowed the participants to empathize for one another and offer support. It was a safe space that was created in the ways they were willing to be

vulnerable. Brisa recognized the uniqueness of the space within the Book Club when she said, “We were comfortable talking about certain topics that we would never have been able to talk about at school had that not happened, like the Book Club.” Katia agreed, “We can all relate at some point. It gave us the space to talk about it.” Ibby and Brisa have been inseparable throughout middle school. I was excited to have them in the Book Club, knowing their comfort level with one another might provide a foundation of trust for the rest of the group. What I had not anticipated was how much more the two friends would learn about one another through this experience. Brisa shared during her post-interview, “And with her [Ibby] and me being close friends for three years and not know some of that, I was kind of surprised. Sometimes whenever she’d be talking, I’d just be staring at her like, ‘Wow.’ I never knew that.” This shared space allowed for the girls, even those who have been close for years, to openly discuss topics that are deeply connected to their Latinx identities. The girls created something very special in this space during the project that will be difficult to fully replicate.

Summary

The case study participants consisted of six Latina middle school students in a rural setting. They represent three different countries: Mexico (3), Costa Rica (2), and Puerto Rico (1). The findings through pre-interviews, discussions, projects, and post-interviews provided a picture of the participants’ experiences during the book club. This study was guided by one main question:

(1) In the context of a North Carolina rural middle school, how do adolescent Latinas experience a Latinx-centric novel in an extracurricular book club format?

After analyzing the data, four themes emerged. The data provided clear evidence that the participants grew in their trust and connection with one another through this experience. While three of the participants were more vocal with their thoughts and insights, there was still evidence in the responses from the other three that this experience was meaningful and worthwhile to them.

The girls started a SnapChat group with all of them in it about the fourth meeting. By the sixth meeting they asked me to join. I stayed silent, but watched how they shared nonsense photos out the bus window or of their living room ceiling fans. Somehow, this 21st Century socialization was bonding this new-formed friendship. They purposefully tried to include me by asking what time we would meet in the morning. I would reply that it was (still) at 8 am. Daily, they playfully changed the name of the group to Spanish words that I didn't know and had to look up for translation. For the picture activity, they began sending photos of their family or images from around their homes that reflected who they are. They would add assuring and affirming images and words, continuously building up one another. Nearing the end of the Book Club days, Katia sent a message to see if anyone was available to speak to her. Her message read, "Something that is really hurtful to me to talk about but you guys will only understand." Immediately, Neiva reached out, "What is it about? If you don't mind me asking," followed closely by Abril, "What happened?" I learned that Neiva and Abril both called Katia that night on a group chat and spoke for some time. Some hateful things had been said by a fellow seventh-grader about the inability to understand Katia and her accent. It broke her heart. While this supportive exchange towards Katia may have seemed insignificant to the girls, what I recognized was a new sense of community and friendship that did not exist before. Three

weeks prior, this SnapChat group would not have been where Katia would have turned for comfort, but now it was. Alas, comfort had been found.

Language became a central component to many of the discussions, including some participants' criteria for identifying Latinx. The one participant, Jade, who was the quietest throughout, was also the only one who was monolingual in English. Her short contributions to the discussions were appropriate and connected to the topics. Knowing her from the beginning of middle school, this Book Club may have served a different purpose for her beyond what was examined through the data. In one activity, the girls wrote "Identity Poems". Jade repeated the word "failure" three different times. This was not the same upbeat eleven-year-old from two years prior. She became the first one I would greet, and the one I chose to sit next to. She was the one I was trying to include in the discussions when the other outspoken participants could fill the time easily with chatter. Jade willingly participated in our group; it was clear she wanted to be with us. The full impact of what this experience meant for her: I may never know.

Books featuring protagonists from diverse racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, religious, and cultural backgrounds allow readers to see themselves within the pages of the text and to witness experiences, triumphs, and challenges that may be different than their own. Through this project's book club experience, the participants validated their lived experiences and the ways in which these examples intertwine with their ethnic identity, especially at a school in which they identify as minorities. The characters' stories within the book collection of short stories provided a foundation for which the girls could empathize with the characters' development and use for discussion points in which they related. The chapters allowed for the girls to openly discuss sensitive topics

that were ethnically and racially connected to their lives in and out of the school building. During the Book Club, the girls created a space to not only delve deeper into a shared book together, but they created a friendship amongst themselves that extended beyond the project. The girls found examples that mirrored their own lives and those of each other; they found examples of text that would allow their non-Latinx peers to gain perspective into a culture beyond the dominant one of the school; and the text provided space for all readers to relate to the challenges of concepts that extend beyond one racial or ethnic group. Diverse books that feature diverse characters give space to recognizing, reflecting, and honoring the lives and experiences of all readers.

Chapter Five will further discuss the findings of this project and expound on their importance, meaning, and significance. In addition, I will also discuss the implications of these findings. The impacts of the results from this study, its limitations, and potential for future research will also be explored along with my personal reflection of the project.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

Overview

The Latinx population is the largest and fastest growing underrepresented groups in the New South. This change in the rural communities directly impacts the school demographics that were once White dominated. The teaching staff and teaching materials, while still largely without ethnic diversity, have become the front force to integrate topics and discussions into curriculum that are inclusive of all within their school community.

One of the challenges for the increasing diverse school community is the access to curriculum materials that are inclusive of diverse characters and authors (Everett, 2018; Koss, Martinez, & Johnson, 2016; McNair, 2008; Moss, 2013). This lack of inclusive texts is not aligned to reflect the growing diversity of the demographics of schools in the rural south. It is generally through the guidance of literary canons that educators and county's select teaching materials appropriate for the grade level, but upon closer examination, even the literary canons are not reflective of the diversity within the school systems (Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, and Petrone, 2014; Common Core, 2018; Moss, 2013), requiring middle school teachers to make cognizant decisions about the text selections used to support the required curriculum for adolescents.

Adolescent readers seek equilibrium in their identities of who they are becoming. Readers are aware of the implicit and explicit messages of racial and ethnic integration and seclusion within curriculum materials. When the teaching materials that are presented to students reflect the system's value of diversity, students are able to see themselves in the resources as well as gain insight into another's cultural background

(Sims-Bishop, 1990). Students seek validation in the materials that are utilized in the classroom as well as the teachers' abilities to place value on the attributes that are unique to each individual. Students, who speak multiple languages and represent bi-cultural upbringings, appreciate the intentional efforts educators make to be inclusive in literature decisions.

This study was designed to add to the existing literature surrounding text selection decisions in American curriculum, adolescent identity, and ethnic and racial identity through literacy. Using the theoretical framework of Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors as conceptualized by Sims-Bishop (1990), I worked with six rural Latinas to understand the experience and cultural influences of utilizing ethnically diverse protagonists featured in a middle school Book Club. Interviews with the participants, before and after the Book Club, and group discussions were used to determine the influence of diverse characters on student identity and cultural connections. The following question guided this study:

1. In the context of a North Carolina rural middle school, how do adolescent Latinas experience a Latinx-centric novel in an extracurricular book club format?

Chapter Four described the context for the Book Club at the participating school. It used thematic and discourse analysis to create a coding system and described the themes developed from the analysis with the assistance of AtlasTi qualitative data analysis software. Chapter Four also explained the relationship of the theoretical framework within the book club activities, and Chapter Five presents a summary of the data gathered on the participants' experiences with a book collection of short stories featuring Latinx protagonists. The data is used to draw conclusions. This chapter also

provides a discussion of the implications for practice and research related to diverse books for middle school adolescents.

Chapter Five also discusses the implications of the findings of the data analysis. I begin this chapter with a summary of the findings from my data analysis. Next, I consider the impact of the results from this study, its limitations, and possibilities for future research. I conclude this chapter with a personal reflection.

Findings

The primary focus of this study was to investigate the experience of adolescent Latinas during a book club featuring Latinx protagonists. The study selected six participants from a rural middle school ranging in grades sixth through eighth and ages 11 through 14. Analyzing participant interviews and group discussions through conversations about identity, personal experience, and interpretations provided an opportunity to describe the experience of a Latinx-centric novel in a rural middle school. Because the girls encountered experiences of the characters with whom they could personally connect, they understood the importance of purposeful diversity within reading materials for all students. They began to describe not only the perspective and relatability that diverse books provide, but the girls openly discussed how meaningful it was to each of them to have this space with one another to discuss topics that were relevant to them. Additionally, the girls discussed the ways books with diverse characters could provide insight for their non-Latinx peers.

When students experience books in which they can see themselves, their own lives, and experiences, reading becomes an act of self-affirmation and validation of identity. The content of the curriculum materials implicitly validates the social and

cultural identity of the school and district. The narratives embedded into the curriculum indirectly place value on whose narrative is being shared. By offering text that reflects the counternarrative of all students in the community, students are gaining validation, while simultaneously being offered perspective of one another.

This study was designed to add to the existing work that values diversity for all learners in the classroom and validates the backgrounds of all students in a rural community. Through discourse and thematic analysis, the data was coded using qualitative data analysis software to explain emerging themes found in the participants' experiences. The codes were based on ideas found in the literature, reoccurrences in participant interviews, and patterns within the group discussions. Upon analysis of the data, several themes emerged: Latinx culture, cultural challenges, familial relationships, and educational perspectives.

Latinx Culture

In a community, whose greatest diversity is socioeconomic and not ethnic or culturally-related, there is a lot to be gained by diverse readers interacting with narratives that differ from their own. The participants frequently discussed how the context of the chapters could serve as a means for others to view the Latinx community from a different perspective, perhaps one where the reader discovers the similarities to his/her own culture or for outsiders to better understand the complexity of Latinx-identifiers such as belonging, culturally connected, and language.

Language is an important factor of identity. This became apparent in my time at Gearing Middle School. In the beginning, the girls would slide one or two Spanish words into conversation by code-switching (Mabule, 2015). As their comfort grew, they would

engage in private one or two-lined Spanish conversations with one another during the group discussions, sometimes offering to translate for me. When trust within the group had been achieved, there was a more lengthy and honest conversation about the hesitation that was originally felt by inviting one of the participants to the group, who did not speak Spanish, nor was this girl able to understand Spanish. The girls confided that the Spanish language was very much a part of their identities, and they longed for the ability to use their mother tongue in the school aspect of their lives. Their inability to understand why one would choose to not maintain the Spanish language, while identifying as Latinx, remained incomprehensible to them, almost to the point the group questioned the authenticity of such a person identifying as Latinx.

Cultural Challenges

All the participants described aspects of being Latinx that were challenging. Each girl had several personal challenges that she has had to face or that loved ones had encountered. The girls gave voice to fear and heartache for current immigration rhetoric that was politically and locally charged (Silver, 2018). Their conversations became more detailed and transparent as the weeks went on and trust was built before they openly engaged. Discussing racism is a complicated process. For the purpose of the analysis of the participants' discussions, I relied on the interpretation of Bermin and Paradies (2010), which examined racism as a means to "maintain or exacerbate[s] inequality of opportunity". Bermin and Paradies (2010) examined the historical influences of their definition to encompass the work of others who have examined racism in great extent (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Essed, 1990; Goldberg, 1993; and Miles, 1989). The participants' experiences of racism proved the least amount of social risk associated with it when

sharing. This was evidenced as the participants discussed racism without much trepidation in the group setting. It was not until the later weeks that the group learned immigration status of group members' family and the ways in which their immediate families have extended help to other Latinxs across the border and locally. These conversations imposed the most risk (Enriquez, 2015) and were not offered until the later weeks of group discussion.

Through the participants' examples, the girls also shared the ways in which they handle negativity. Some of these tools have come from watching the ways in which their family members have interacted with negative members of the community and other times the ways the girls have handled themselves simply speak of their personal character and unwillingness to contribute to the negative stereotypes. They aspire to be advocates for change, but outside of their own social and family groups, they have yet to exercise these voices.

Family Relationships

While trust in the space was not guaranteed, the participants surpassed my expectations of making the Book Club a place where anything could be discussed. This included the variations of family: single parent, step parents, raised by grandparents, extended family divided by miles, and even substance and domestic abuse situations. These girls have navigated adversity in and out of their homes, and while they may not see it now, they are strong.

Embedded in the discussions and interviews, several of the girls circled the high expectations that are rooted in their family culture. The girls not only want to make their families proud, but the girls know the expectation is that they surpass the socioeconomic

and academic levels of their upbringings. When coding the conversations, the expressions of the ways in which the girls interpret the high expectations from their families provided insight to the foundation of their own educational perspectives.

Educational Perspectives

At times the girls expressed frustration with current practices at school, which included the lack of diversity in curriculum materials, comments from educators that the girls must rely on English during the school day, and the methods used for mainstreaming ESL students. None of the girls could recall a book that they have read that featured a Latinx protagonist that was not facing a stereotypical conflict (i.e. immigration and migrant farm working). They believed books featuring ethnic protagonists that are engaged in real experiences would help the diverse populations of schools feel connected as well, as the students of the majority gain perspective. The lack of diversity within this rural school is recognized from the beginning of the day to the end by the participants. At times they have been challenged with maintaining their Latinx identity in a White-dominated school. They have admitted that their friend circles at school rely on the intrapersonal relationships of other Latinx or Black students. The majority of the participants wished there were more opportunities during the school day to embrace their bilingualism and have it validated by the teachers and dominant student population. Lastly, while the girls had difficulty determining a better practice for mainstream ESL students, they felt strongly that educators and the school system could do better.

For the purpose of this study, Latinx was defined through evidence of the evolution of the binary and gender-specific form of Latino and Latina (Salinas Jr. & Lozano, 2019) and identity (de Onís, 2017) to conceptualize the collective group for the

participants. While their cultural identity varied from person-to-person, there were similarities across the participants that contributed to the understanding of what it was like to be Latinx in a rural southern community.

Identity was defined by the participants during the interview process using the collective identity framework of Ashmore, Deaux, and McLaughlin-Volpe (2004), which I modified with age-appropriate interview questions for adolescents (Appendix A). This was necessary to understand the ways the students found the protagonists in the stories to be relatable and authentic examples of the Latinx culture. These early perceptions of Latinx culture influenced the participants' connections to the characters in the book collection of short stories.

Implications for Practice

This study argued that including diverse texts within the curriculum helps to empower and to validate rural Latina students, allowing them to connect to protagonists, while demonstrating a greater understanding of their identities within their communities. The current standard-based practices for middle grades literary development is concerned with the rigor of texts to develop students' ability to decipher more complex text. Historically, little concern has been given to the racial and ethnic content of the novels. Sims-Bishop (1990), alongside a current advocacy platform of agencies such as We Need Diverse Books (2014) and Diversity in YA (2011), posits the need for all readers to find books in which they can see themselves within the characters and stories. Furthermore, this literacy philosophy supports the opportunity for all readers to gain insight and perspective into the lives and cultures of those that differ from their own. This study

attempted to increase the importance of including diverse books into the curriculum to benefit all readers.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine how a group of middle grades Latinas in a rural context interacted with ethnically diverse protagonists featured in an extracurricular book club and the intersection of text, dialogue. This study indicated that diverse books can provide space to enhance the connections of their readers through the participants' abilities to see themselves reflected in the content. Likewise, it was projected through discussions that books like this would also allow non-Latinx readers the opportunity to see into a culture unlike their own and gain cultural perspective. Reading about what they know, and sharing about their connections to the text, allowed the participants to build trust within the Book Club to engage in meaningful discussions, extending beyond the story. When participants were engaged in discussions, connected to text, and related context to other aspects of their lives, the data showed their confidence increase, as they openly discussed race, ethnicity, and the triumphs and challenges they associated with this facet of their identities. This lends credibility to the understanding that books featuring diverse characters that reflect all the students in the community is important for student identity, as it validates a narrative that contributes to the community yet does not solely reflect that of the dominant culture. Similarly, the analysis revealed that by providing texts that features diverse characters that are engaged in authentic experiences allows for readers of diverse backgrounds to gain perspective to the context of the story; in addition, these stories create relatable experiences for readers from similar backgrounds of the characters in these authentic contexts.

Future Research Recommendations

This case study questioned the practicality and results of creating a Book Club that allowed rural Latinas to engage in a shared novel experience that featured Latinx protagonists. This study focused on the experiences of the participants through interviews and group discussions. The results are not generalizable, as is true of case studies, but the case did provide insight for further research in this area that continues to investigate the availability and implications of diverse texts in all levels of education.

I observed changes in the students as they developed trust within the bounded system of the Book Club. Because of the politically-charged population that my study focused upon, and the low-percentage of Latinx students at the school site, the Book Club became a space in which the girls built trust with one another and were vocally grateful to have a place at school to share honestly about topics that were inseparable from who they identify. While the period of adolescence is social by definition, further studies could be employed that allow students to respectfully and safely discuss topics that are felt socially taboo within the regular classroom. While my study featured six females of similar cultural backgrounds, all identifying Latina, we did explore the idea of making the Book Club group heterogeneous, expanding ethnic and racial identifiers. I do believe that the same level of trust might not be achieved, but the openness about race, and the perspective the girls imagined a novel such as this would provide to a non-Latinx, would have been very interesting to hear from others. What new perspectives would have been shared to the original group that were perhaps missed because they all had similar backgrounds?

The participants valued the use of their first language in the text, and they also appreciated a text that attempted to examine the complexity of their ethnic identities. To extend the inclusion of diverse books and approach topics that are important to all groups of students with the middle school setting, a study focusing on the inventory of the school library, a place in which all students have access, would be a natural companion to the first study. This could be addressed through a qualitative study as the participants discuss the books they have found and how or if these characters and authors are reflections of the student population and community. A quantitative component could be added to determine the significance of the number of diverse books the students pull from the shelves, as they analyze the contents and criteria of diverse books. Depending on the age of the participants, there is potential for this to be used as a leadership opportunity, allowing the students to create a plan to advocate to the school or even the school board for more access to diverse materials. Perhaps, if there were more books featuring diverse characters, the conversations about race would not be as uncomfortable in peer discussions, as the girls found them to be in the beginning of the project. By allowing more readers to respectfully experience others' cultures through books is implicitly teaching and validating diversity.

Diverse books encompass a large canon of materials. While the above recommendations are geared more towards the diversity of the protagonists and authors, my recommendations would not be complete if I did not give some thought to another aspect of the girls' discussion that affected me. The girls, ranging in age of twelve to fourteen, are keen to the methods employed by teachers for students with limited English proficiency. With a limited ESL population, the site has limited access to routine ESL

interventions. Many teachers do not have adequate ESL backgrounds nor training. The teachers and ESL students need a resource that is meaningful for the learner and easily accessible for the teachers to incorporate into the flow of classroom lessons. This is especially true for schools that do not have a high ESL population, warranting a full-time ESL teacher on staff. For such schools, a resource could be developed that will support teachers and that the teachers can have access for their ESL students that provides learning materials, support materials, technological access, and bilingual, age-appropriate books. Providing a resource that could act as a classroom on wheels for ESL support would be the first step. The next would be to create a practioners' guide that supports empirical evidence for the items on the cart and clear explanation of how and when to use each piece with ESL students would maximize the time students are learning. You are right, girls: we can do better.

Reflection

This study was intended to understand how adolescent Latinas experience a Latinx-centric book collection of short stories in an extracurricular book club. As a researcher, I wanted to utilize the Literature Circle format that I found to be very successful in middle school literacy classrooms to allow students to delve deeper into a book, gain perspective from one another, and support the reading goals of each team member. Based off the expertise of Daniels (1994), Literature Circles are more than a trendy label for group reading. The collaborative learning environment created trust and safe space for group reading and discussions. This format has always naturally intertwined with Reader's Response Theory (Rosenblatt, 1982), as it also challenged the way individuals related to characters because of personal background experiences and

allowed some decision-making components. This structuralist view is completely dependent upon the words in the text and the experiences the readers brought to the discussion to create a deeper level of understanding. Plus, the autonomy that adolescents experience in their decision-making as group members in this format is appropriately challenging at this stage of their learning development. I had witnessed the depth of understanding from my own students, but I have never been in a position to attempt to measure the growth and experiences of the students in this format. It seemed natural to intersect that as an instructional strategy with the Latinx population that I have worked closely with since my undergraduate program. The project came to life on its own, through the guidance of my committee, as we searched for a book that would be new, appropriate, and time-sensitive with the growing political unrest of immigration and policy. When I analyzed the data, I saw growth in the ways the girls began speaking about topics more confidently, the degree to which they shared information, the bilingual space they had created, and the way they fell in love with this book, the first for most that positively reflected Latinx characters.

Over the five weeks of this study, students were given the space to discuss the characters and chapters at length and then given time to connect to what they knew. They learned more about how they identify in a Latinx community, but they also learned how to articulate what authenticated this identity. A trusting and honest component was revealed in their discussions as they admitted the challenges of being Latinx coupled with how it was easier from their perspective to be White. Yet, all the while, they remained proud at the core to be a part of the Latinx community, and that remained at the center of their identity and what they hope to accomplish in their lifetimes.

What began as a group of girls from different backgrounds, all who shared the common experience of being a part of an underrepresented group in a rural southern middle school, ended with a group of girls who found heroic voices that were similar to their own, within the pages of the short story collection. The participants have taught me that heroes are ordinary people who are willing to act extraordinary. The world of literacy needs heroes, who have the ability to make extraordinary things out of everyday pages. This change can begin with giving voice to who is highlighted in the books selected for our growing diverse classrooms. Being a hero starts with recognizing the necessity of the transformation and committing to make a difference in the lives of others. These small revisions create a ripple effect that can become bigger and greater than those who once initiated the change.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Pre-interview questions

1. Describe your group of closest friends. Describe to me your immediate family.
2. How do you ethnically identify? How does this relate to the larger student population at Gearing?
3. Will you please share a memory of when you first recognized race or ethnicity?
4. In what ways would you say you are like other Latinx? In what ways are you different?
5. In what ways do you feel connected to other Latinx?
6. In what ways does your family involve itself as a part of the larger Latinx population?
7. What are the positive aspects of being Latinx?
8. Are there any challenges of being Latinx?
9. How is being Latinx an important reflection of who you are?
10. What is one thing you would want others to know about you?
11. In what ways do you think how Latinx are viewed will affect your own life?
12. When people make derogatory comments or judgements about Latinx, would you feel as if they said it directly about you?
13. What cultural activities do you participate in that make you proud to be Latinx?
14. Finish this sentence: “Latinx people should…”
15. Tell me about the stories that you have read in your ELA class this year.
16. Can you share with me a time that you remember a character in a story having similar racial or ethnic characteristics as you?

Appendix B

Discussion Prompts for Book Club Selections

There are twelve short stories in the book *Us, In Progress: Short Stories About Young Latinos*. Each story features a Latinx youth as the protagonist, facing a challenge in his/her personal life. Immediately after each selection, the group will reflect about how the refrane from the author fits (or does not fit) with the short story. Then, to address the research question, I will ask participants to respond to three specific questions:

1. In what ways does this story convey human essence (the parts of our soul that are common among humans despite cultural and ethnic differences)?
2. In what ways does this story convey aspects of being Latinx?
3. What does this story contribute to literature for all adolescents?

These questions are intentionally designed to elicit responses that would be appropriate to answer my research question, utilizing the conceptual lens of Sims-Bishops's (1990) Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors

- The first question is aligned to support the concept of Mirrors (Reflective of Latinx culture): *How do the elements of diverse text influence adolescent Latinas' perception of identity through a Book Club?*
- The second question is aligned to support the concepts of Windows (Common experiences for adolescents as a general group): *How does the Book Club influence the participants to make connections in their lives personally and as readers?*

The third question is aligned to support the concept of Sliding Glass Doors (How can all students “step into” other cultures): *How does the Book Club influence the participants critical lens of instructional texts at the middle school level?*

Furthermore, after each question has been posed to the group, the group will begin their discussion about each selection using Text Connections commonly used in literary discussions: Text-to-Text, Text-to-Self, Text-to-World, and Text-to-Media. This will provide a springboard for further discussing each selection and determining its cultural relevance to the Latinx community the site supports.

Appendix C

Writing and Activity Prompts for Reflective Journal

Each chapter begins with what the author, Delacre, refers to as *Refranes*. Delacre (2017) explained, "*Refranes* are sayings in the Spanish language that often convey a lot in a succinct way" (p. 228). Since these refranes are specific to the Spanish-speaking culture, I do want to use these to guide the students in their journal responses, staying true to the author's intention the best we can.

In the table below, I have noted the number and title of the short story, the Spanish refrane, its English translation, and an interpretation afforded to me by my first two participants. I will then only refer to only the short story number and corresponding Reading Response activity.

Table 4

Short Stories and Corresponding Refranes, Translations, and Interpretations

Number and Title of Short Story	Spanish Refrane	Translation	Interpretation
1. The Attack	*De noche todos los gatos son pardos.*	At night, all cats are black.	You cannot see the flaws of a person at night, and you can't really distinguish things in the dark.
2. Selfie	*El que quiera celeste, que le cueste.*	He who aims for heaven must work for it.	You must work hard for the things you want to achieve.
3. G*üera*	*Las apariencias engañan*	Appearances deceive.	Appearances can be misleading.

4. Burrito Man	*Nadie sabe el bien que tiene hasta que lo pierde.*	No one knows his wealth until he loses it.	You may not realize the value in something until you lose it.
5. Band-Aid	*No se puede tapar el cielo con la mano.*	You can't hide the sky with one hand.	When there is something bad in your life, and you act like everything is fine, but you know you can't hide or cover it.
6. Firstborn	*Hay que coger al toro por los cuernos.*	One must take the bull by the horns.	One must confront situations or problems directly rather than trying to avoid it.
7. Cubano Two	*Tal para cual.*	The one for the other.	Some people were meant to meet because of similar qualities, whether good or bad.
8. Peacemaker	*Las aguas siempre vuelven a su cauce.*	River waters always return to their bed.	No matter what problems you face, or how difficult they are, they will eventually be solved and everything will return back to normal.
9. The Secret	*Mañana será otro dia.*	Tomorrow will be another day.	There's always tomorrow to try again or to start over and do better.
10. Pickup Soccer	*El futbol es la unica religion que no tiene ateos.*	Soccer is the only religion without atheists.	Soccer can be a common denominator.
11. Saturday School	*Ser valiente es tener miedo a quedarse sin hacer nada.*	Being brave is to be afraid of doing nothing.	At least try and put effort into something rather than just giving

			up without at least trying.
12. 90,000 Children	*Sóllo el que carga el costal sabe lo que lleva adentro.*	Only he who carries the sack knows what it holds.	Only one person knows what they have been through or what problems they have.

Note. Adapted from "Us, in progress: Short stories about young Latinos," by L. Delacre, 2017, New York, NY: Harper Collins."

1. The Attack. Emilio and Jose, mama's miracles, put their feelings aside to support the family's decision to move back to Mexico after Tony's incident with the paramedics and police officers. *What example can you provide of a selfless act one of your family members has done to support another family member?*

2. Selfie. On picture day, Marla notices a ring around her neck becoming darker. This line was indicative of her declining health leading towards Type II Diabetes. The doctor warned she needed to eat better and exercise to take care of herself. The story begins with picture day and ends with a photograph at the end of a bike race. The two images are in stark contrast of who Marla was and who she desired to become. *Create a mask that represents all aspects of you. All art mediums are welcomed.*

3. G*üera.* The main character has lighter skin and features than other Latinx in her family and community. Sometimes she struggles to prove that she belongs. *Write an Identity poem, using one of the two templates provided* (Appendix D).

4. Burrito Man. Alex reluctantly spends the day with her papa at his burrito cart for "Take Your Child to Work Day". Alex originally finds herself wishing that she was going into a lawyer's or doctor's office instead. She learns through observation how significant her father has become to the community and hears second-hand how dearly

rod he is of her. When Papa passes away, the reader learns how special that day was for Alex and how she is making her papa's dream come true for herself. *Has there been any time in your life where you wish your experiences more closely reflected those of a different part of the community only to later realize the worth of your own experiences/culture/loved ones?*

5. Band-Aid. Alina's father was recently deported, leaving her Mami worried about the fate of Alina and her siblings if she, too, were to be deported. *This story raises many emotions surrounding the current state of immigration as it relates to deportation. Create an Acrostic Poem using either the word "immigration" or "deportation" to explain what these two concepts mean within the Latinx community specifically.*

6. Firstborn. Luci comes to the realization that her older sister, Brigida, has been bullying her, which was not easy to recognize such behavior, since the word "bully" is not in the Spanish language. When Luci witnesses the target switch to their younger sister, Ani, Luci finally stands up to Brigida. *Write a letter to one of the characters in this story. Be sure to make connections to what you have read. Include advice that you would give to one of them, if they were a dear friend.*

7. Cubano Two. The conversation between two middle school students, Monster and Rascal, in the school's newsroom is recorded. The light-hearted banter between the boys is indicative of their closeness and the way they can joke with each other. *Write a letter to educators about what they need to know about teaching Latinx. Include aspects of culture and language that you find valuable for consideration in education. What does your school already do well when incorporating diversity? What areas could your school improve when incorporating diversity?*

8. Peacemaker. Wilfred and his younger sister, Blanca, live with their parents and abuelos. When Wilfred's parents argue, it upsets Blanca. His role in the family has been to be the peacemaker at the end of the arguments by going to each parent, softening the message, and delivering to the other. One final argument leads Wilfred to take Blanca to their aunt's restaurant, drawing the end of his role. The parents, recognizing things have gone too far, come to get the children and leave holding hands. *Take a photograph of something that symbolizes each member of your family. Be prepared to explain why you chose this object and how it represents the person.*

9. The secret. Carla and Esperanza are sisters. When Esperanza is offered a role dancing as a paid role, their mother has to explain to Esperanza that she does not have a social security number, which is required for employment. This is because Esperanza was born in Mexico and brought to the United States illegally as an infant. Esperanza has a very difficult time digesting this information and relating it to her already-established American identity. Carla does some research about the process for DACA (Deferred Action for Children Arrivals) and DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) and supports her sister during a Dream Rally at a nearby pier. *Looking at the profiles of DACA and DREAMers, (Appendix E) choose one of these individuals to make a playlist for. What song would inspire him/her? What song gives him/her hope? What song do you believe would speak to him/her greatest desires? What song do you believe could soothe him/her deepest fears? Be prepared to speak about your choices for each song.*

10. Pickup Soccer. Two neighboring groups of Latinx show up on the soccer field at the same time, unwilling to share the space, yet they share a friend, Hugo. They both look

angry at Hugo for this confrontation, but Hugo's answer is to respond in a large announcer's voice the typical beginning of a soccer game, causing the tension to break and sparking a willingness to play together. *In what ways do you see Latinx as one group and how are the groups within the Latinx community different? What are your experiences with society's grouping and stereotypes?*

11. Saturday School. Sandra's mom has found a Spanish-speaking Saturday school that reiterates correct Spanish for students. Even though this is not how Sandra wants to spend her Saturdays, she knows the retaining of her spoken culture is very important to her mom and Abuela. When Sandra goes the first day, she feels completely out of her element. The students make fun of her Spanish, and the teachers consequently makes her feel dumb. At the end of the day, when Sandra's mom picks her up, Sandra tries her new *correct* Spanish. Mom learns that the school is teaching Argentinian Spanish, not Puerto Rican and decides not to take Sandra back. *What part of your culture is important to your family that you retain? How are they doing this for you? In what ways have your parents tried to assimilate to American culture? How are they doing this for you? What examples have your read in books with other characters that are similar to retaining one's culture or reflecting your own experiences with culture? What examples have you read in books with characters that are reflective of the dominant culture?*

12. 90,000 Children. Frank's dad works on the Border Patrol and listens to the negative rhetoric from his grandfather about Mexicans who illegally cross the border. This narrative becomes ingrained into Frank's conscience, which has removed the human story from the immigration story, until he meets a young girl named Romina. This encounter opens Frank's heart to consider "how hard it must be to travel alone, not

speaking the language, afraid of the Mexican gangs that at any moment could hurt you, extort money from you, or even kill you…she was courageous" (p. 208). *What aspect of Latinx youth culture is missing from this novel? Using a voice recorder app, discuss any Latinx topics that you feel are missing from this novel that would be beneficial for diverse audiences if it were included. Explain why it is important to feature the topic(s) and what insight it would provide for non-Latinx readers and what validation it may provide for Latinx readers.*

Appendix D

Identity Poem Templates

Let them be as _____
Always _____
_____.
but _____.

I'd rather be a _____
_____
_____.

To have _____
_____
to _____, to _____, to _____
of _____.

To be _____
_____
_____
_____
or _____.

I'd rather smell of _____
than of_____
If I could _____
I'd rather be a _____

Note. Adapted from "Identity," by J. N. Polanco, (1977) from *Nosotros Anthology, Revista Chicano-Riqueña*

Line 1: I am _____ (Your name)

Line 2: 4 adjectives or character traits to describe you

Line 3: The skin I'm in is _____ (adjective)

Line 4: The scars on the surface remind me of _____ (How did you get them)

Line 5: In my _____ (color) eyes, I see _____ (What do you see in your eyes?)

Line 6: Like _____ (simile to describe what you see)

Line 7: In my smile, I feel _____ (What does your smile show about you?)

Line 8: Example of alliteration

Line 9: From my lips, I say _____ (What do you say to the world?)

Line 10: People outside me think I'm _____ (What do others think about you?)

Line 11: In my ears, I hear _____ (What do you hear in the world or at home?)

Line 12: Inside my skin, I feel _____ (How do you feel inside?)

Line 13: My skin does not always show the real me.

Line 14: The real me is _____, _____, and _____.

Line 15: I will LOVE the skin I'm in because _____.

Appendix E

Profiles of DACA and DREAMers

DACA: Talking to recipients five years later. (2019). Retrieved from http://time.com/daca-dream-act-jose-antonio-vargas-time-cover-revisited/

Journeys of hardship and hope: DACA students share their stories. (2018). Retrieved from *https://paw.princeton.edu/article/journeys-hardship-and-hope-daca-students-share-their-stories*

We are all Dreamers. (n.d.) Retrieved from https://www.dreamerstories.com/

Appendix F

Semi-Structured Post-interview questions

1. Who was your favorite character in “Us, In Progress”? Why?
2. In what ways were the characters believable to you?
3. In what ways were the characters not believable to you?
4. What was one of the most memorable parts of this book? Why?
5. Can you share with me the experience of having a character in a story having similar racial and/or ethnic characteristics as you?
6. How do you think these stories would be different if the main characters were White?
7. What in particular stood out to you from your group discussions?
8. What did you learn about your peers through this book experience?
9. Would you recommend this book to others? Why? Why not?
10. What would you like to share with the author, Lulu Delacre?
11. What topic was this book missing that is important to understand the life of a young Latinx?
12. In what ways are the stories in your ELA class different than this book?
13. In what ways could non- Latinx be affected by reading a book that features a Latinx protagonist?
14. I'd like to hear your thoughts on the inclusion of more texts that feature ethnically diverse characters.