The Social Integration of Latino Newcomer Students in Midwestern Elementary Schools: Teacher and Administrator Perceptions

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Abstract

Midwestern communities have experienced rapid influxes of Latino immigrants in recent years. Public schools in areas that were previously white and monolingual are now challenged to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. There is a substantial body of research on the academic needs of Hispanic immigrants, especially in terms of English language instruction. However, little is known about how these newcomer children are adjusting socially at school. The purpose of this study is to explore teacher and administrator perceptions of Latino student social integration, which is conceptualized as how these children interact with their U.S. born peers and with the entire school community. Social integration also includes policies and practices that have been implemented to welcome and support these students as they adjust to attending school in a new country. A total of nine teachers and administrators from public elementary schools in Ohio and Indiana were interviewed to get their perspectives on how Latino newcomers are included in their new school environments.

Introduction

Traditionally (im)migrants[1] have populated the urban centers of Texas, New York, California, Illinois, New Jersey, and Florida, and these states continue to receive seventy-five percent of this incoming population (Ruiz de Velasco and Fix cited in Short, 2002). In recent years, however, a shift in (im)migrant settlements has been occurring outside the boundaries of these states, where newcomer[2] populations have grown by forty percent during the mid-1990s (Short, 2002), and these numbers continue to increase. A dynamic shift in the United States population is occurring, in which Hispanics are

[1] The term immigrants is coined "(im)migrants" to represent an operational understanding that some Latinos have come to the United States to establish permanent residency (immigrants), while others' presence here is merely a temporary situation. (Migrants) arrive with intentions of returning to their home countries, and sometimes move back and forth between the U.S. and their home country.

[2] The term newcomer is used synonymously with the term (im)migrant.

journeying to Midwestern states, marking the first arrival of Latino[3] people for many of these communities. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Census Bureau, Hispanics are (im)migrating from traditional Southwestern states into metropolitan and non-metropolitan communities. Moreover, nearly 50 percent of Hispanics now reside outside of the Southwest.

While many Latino (im)migrants come to the U.S. in search of economic opportunities, they often find that life in a new country presents challenges for both parents and children alike, namely the burdens and anxiety associated with residential instability, poverty status, language barriers, cultural conflicts, and family separation. For example, due to financial constraints, it is common for a parent to migrate to the U.S. alone, bringing the rest of the family months or years later. (Caplan, Whitmore, & Choy, 1989; Duran & Weffer, 1992; Igoa, 1995; Stull, Broadway, Griffith, 1995; Suarez-Orozco, 1989; Thomas, 1992). Stresses that children experience include feelings of apprehension, uncertainty, and confusion in their new environments. For instance, fears of getting lost and uncertainty about the future are common (Gonzalez-Ramos & Sanchez-Nester, 2001). Ainslie (1998) describes the mourning that (im)migrants experience in their new surroundings after leaving their homelands behind:

> The immigrant simultaneously must come to terms with the loss of family and friends on the one hand, and cultural forms (food, music, art, for example) that have given the immigrant's native world a distinct and highly personal character on the other hand. It is not only people who are mourned, but culture itself, which is inseparable from the loved ones whom it holds (p. 287).

The seemingly "overnight" arrival of Latino families in the areas of the Midwest that were historically predominantly white and monolingual has presented public schools with the challenge of quickly adapting to serve the needs of large numbers of (im)migrant students. While traditional (im)migrant states are typically equipped with long-standing programs and services to promote the successful integration of diverse students, newcomers who are infiltrating non-traditional (im)migrant states are at a tremendous disadvantage. They are receiving little to no services to accommodate their adjustment to life in the United States, which, according to Short (2002), perpetuates their frequently held subordinate status in American society.

The purpose of this study was to examine how Latino newcomers in the Midwest fare socially in their new elementary school environments, as perceived by their teachers and administrators. Specifically, we were interested in learning about class-wide and school-wide welcoming practices, how (im)migrant students adjusted to their new surroundings, and what characterized interactions between (im)migrant and native children. Some of the questions we wanted to answer include the following: How are Latino newcomers "mixing" with native students? What kind of interactions are Latino newcomer students having with native born students? How do students of differing ethnic/racial backgrounds interact in the lunchroom and at recess?

[3] Please note that throughout this manuscript, the terms Latino and Hispanic are used interchangeably to represent those individuals who are from and/or are descendents of Spanish speaking countries.

Educators in the Midwest must now suddenly develop strategies to instruct students with various levels of English competency, address cultural differences, and facilitate parent involvement when language barriers are present. This challenge is further complicated when newcomer families are transient, making it difficult for service providers to fully assess the complexity of their needs (Stull, Broadway, Griffith, 1995). As such, the impact of this demographic shift is especially felt in the educational arena, where teachers and administrators--who are often new to (im)migrant education issues and/or the Latino culture and language—experience a great deal of stress as they attempt to work with this population on a daily basis (Hertzberg, 1998).

(Im)migrant children often have additional challenges and needs above and beyond those experienced by those who are native born. For the newly arrived students, adjusting to a new school environment, learning or mastering a foreign language, and coping with culture shock are just a few of the new challenges they encounter (Chang, 1990; Exposito and Favela 2003; Goodwin, 2002; de Atiles & Allexasaht-Snider, 2002; Thomas, 1992). Furthermore, being accustomed to different classroom environments and feeling unsure of how to relate to teachers and peers during class, are sources of stress for students from other countries (McLaughlin, Liljestrom, Lim, Meyers, 2002). These children often have fears of not "fitting in" at their new school. Additional stresses that immigrant children experience in schools include embarrassment and shame for not speaking English as proficiently as their American-born counterparts. This shame can be exacerbated when a younger sibling acquires English at a faster rate, or when a child is teased at school for speaking with an accent (Gonzalez-Ramos & Sanchez-Nester, 2001). Minority students, including (im)migrants, are often teased at school about their color or race (Cline et al., 2002; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002), and the psychological consequences of teasing have been well-documented. For example, researchers have demonstrated the relationship between teasing and the development of aggression, depression, low self-esteem, and even eating disorders (Iyer & Haslan, 2003). Many children who are aware that they do not speak perfect English often respond by becoming silent (Igoa, 1995; Gonzalez-Ramos & Sanchez-Nester, 2001).

One aspect of the newcomer child's adjustment to his/her new surroundings involves social integration. Just as the U.S. Department of Agriculture considers the degree of residential integration a measure of the ability of newcomers to integrate socially with the native population, social integration is defined here as the degree to which (im)migrants are interacting positively with U.S. born peers and the school community as a whole (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2003). Social integration also involves the welcoming and inclusion of newcomer students into the school community, including school policies and procedures that are in place for supporting (im)migrants as they adjust to their new environment. If students of differing racial/ethnic backgrounds are choosing to interact with one another in social settings such as recess, we can assume that they are being incorporated into the school community and are adjusting to their new environment.

Most of the studies pertaining to social integration have taken place at high schools (e.g., Olsen, 1997; Tatum, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999) rather than elementary schools. Studies conducted with high school students have often found that there is a great deal of segregation between racial and ethnic groups of students. In one particular analysis, Olsen (1997) found that the (im)migrants she studied were painfully aware of how the students at their school grouped themselves according to nationality and language. These newcomers often had negative experiences with their "American" peers, such as being laughed at for wearing different clothes or speaking imperfect English.

Studies conducted at the elementary level have determined that these students often spend recess time with a person of the same race (Pellegrini, Kato, Blatchford, & Baines, 2002; Boulton & Smith, 1993). Cross-race friendships decline with grade, and there is evidence that students self-segregate according to language (Graham, Cohen, Zbikowski, & Secrist, 1998; Henze, 2001). As evidenced by the high school literature, this divide between ethnic/racial groups of students only intensifies as children leave elementary school.

Since attitudes toward race and culture begin to form well before high school, elementary students perhaps have a greater proclivity to develop a positive outlook towards diversity when appropriately guided by teachers and administration. It is hypothesized that these attitudes begin well before high school, so examining the social climate of elementary students could offer some insight into this matter.

There is a noted scarcity of research on the emotional needs of (im)migrant children, including their adjustment to the school environment (Gonzalez-Ramos & Sanchez-Nester, 2001; Thomas, 1992). As noted above, there is considerable stress involved with relocating to a new country, and these experiences are often misunderstood or go unnoticed by professionals and educators. The *academic* needs of (im)migrant elementary students have been researched, especially in terms of the most effective ways to teach English (e.g., Cummins, 2000; Medina & Escamilla, 1992), but researchers have noted that the effects of immigration, including the social and emotional difficulties of these children have been largely ignored (e.g., Gonzalez-Ramos & Sanchez-Nester, 2001; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2000; Thomas, 1992).

If educators fail to recognize and understand the emotional impact of (im)migrating from a foreign county to the Unites States the educational achievement of newcomer students will be compromised. Gonzalez-Ramos and Sanchez-Nester (2001) posit that schools often fail to assist (im)migrant students in negotiating the educational terrain and dismiss their emotional experiences, which contribute to the children's academic difficulties. In other words, if the school neglects to take responsibility for managing these issues, they bear at least part of the responsibility for the problem.

Integrating (im)migrant students into the school environment is a responsibility that should be shared both teachers and administrators alike. It is not only ethical to incorporate newcomer students into the school community, it is required by law. Ohio has the following general guidelines: "In Ohio, there is not a specific type of intervention

program that is prescribed. Thus, school districts have the flexibility to decide on the educational approach that best meets the needs of their LEP students" (Ohio Department of Education).[4] Indiana requirements are more specific, whereby the Indiana Department of Education, Division of Language Minority and Migrant Programs, provides the guidelines below (Guidelines to Satisfy Legal Requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964)[5] for implementing services to language minority students:

> Section F: The school corporation shall provide counseling services to language minority students in the following areas: 1) social, emotional adjustment to United States culture, 2) drop-out prevention, 3) technical vocational training, 4) college preparatory coursework, 5) substance abuse, 6) teenage pregnancy and prevention.

Recent research on (im)migrant education reflects a movement toward a holistic approach that incorporates the student's home cultural values into the educational setting. Successfully integrating newcomer students into the classroom is a bi-directional process, in which both the teachers and the students develop mutual respect and understanding of their respective cultures, values, and beliefs (Trueba & Bartolome, 2000). Several effective strategies for teaching (im)migrant children have been delineated by de Atiles and Allexsaht-Snider (2002). These strategies include developing the children's first language, learning about the children's culture, acknowledging children's strengths, and allowing children to practice language skills.

Programs and services that assist (im)migrant students in adjusting to their new environments that have been recommended by researchers include the following:

- newcomer schools, which are designed to meet the psychological, social, and academic needs of an exclusively (im)migrant student population (Feinberg, 2000; Hertzberg 2001)
- group counseling, such as the Mi Tierra/My Country program, where both the host culture and native culture are equally respected (Gonzalez-Ramos, & Sanchez-Nester, 2001)
- ethnic language programs, especially those that are part of the compulsory curriculum (Padilla et al., 1991; Tse, 1997)
- after school activities designed to enhance inter-ethnic relations, where children work together in a non-competitive environment with adult guidance (Cruz & Walker, 2001; Henze 2001).

[4] http://www.ode.state.oh.us/students-families-communities/lau_resource_center/lauguidelines.asp

[5] INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION Division of Language Minority and Migrant Programs Guidelines to Satisfy Legal Requirements of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 USCS, 2000d) Lau v. Nichols (1974) 414 US 563, 39L ED 2d1, 94 S Ct 786 Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 204(f), 20 USCA 1703(f) Indiana Public Law 218 and 511 IAC 6.1-5-8

Methods

The researcher who conducted the interviews for this study set out to find a cross section of elementary schools that have been impacted by the arrival of Latino newcomers. Schools that experienced an influx of Latino students after having a history of few to no Latino students were targeted. A mix of both rural and urban schools was sought, in both Ohio and Indiana. Finally, the adult perspective was the subject of interest for this study. Sampling both teachers and administrators (e.g. principals, school psychologists, and social workers) was also a goal of this study. Once these criteria were established, participants were sought through Internet searches, as well as referrals from personal and professional contacts.

Interviews with teachers and administrators from various Indiana and Ohio public elementary schools were conducted to get their perspectives on the issues that affect the social integration of Latino students. Participants were asked to discuss the challenges they have faced, as well as what has been found useful in facilitating a sense of community in their schools. They were asked open-ended questions, such as, "How do the immigrant students interact with the other students in your classes? At lunch? Recess? After school activities?" and "How do you think the school could improve in helping the newcomers feel welcome at their new school?" As interviewees worked in a variety of positions in the schools, they were encouraged to simply answer the questions that applied to their personal experience. Interview questions are listed in Appendix A.

Participants were offered to examine the interview questions before meeting with the researcher. The questions were made available in advance for two reasons: 1) Since issues related to race are often difficult to discuss, we believed that providing the questions in advance would reduce the "unknown," thus calming any potential anxieties. 2) Providing questions in advance would allow the participants time to reflect on these issues and recall their personal experiences prior to meeting with the interviewer. Most chose to review the questions (approximately one week) in advance, although some commented that they did not end up reading them before the interview took place.

The participants were nine teachers and administrators from seven different public elementary schools in Ohio and Indiana. Composing this group was five teachers, one principal, one social worker, one teacher's aide, and one after school educator. As stated above, all the participants were employed at schools that have experienced an increase in Latino (im)migrant students in recent years, after having few to no Hispanics in the past. It is also important to note that the newcomer Latino students are often the first second language learners to attend these schools. All participants were native-English speaking Caucasians, except for Raquel and Elaine. Raquel is a native Spanish speaker from Puerto Rico, who has resided in the United States for approximately fifteen years. One of Elaine's parents is South American, and she was also able to communicate with students in Spanish when necessary. Information on the participants is displayed below.

Figure 1. Participants

Participant	Position	School Location	Percentage of Latino students
Judy	ESL teacher	suburb	8%
Elaine	teacher's aide	mid sized city	5%
Brenda	kindergarten teacher	large city	27%
Monica	3rd grade teacher	large city	27%
Donna	4th grade teacher	large city	27%
Aaron	1st-6th grade art teacher	mid sized city	30%
Gina	social worker	mid sized city	4%
Mike	principal	rural	14%
Raquel	volunteer & after school educator	small city	(various schools)

Interviews were conducted in person when possible. It is important to note that a factor that could have influenced responses was the appearance of the researcher, who is of Central American descent. Due to her appearance and the nature of the questions asked, an interviewee who has a great deal of familiarity with Latinos could have been aware of her background and thus answered questions accordingly.

The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed, with the exception of two interviews being conducted by telephone, due to distance, and detailed notes were taken throughout. All nine participants were asked the same set of questions (see Appendix A). Since interviewees held a variety of positions in the schools (e.g., some teachers, but not all, supervise recess), they were encouraged to simply answer the questions that applied to their experience. Questions were open-ended, and were designed to encourage discussion about each participant's unique perceptions and experiences.

The two researchers coded all the interviews separately, compared results, and then agreed upon one set of codes. Since the goal of this research is to provide an in

depth understanding of how teachers and administrators perceive the interactions among native born students and their (im)migrant counterparts, a small sample size of nine was selected. Furthermore, a small sample size provided an opportunity to develop rapport with these educators, thus expanding the opportunity to gain an emic view of the phenomenon being studied (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The goal of this research is to provide an understanding of how Latino students are socially integrating at specific Midwestern elementary schools, and results are not intended to make generalized statements about Latino social integration throughout the educational community.

Results and Discussion

When the researcher began the process of recruiting participants—(mainly by telephone calling the school to begin making contacts), she was frequently directed to the ESL (English as a Second Language) coordinator or another person designated to handle "(im)migrant issues." For instance, a school psychologist from one of the participating schools agreed to participate in this study; however, after reviewing the interview protocol, she commented on her inability to answer questions about the social integration of the newcomer students in her school. This psychologist then referred the researcher to a special education teacher. This practice of referral was a common occurrence, and it led the researcher to infer that Latino education is not a school-wide concern. Instead, it seems to be an issue that is relegated to selected teachers and staff members.

Below are themes that were prominent across the participants' responses. The seven themes that will be discussed below are the following: the Buddy System; Encouraging/Requiring English; Comments on Age Differences; Racial Conflicts; Denial, Dismissing, and Minimizing; and "Just Like Any Other Kid."

Buddy System

Several participants, when asked the question, "Are there certain procedures or practices that have been developed at your school or in your classroom for welcoming new immigrant students?" described a practice of assigning a "buddy" to the newcomer student. This buddy was either a Latino peer or a "friendly" native child who would be willing to orient the new student to the school. A buddy's job often included showing the newcomer where the restrooms were, and accompanying the child to the lunchroom. Throughout this section, the various buddy practices are highlighted, as described by the participants:

> *Gina: What they try to do at the school is match each kid up with somebody who speaks their language so that person can help them out in the classroom.*
> *Aaron: We match kids up with someone who's good at English and Spanish. We tell them, "You show them where to go for lunch and recess."*
> *Judy: The classroom teachers assign a buddy, to sit next to them, in the cafeteria and at recess. They pick a same language buddy if they can. If not, they pick an outgoing kid.*

> *Donna: I always give them a buddy. ....And, um, but we always have a person when they come in, they take them around the building and show them where things are, so that they can, you know, know where the restroom is, where they need to so to the lunchroom and stuff.*

Overwhelmingly, the research participants were sensitive to the newcomer students' need for assistance in the new school environment. Assigning new students to a buddy may ease children's fears related to a lack of familiarity with the daily routine or the school facility. The "buddy system" may also benefit the other participating students in a variety of ways. For instance, the child who is assigned as a buddy may gain a sense of pride in knowing that he/she was able to assist another student. Additionally, if a native born student is assigned this duty, he/she may develop an understanding and appreciation for the (im)migrant peer.

Welcoming Practices

The following responses provide a glimpse of how teachers and staff continue to welcome students into the school community, outside of the "buddy" system:

> *Gina: I mean they don't really do anything different for the immigrants than they do for anybody else.*
> *Raquel: What I noticed is, um, they [the newcomers] were lost to begin with. There was nothing different done since they were there. The class continued like you know what they're saying.*
> *Monica: This is an ESL site. Everything is in English and Spanish. During enrollment there is an ESL person there.*
> *Mike: Mrs. Rodriguez is our ESL person in the building. ...and you know we've worked up, not all of our forms yet, but many of our basic forms we've worked up in a Spanish version. ...we offered some conversational Spanish classes .... one of our teachers took a couple more steps, a couple more versions of that class and then moved along the line a little bit. One of our fifth grade teachers, (pause) I, uh, again the kids just act as kids.*
> *Jenny: In my class we introduce ourselves, in English and Spanish. Go Fish is the biggest ice-breaker I've seen in my life. Welcoming is not a school policy; it's up to individ*ual teachers. *I show parents around if they come during my free period.*

The educators interviewed here discussed a range of welcoming practices, ranging from none at all to introductory Spanish instruction for school staff. Gina and Raquel were not able to identify any practices at their schools for welcoming newcomers. Jenny used both English and Spanish in her classroom, engaged her students in an icebreaker activity, and even offers her free period to parents who would like a tour of the building. Monica and Mike discussed having at least one native Spanish speaker on the premises, as well as having school paperwork available in both English and Spanish. In addition, the signs in Monica's school building are posted in both languages. Mike's school was the only one in the study where staff enrolled in a beginner Spanish course.

Given that Indiana schools are required to provide counseling for social and emotional adjustment to United States culture, it was surprising when participants did not appear comfortable or interested in discussing practices for welcoming language minority students. For instance, when Mike discussed how one of his teachers continued to higher level Spanish courses, he quickly shifted to another subject, stating, "(Pause) I, uh, again, the kids just act as kids." This abrupt change of subject lead the interviewer to infer that he perhaps considered it unnecessary to discuss the ways his school responds to the influx of (im)migrant students. This took the researchers by surprise, since it was expected that he would express more pride in the proactive steps the staff at his school has taken. In sum, the findings in this study demonstrate that attempts to welcome newcomer students were usually done on a voluntary basis, rather than implemented formally throughout the school corporation.

Encouraging/Requiring English

Participants in this study have also been recently challenged to expand their instructional repertoires to include language instruction for (im)migrant students. The teachers implemented language instruction strategies that they perceived as "best practices" for facilitating English acquisition. It should be noted that not all of the participants have certification or endorsements in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL).

> *Brenda: Cause towards the end of the year I told them, "You need to start talking to each other in English instead of Spanish." And they do, they do, you know, get better at it.*
> *Donna: [Newcomers are assigned a seat next to a Spanish speaking student for the first two weeks.] Then I put them in another group to encourage them to do English. And most, you know, they can't ask me to go to the bathroom unless they ask me in English. ... Because they don't speak English at home. So it's real hard just eight hours a day, with English and then back home again. ...At recess, (pause) they, you know, sometimes they, lots of times they get together and I'll say, "Oh, don't speak in Spanish. Talk in English, 'cause I think you're talking about me." ...Of course it's their, you know, native tongue, so it's a lot easier for them.*
> *Gina: I mean (pause) I know, you know, sometimes the teachers have a problem with it [Spanish and Korean speaking children playing together at recess]. They say, you know, they kind of stick together and leave other kids out and then speak in their language.*

These participants encouraged, and in some cases required, Latino newcomers to speak in English, even during recess. Doing so was generally considered a means of promoting English acquisition, as Brenda and Donna both articulated. Some of the participants also expressed discomfort with children speaking a language that was not commonly understood. Donna told students on the playground not to speak in Spanish so she would not think they were "talking about" her. Gina described the Latino children's use of Spanish as a deliberate attempt to exclude other children.

While the participants acknowledged the newcomers' need to acquire English, they sometimes focused on language acquisition while overlooking the students' other needs. For example, no one mentioned the importance of retaining Spanish or a Latino identity. Donna even commented that the students' speaking Spanish at home made her work more difficult. ("Because they don't speak English at home…So it's real hard just eight hours a day, with English and then back home again, so…") What's interesting is that she did acknowledge why the newcomers would speak Spanish on the playground, ("Of course it's their, you know, native tongue, so it's a lot easier for them.") but she still insisted that they speak only in English. It is also important to point out that none of the respondents referred to research, workshops, or training they have received for English instruction when discussing their belief that only English should be spoken. Igoa (1995) asserts that (im)migrant children need a break from the exhaustion that results from hearing the sounds of a new language all day. Also, prohibiting Spanish can send the message to children that their native language is inferior, or worse yet, cause them to feel ashamed of their culture.

Comments on Age Differences

A reoccurring theme across responses was that younger children learn English faster and are more accepting of differences. Participants also observed that younger children, when compared to older students, are more responsive to school interventions designed to encourage positive interactions between newcomer and native students. Furthermore, interviewees commented that depending on the age of the (im)migrants and their native peers, students may be resistant to developing friendships with children outside of their racial or ethnic group.

> *Raquel: I noticed that when I work with first graders I have better response [to an intervention she implemented to address teasing] than when I work with fourth and fifth graders.*
> *Monica: Many kids are quiet at first, well behaved. The younger kids are usually more scared.*
> *Judy: For the older kids, third and fourth graders, they are more reluctant to talk. They are afraid of making mistakes. They don't want to sound different.*
> *Elaine: As far as the grade school level they mix. Extremely well, its when they get to high school that they, they try to find others who speak Spanish!*

Participants in this study observed the influence that age has on adjusting to (im)migration. Younger children tend to be more fearful when they arrive, but younger native students are more easily coached into supporting their newcomer peers. Some participants noted that younger children integrate more easily than older students, which was hypothesized in this case.

In a country that continues to be plagued by racial/ethnic problems, (e.g., race riots in Los Angeles, Cincinnati, and other cities; hate crimes and demonstrations organized by the Ku Klux Klan) all citizens need to work to create understanding between groups. These findings indicate that younger children are more responsive to directives aimed at promoting social integration than older students. The elementary

years are a critical period for addressing inter-ethnic relations, and waiting until students are in high school may be too late. Cruz and Walker (2001) suggest we utilize the preadolescent innocence to promote caring and positive relationships toward others:

> It stands to reason, then, that the preadolescent school years are critical for the diffusion of stereotypes, misinformation, and prejudicial attitudes that children may have. As a result, some educators have called for a concentration of efforts in the elementary school years (p. 9).

Racial Conflicts

Prior to the mid 1990s, the participants worked in monolingual settings, where English was the dominant language and the community members were overwhelmingly homogenous in their culture, values, and beliefs. This section provides a glimpse of various racial conflicts that have occurred since the arrival of Latino newcomer students. In addition, we seek to offer the reader an "insider's" view of how teachers and administrators comprehend and respond to racial conflicts.

> *Monica***:** *Our Black students are much more, you know, I guess you would call like the reverse racism. Much more so than the white students. … I hear comments from the Black students much more than White students, I would say. You know, "Dirty Mexicans." Um, you know, "You should be cleaning my toilet."*
> *Mike: Have there been any conflicts? Yeah. Yeah, we've got a few kids that, "Well, that Mexican did this." "That Mexican-"*
> *Raquel: Um, there will be tensions. There will be teasing. And that's the number one thing that I found. There's teasing because they don't speak the language, their English.*

Above are incidents of racial/ethnic teasing that these participants have witnessed at their schools. The word "Mexican" was often quoted, indicating that the teasing has been targeted at the background of these new students. While Monica observed more conflicts between her African American and Hispanic students, it is important to note that she heard negative comments towards Mexicans from both Black and White children.

Studies have found that minority students are often teased at school about their race or color, (Cline et al., 2002; Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002) and the degree to which a student is targeted depends on a number of factors, including school climate (Hanish, 2000). Children "who are victims of bullying, teasing, and other forms of intimidation in the school environment view their educational experiences more negatively and with greater fear than those who are not exposed to such indignities" (Baker & Mednick, 1990; Blyth, Thiel, Bush, & Simmons, 1980, as cited in Roberts, 1996). Furthermore, as previously mentioned, research has demonstrated the numerous psychological consequences that result from teasing. It has also been found that teachers often do not appreciate just how distressing it is for children to be teased, and failure to take this experience seriously can have long-lasting negative outcomes for these students (Landau, Milich, Harris, & Larson, 2001).

As previously stated, racial divisions only increase as children get older, so ignoring this teasing is likely to have negative outcomes that will become apparent by high school. Furthermore, there are more cases of conflict in the section that follows.

Denial, Dismissing, and Minimizing

In this section, participants were asked about conflicts between racial/ethnic groups, and tensions were attributed to personality conflicts, inner city behavior, typical boy-girl scuffles, and the like. Although racial/ethnic teasing and fighting were observed, respondents did not often believe that racism or prejudice were to blame.

> *Gina: But I don't think that has anything to do with their, you know, nationality. It has more to do with, you know, boys picking on girls and that usual kind of stuff. I'll tell you one time we had a kid come into the office was crying because she brought sushi for lunch and the other kids were making fun of her. ... If they do have conflicts, it's probably just personality more than ethnicity. I've never seen any ethnic or racial (pause) things like that going on.*
> *Aaron: I won't lie. They fight. I see these kids fight somebody until they're bleeding. It can happen quick. If you hear name-calling, you better stop it quick. Last year six Hispanic boys and a couple of White and a couple of Black boys fought after school one day. Girls do it too. ... I think it's inner city though. I don't hear "Let's beat up some Mexican," or "You stupid Mexican." ... I don't know if it's where they're from, but where they're at.*
> *Mike: Very few [conflicts], but if it wasn't "That Mexican kid" it would be "That red-headed kid." I mean, they come, it's not that it's a Mexican thing. If not, it would be a Jewish, a Catholic, it would be Black, whatever descriptive word they could find. ... We've had some, and I don't think we have a problem, by any means. We've had some rascals. And like I said, these are, when, "Well, that Mexican did this." When that comment is made, it's almost always a, uh, I hate to say typical or normal. But a typical or normal scuffle....We don't have, haven't had any racial within the school, among the kids per se. Just very few incidents.*
> *Brenda: Not anything that would, because of their race. You know, just typical boy-girl, or boy-boy things. It's not, not because of ESL. I wouldn't say. I mean, there's always little squabbles.*

These participants have described racial/ethnic teasing, and even fighting, but then conclude that they do not really have such problems at their schools. Perhaps these educators contradict what they know to be true because acknowledging such problems can be difficult, and could even translate to the responsibility to take action. Also, it is not known how this denial of racial/ethnic conflict colored what participants did and did not report to the interviewer.

In understanding why teachers and administrators would overlook racial conflicts and teasing, examining literature pertaining to the "colorblind" approach is useful.

Johnson's (2002) research indicates that educators are often uncomfortable with the discourse of race and racism--thus causing a potential to dismiss racial acts that may occur at school.

Lucero (1997) cautions that if educators operate from a color-blind model, an injustice is occurring, by which students will have future problems in understanding race relations in the middle school and high school years. "Schools that ignore the importance of addressing issues of diversity in the early grades are missing some important teachable moments. They are also allowing the seeds of prejudice and racism to gain footholds that will cause greater problems" (p. 5).

"Just Like Any Other Kid"

Scholars prolifically write about the need to recognize that newcomer students are not "just like any other kid," (see: Short, 2002) yet this sentiment was fervent among the research participants.

> *Donna: Basically, just you know, treat them like a normal, um, fourth grader.*
> *Aaron: Kids are kids. They all like the same stuff. They all like movies. They laugh at the same parts. They all love treats. To me, I don't really see much of a difference after a while.*
> *Brenda: They just play together. And sometimes the Spanish students tend to play together at first. At the end of the year it doesn't make any difference. They've done just as well.*

The teachers who expressed this "just like any other kid" sentiment certainly did so with the best of intentions. That is, they wanted to view and treat their students equally. This willingness to nurture all children can contribute to each student's academic growth. However, the risk in the "just like any other kid" mindset is that the unique needs of (im)migrant students could be overlooked.

As cited in Schofield (1986), teachers often deny differences between students— "I don't see color, I don't care if students are black or white or purple." Sleeter (1992 as cited in Johnson, 2002) further expounds how the denial of differences leads to silence when it comes to issues related to race—"They denied the salience of race by adopting a colorblind approach and viewed the experiences of students of color as if they were white ethnic immigrants who would eventually assimilate into mainstream society" (p. 154). While there is certainly truth to the "just like any other kid" perspective, the unique experience and needs of newcomer children should not be underestimated.

Summary and Conclusion

The focus of this research was the social integration of Latino newcomer students, as perceived by teachers and administrators. Social integration involves the interactions that take place between newcomers and native born peers, as well as the policies and practices that have been implemented for welcoming and supporting (im)migrant students. As stated above, findings were organized into the categories of the Buddy

System; Welcoming Practices; Encouraging/Requiring English; Comments on Age Differences; Racial Conflicts; Denial, Dismissing, and Minimizing; and "Just Like Any Other Kid." Our recommendations for each of these categories follow.

Assigning buddies to newcomer students was the most common means of supporting them during their transition to a new school environment. Welcoming practices outside of the "Buddy System" varied a great deal from one school to another. Welcoming practices were often implemented informally, and were a reflection of the sensitivity and dedication of a few teachers. Although the directly involved teachers responded to the newcomer children's needs, usually by assigning buddies, extending it beyond these particular classrooms can strengthen this support. It is recommended that incorporating (im)migrant students become a goal of the entire educational community, and that policies for doing so be implemented throughout the school.

English was commonly encouraged and/or required, even during lunch and recess. This issue needs to be addressed in teacher training programs and continuing professional development. Specifically, educators should become familiar with the research on various methods of English instruction, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of adopting English Only policies. The emotional consequences of these various instructional methods and policies should also be explored. One way to honor both languages is to offer Spanish instruction to native born students. If all students learn to become bilingual, speaking Spanish on the playground would cease to be considered threatening or divisive. Furthermore, bilingualism is becoming increasingly valued in today's global economy. It is also recommended that schools seek a more bilingual staff.

Respondents observed that younger children socially integrate more readily than older students. As stated above, a great deal of segregation and tension between racial/ethnic groups has been found at the high school level, and these problems persist throughout U.S. society. Capitalizing on elementary students' openness to diversity in promoting positive attitudes and inter-group relationships is strongly recommended. If we aim for an integrated and harmonious society, we must recognize the elementary years as a critical period for teaching tolerance and interrupting the cycle of racism.

Participants in this study were able to give numerous examples of racial/ethnic teasing, but many did not seem to appreciate the negative effects this can have on a child. It is recommended that educators take racial teasing seriously and develop interventions prevent and address it (Boulton, 1995; Ross & Lane, 2001).

The most difficult question to discuss was perhaps the one concerning inter-group conflicts. Some participants shared that they have observed such conflicts, but they did not typically recognize or acknowledge these incidents as racially motivated. This denial may be related to the finding that educators in this study seemed to have a strong need to view each child as the same, as outlined in the "Just Like Any Other Kid" section. While the motivation for this approach is certainly honorable, taking it to the extreme can result in overlooking the unique needs of each child. Adopting a more moderate stance, in which all children are expected to succeed, yet individual problems and needs are

recognized and addressed, may prove a more effective way to work with a student population that is increasingly diverse.

If educators are unprepared to handle the influx of Latino newcomers, the ultimate burden often falls on the children themselves. An (im)migrant child has a network of forces working against him/her that a white native born student does not have. Failing to mitigate those circumstances will perpetuate the presence of too many Latinos in the underclass.

These educators did not often report that their schools are proactive in integrating Latino students into the educational community. That is, many participants discussed informal procedures, and while these efforts have been useful, larger scale policies and practices still need to be implemented.

Equal education and democracy are highly valued in American culture. Although the United States is an immigrant nation, there is a long history of discrimination against newcomers from other lands (eg., Chinese exclusion acts, Japanese internment camps, and Operation Wetback). If we want to be more consistent with our values, we need to educate and meet the needs of *all* children. Maybe then we could learn something from our (im)migrants about resilience, perseverance, and hard work--and we would all become more American in the process.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. How do the U.S.-born students in your class/school respond to having immigrant students at their school?
2. What kinds of questions do the U.S-born students ask about the immigrant students? What are some comments that they make?
3. How do the immigrant students adjust to being in their new school? (Examples: Do they appear happy, sad, scared, hopeful, etc.? Are they quiet at first? Do they seek out social interactions? If so, with whom?)
4. Are there certain procedures or practices that have been developed at your school or in your classroom for welcoming new immigrant students? If so, tell me about them.
5. Tell me some stories of immigrant students interacting with non-immigrant students.
6. How do the immigrant students interact with the other students in your classes? At lunch? Recess? After school activities?
7. How do you think the school could improve in helping the newcomers feel welcome at their new school?
8. Have there been any activities/lessons that have resulted in better interaction and communication between immigrant and U.S.-born students? If so, describe them.
9. Have there been conflicts between immigrant students and U.S.-born students? If so, what seemed to cause the conflict? How did the conflict end?