"We don't Talk about Undocumented Status…We Talk about Helping Children": How School Leaders Shape School Climate for Undocumented Immigrants

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Abstract

The racial/ethnic tensions, policies, and practices in society can be mirrored in spaces and institutions like schools. In schools, sociopolitical discourses can be reproduced and protected in institutional policies. One way K-12[1] leaders can initiate change and limit marginalization of students is by creating a school environment that accepts and integrates students regardless of legal status. This study investigates how K-12 school leaders influence the school climate to enhance receptiveness for undocumented students and the children of undocumented immigrants. Study findings come from a Conversation/Talk Analyis (CTA) of nine school leaders in K-12 schools in two urban districts in Texas along the U.S.-Mexico border. Findings demonstrate that leaders acted to increase students' performance, sense of belonging at school, and their integration and participation in school as paths to producing a welcoming school climate. Leaders' talk revealed they used practices and strategies to reduce barriers between home and schooling cultures.

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"No Hablamos de Indocumentados… Hablamos de Ayudar a Niños y Niñas": Líderes Escolares que Generan un Clima Escolar para Migrantes Indocumentados

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Resumen

Las tensiones raciales/étnicas, las políticas y prácticas de la sociedad pueden verse reflejadas en los espacios e instituciones como las escuelas. En las escuelas, los discursos sociopolíticos de pueden reproducir y proteger por las políticas institucionales. Una forma en que los líderes de K-12 pueden iniciar cambios y limitar la marginalización de estudiantes es creando un clima escolar que acepta e integra al alumnado independientemente de su situación legal. Este estudio investiga cómo los líderes escolares de K-12 influyen en el ambiente escolar para mejorar la acogida de alumnado indocumentado y los niños y niñas de migrantes indocumentados. Los resultados del estudio provienen del Análisis de Conversación/Habla (ACH) de nueve líderes escolares en escuelas K-12 de dos distritos urbanos en Texas a lo largo de la frontera de México con Estados Unidos. Los resultados demuestran que los líderes actuaron para aumentar los resultados del alumnado, el sentimiento de pertenencia a la escuel, su integración y participación en la escuela como formas de generar un clima escolar de acogida. Las conversaciones de líderes revelaron que utilizaban prácticas y estrategias para reducir las barreras entre el hogar y las culturas escolares.

Palabras clave: líderes educacionales, estudiantes indocumentados, clima escolar, Análisis Conversación/Habla

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T here is a crisis of im/migration across the globe, with the movement of large populations of people across borders. Im/migrants take great risks in seeking shelter or refuge in a new destination, but the contexts of reception they experience can range from non-receptive to openly hostile or highly receptive. In 2015, Germany welcomed Syrian refugees fleeing violence and civil war, eventually taking in a million refugees (The Guardian, 2015). Other European Union countries like Poland closed their borders (Broomfield, 2016). Uncertainty over how to address the sheer number of people fleeing war-torn countries and simultaneously protect citizens from terror attacks has led nations ranging from Saudi Arabia to Estonia to urgently build physical barriers like walls and fences. These physical and symbolic attempt to control unauthorized migration, despite mixed evidence that borders and walls are effective deterents to migration (Jones, 2016).

Around the world, "This new age of barriers is not just about chain links and concrete. It also reflects the rise of populist politicians" (Granados, Murphy, Schaul, & Faiola, 2016, para.3). The reception and treatment of "unexpected" im/migrants, from undocumented immigrants[i] to refugees in the United States is highly politicized and contentious. In the U.S., President Trump's policy pledges and rhetoric about undocumented immigrants have prompted public outcry, resistance, and escalating court battles (Liptak, 2017). He has sought to ban the travel of immigrants from seven predominantly Muslim countries, halt refugee resettlement (Pierce & Meissner, 2017), and deter unauthorized immigration by lengthing the wall along the Mexico-U.S. border while chastizing Mexico to stop "the bad hombres" (Salama, 2017). Such discourses about undocumented immigrants have racist, xenophobic, and culturally prejudiced tones and texts. These discourses present Latino/as as especially threatening, and discourses can be characterized as "vitriolic" (Chavez, 2008; Antony & Thomas, 2017, p. 4). Mexican undocumented immigrants, who constitute the majority, but not all, of the 11.3 million undocumented population in the United States (Krogstad, Passel, & Cohn, 2017) are frequent targets of stereotyping and discrimination (Ayón, 2015).

The racial/ethnic tensions, policies, and practices in society can be mirrored in spaces and institutions like schools. In schools, sociopolitical discourses can be reproduced and protected in institutional policies. One way K-12[2] leaders can initiate change and limit the marginalization of students is by creating a school environment that accepts and integrates

students regardless of legal status. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) identify an *ethos of reception* as the general climate that immigrants encounter, and it shapes how immigrants function in their socio-cultural environment. We assert that a welcoming ethos of reception and school climate that ensure undocumented students feel safe and a sense of belonging is crucial to their ability to connect to school.

Our purpose is to investigate how K-12 school leaders influence the school climate to enhance receptiveness for undocumented students and the children of undocumented immigrants. Leaders care about school climate as it is tied to school effectiveness, student achievement, and other student outcomes like pro-social behaviors (Halpin & Croft, 1963; Hoy & Hannum, 1997). Yet, it is unclear how climate may related to how undocumented students experience education. They have a legal guarantee to access free, public K-12 education (Plyler v.Doe, 1982), but their education is often hindered. Students can feel isolated, stigma, and shame about the undocumented label (Gonzales, Suárez-Orozco, & Dedios-Sanguineti, 2013). Research shows undocumented students fear deportation (Chaudry, Capps, Pedroza, Castañeda, Santos, & Scott, 2010), struggle to build trust and connect with educators (Enriquez, 2011), hesitate to share legal status with educators (Murillo, 2017), and are affected by poverty (Ayón, 2015; Chavez, 1998). Further, these students and their families may not be able to access basic social services (Passel & Cohn, 2009). Any of these issues can impede whether a student feels comfortable at school and ready for instruction. Educators have a fundamental responsibility to critically examine, challenge, and work to change unjust policies and discourses that instigate or perpetuate students' marginalization.

Organizations like schools reflect the beliefs, assumptions, expectations, norms, and values of the people working with them (Lindahl, 2006). These values, expectations, norms, and beliefs are conveyed through talk and discussion. Little scholarly work explores how space and place discursively mediate climate, and how school leaders negotiate the environments that support the social, emotional and "physical quality and character of school life" (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickerell, 2009, p.182) that undocumented students experience. We investigate the linkages among school space, "talk," culture, and climate by examining leaders' discussions about newly arrived and undocumented students using Conversation/Talk Analysis (CTA). We specifically and discursively examine the talk structures (Boden, 1994; Boden & Zimmerman, 1991) school leaders use to

describe aspects of immigrant reception, and how space, place, and organizational norms contribute to (re)producing school climate. Study findings come from a CTA of nine school leaders in K-12 schools in two urban districts in Texas along the U.S.-Mexico border. In analyzing leaders' talk, the realities of the contexts in which K-12 leaders practice, and how they influence an ethos of reception for undocumented students, can be better understood.

U.S. Policy and the Political Climate for Undocumented Immigration
Federal immigration policy and undocumented immigration

The national policy climate and treatment of undocumented immigrants has fluctuated. The U.S. federal government placed limits on the number and origins of immigrants permitted into the country as early as the 1920s (Espenshade, 1995). However, the first national-level policy to consolidate immigration-related statutes was the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) in 1952 (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2016; n.d.). The INA undid previous policies allowing for race-based considerations (Massey, Durand, & Malone, 2002). Throughout the first half of the 20th century, undocumented immigration grew or ebbed and flowed to the country thought U.S. immigration policy attempted to limit it.

The Immigration Act of 1965 ushered is "…the centerpiece of current immigration policy" (Alba & Nee, 2003, p.127), and deportations escalated (Rincón, 2008). Between 1960 and 1965, apprehensions of undocumented immigrants surged from 30,000 to 100,000. Some scholars argue that undocumented migration from Mexico would have stagnated if pre-1965 immigration policies persisted (Massey et al., 2002). Since 1965, U.S. immigration policy has become more restrictive, but undocumented immigration rose substantially until 1985 (Massey et al., 2002).

The Immigration and Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA) represented a major shift in national policy (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). IRCA intended to control the flow of undocumented immigration while diminishing the population already present. Nearly 3 million long-term residents gained reprieve from deportation and had access to pathways toward legalized status (Massey & Capoferro, 2008). However, IRCA only temporarily curtailed undocumented immigration (Espenshade, 1995), and may have exacerbated it (Espenshade, 1995;

Massey et al., 2002; Sobczack, 2010). Policy discourse also notably shifted: lax immigration enforcement became associated with compromised national security (Espenshade, 1995; Massey et al., 2002).

By 1990, the Immigration Act put limits on immigration visas and additional money to fortify the Border Patrol (Massey et al., 2002). In 1996, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) was designed specifically to target undocumented immigration. Immigration enforcement on the U.S.-Mexico border was stepped up, and deportation order reviews and deportations accelerated (Massey et al., 2002; Rincón, 2008; Romero, 2005). IIRIRA has been denounced as it anti-immigrant, punitive, and a catalyst for more anti-immigrant legislation (Romero, 2009). Under IIRIRA, states gained control to write the conditions under which both undocumented and legal immigrants are eligible or limited from receiving public assistance. Pertinent to education, IIRIRA's section 505 intersected with the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) to enable states to prevent noncitizens (e.g., undocumented students) from accessing postsecondary educational benefits (i.e., no in-state tuition rates; López & López, 2010; Olivas, 2008).

Undocumented Immigration and the Anti-Immigrant Policy Climate

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 refocused attention on linking undocumented immigrants to gaps in national security. Though demographers estimate that outflows and inflows of undocumented immigrants have brought the net balance of undocumented immigration into parity at 11.3 million persons (Passel, Cohn, Krogstad, & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014), political rhetoric and policy responses create assumptions that undocumented immigration is growing. As an example, state-level immigration legislation have risen. In 2015, state legislation grew by 26 percent; 216 laws were enacted and 274 resolutions were passed (National Conference of State Legislatures [NCSL], 2016).

All state policy environments and immigration legislation cannot be characterized as anti-immigrant, however. The relationships and politics among the local, state, and federal levels of government are complex. Yet, anti-immigrant sentiment is inflamed by politicians who lead voters to believe that U.S. borders—especially the border shared with Mexico—are

easily penetrated. Though the Mexican undocumented population in the U.S. continues to fall (Gonzalez-Barrera, 2015), media stories and TV shows depict rare cases of undocumented immigrants crossing into the U.S. with ease, running drugs, and perpetrating serious crimes (e.g., "Smuggler caught by Border Patrol 24 times is sentenced to prison"; Ford, 2016). Despite anti-immigrant images and narratives (Antony & Thomas, 2017), public support for undocumented immigrants to have a path to legal residency is growing (Goo, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2015).

School Climate and Undocumented Students' Schooling Experiences

Scholars have tried to define and assess "school climate" since the 1950s. To date, there is no one-size-fits-all definition of climate. However, there is overlap in its conceptualization, but educators and scholars often reference climate as the "atmosphere," or "tone" of a school (Cohen et al., 2009; Freiberg, 1999). Climate has also been defined as the strength of the relationship between school employees and students, and the quality of their interactions (Cornell & Huang, in press). A positive climate advances feelings of safety that then facilitates learning, a sense of connectedness among people within the school, and teaching and learning that supports collaboration, mutual trust, and respect (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam, & Johnson, 2014; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Cohen et al. (2009) and Freiberg (1999) posit that, across the literature, climate is comprised of four fundamental dimensions: 1) safety, 2) teaching and learning, 3) relationships, and 4) environmental-structural. We follow Cohen et al.'s (2009) view that climate is "based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, values and expectations that support people feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe." These components relate to the "quality and character of school life" (p.182). We tie this to space, place, and how school leaders create schooling environments more or less receptive to undocumented students.

Leadership, School Climate, and Obstacles to Undocumented Students' Education

A rich body of literature speaks to principals' influence in shaping the culture, conditions, and organization of schools, linking it to teaching

quality and student learning outcomes (Bryk et al., 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson 2010; Marks & Printy, 2003). Principals can effect school improvement processes by promoting a shared vision, building structures and practices to support that vision, and fostering strong relationships with the local community (Bryk et al., 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Scanlan & López, 2012). Concomitantly, schools that are considered "successful" are those where leaders champion student progress by focusing on social outcomes like students' personal, social, and economic potentialities (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Ishimaru, 2013).

Research on undocumented immigrant students' schooling experiences creates urgency for leaders to *intentionally* shape school climate to integrate them. Students have a legal right to a free, public K-12 education via the *Plyler* (1982) court decision. However, undocumented students likely attend segregated schools and those with histories of low performance (Orfield & Lee, 2006). They are also often placed in lower-track classes (Gonzales, 2010) and are likely to have trouble accessing resources, high quality teachers, and decent school buildings (Gandara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003).

Outside of school, undocumented students contend with social, economic, and legal complexities that inhibit their participation in schooling. Undocumented immigrants usually live in poverty (Crawford, 2017; Ayón, 2015; Chavez, 1998) and may have transient living situations (Crawford, Witherspoon Arnold, & Brown, 2014; Piacentini, 2015). They are also likely to have infrequent access to health care (Passel & Cohn, 2009). Equally important, fear of deportation is ubiquitous (Chaudry, et al., 2010). At least two million people were deported during the Obama presidency. Under President Trump, immigration enforcement priorities have shifted to include people previously low-level priority; some K-12 schools have been disrupted by immigration enforcement (Hesson & Kim, 2017).

Undocumented students may hesitate to connect with school employees, except for some who connect with teachers or counselors (Enriquez, 2011). They may also feel stigma and shame about their lack of legal status (Gonzales, et al., 2013). Educators must navigate finding routes to build trusting relationships. Relationships can support student performance and engagement, encourage feelings of belongingness and student perceptions

of safety, and lessen a sense of divide between home and schooling cultures (Rumberger, 2004; Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin 2009). These things affect student and family perceptions of the school climate (Cohen et al., 2009).

Frameworks

Scholars have called for research that shifts studies on immigrants away from an over-focus on individual immigrant characteristics toward greater acknowledgement of how institutional structures and contexts shape the schooling environment (Nelson & Hiemstra, 2008; Massey, 2008). Although sometimes used interchangeably, *school climate* is the subjective experience of school, and *school culture* refers to the actual condition of the school (National School Climate Center, 2016). Climate can be structural, attitudinal, or a combination of both. Structural issues of reception often include exclusion from opportunity or benefits. Attitudinal issues often include public hostility, discrimination, stereotyping, and other biases, represented both internally and externally. Institutional culture and climate affect receptivitity in places like schools.

We consider the *ethos of reception* (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001) that leaders promote for undocumented students based on how they talk about structural and attitudinal aspects of school climate where space, place, and culture intersect. The ethos of reception for immigrants is the "climate shaped by the general attitude and beliefs held by members of society about immigration and immigrants" (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 36). An ethos of reception has varying degrees of intensity, diversity, cultural responses, and sentiments towards immigrants; some spaces integrate immigrants with greater ease than others (Jaworsky et al., 2012).

Space and place fit significantly into discussions of immigrant reception and integration (Glick Schiller & Caglar, 2009). We intersect theories of geography and school reception to examine school climate, applying them to principals' perceptions and practices in shaping spaces. *Critical geography* scholars have broadly theorized notions of how space is used and how meaning is contained within and around space, physically and conceptually, and how social relations and practices occur in social spaces (Helfenbein, 2006; Lefebvre, 1991). Space is a field and source for action

(Munn, 1996; Rockefeller, 2010). Lefebvre (1991) underscores three intersecting concepts while theorizing space: 1) representations of space, 2) spatial practices 3) and representational spaces—or "the conceived, the perceived, and the lived," respectively (p. 33, pp. 38-9). Space always contains meaning (Lefebvre, 1991) and is not discursively neutral (Crawford, Witherspoon Arnold & Brown, 2014; Lefebvre, 1991).

Setha Low (1996, 2000) expanded these concepts to explain how culture is spatialized. She uses a four-pronged lens to describe the intersection of space and culture: the **social production of space** includes anything that produces the formation of the setting physically and materially; the **social construction of space** refers to the spatial constructs generated through peoples' social interactions, within and without places, that communicate particular meanings; **embodied space** views individuals as spatio-temporal units who consciously and unconsciously possess their own feelings, thoughts, preferences, intentions, and cultural beliefs and practices; and **discursiveness**, or how language and discourse expand conceptualizations of space. This occurs by examining talk and other forms of communication, seeing how it is arranged to create and maintain meaning in practices and spaces (Duranti, 1992). Low's (1996, 2000) lens for culture is useful due for this paper for its attention to the power of discourse in communication and emphasis on language as we explore the relationships among climate, space, and talk.

Conversation/Talk Analysis

Conversation/Talk Analysis (CTA), is similar to other types of discourse analysis and is often used to study social texts (talk and written text in social contexts), but it is also employed to examine "the everyday" social realities as discursively constructed and maintained through language (Ashmore & Reed 2000). CTA highlights the 'talked' and 'textual' nature of everyday interactions in organizations…[focusing] on the determination of social reality through historically situated discursive moves" (Alvesson & Karreman. 2000, p. 1126).

Talk structures are intermediaries that give order to organizations. Ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts have studied how the micro-processes of talk become the macro-structures of organizations (Button, 1991; McNall & Johnson, 1975). Macro-social norms are reflected

in discussions and other communications, which influence organizational structures like climate. Studies of work across different professions revealed that most communications among organizational parties are communications about what is "associated/expected/ required of them as the occupants of specific categories of persons, whether these be doctor, nurse, police dispatcher," (Psathas, 1995, p. 140). We focus on school leaders' "talk."

Data Collection

Researcher 1 collected data in spring 2015 in two urban school districts on the U.S.-Mexico border in Texas using snowball sampling (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007). Data collection methods included conducting interviews, observed discussions with coworkers and researchers, and taking observation field notes. Participants were interviewed between 45 minutes to an hour. Researcher 1 also conducted observations in and outside of schools, gathered policy documents, and wrote field notes to make sense of participant accounts and engage in initial data analysis. Researcher 2 reanalyzed study data using CTA methods for this work. We selected nine leaders for reanalysis of data from a larger study, and specifically focused on leaders' talk about newly arrived and undocumented students and their families.

Table 1: Participant Characteristics

Participant	Race/Ethnicity	School Level	Role	Time at Current School
Carlos	Latino	Elem. School	Principal	2 years
Carolina	Latina	Elem.School	Principal	4 mos.
Gabriela	Latina	Elem.School	Principal	5
Hilaria	Latina	Elem. School	Assist. Principal	3
Diego	Latino	Middle School	Assist. Principal	3 years
Patricia	Latina	Middle School	Principal	5 years
Marco	Latino	High School	Assist.	3 mos.

			Principal	
Alejandro	Latino	High School	Principal	3 years

Texas was chosen for the case study as it has approximately 13% of the U.S. undocumented population (Zong & Batalova, 2015); nearly 10% of Texas K-12 students have an undocumented parent (Passel & Cohn, 2009). A key informant helped identify school leaders in two school districts serving undocumented families. The districts' contexts were similar: participants' schools were located close to the border. Leaders served in low-income communities where government housing was prevalent, and English Language Learner (ELL) students were a large majority of the student population. The schools also received new immigrant and undocumented students. Alejandro, a high school principal, said, "A lot of our students have come here that are brand, brand new. It's either because the family has moved into the community, and [in] a lot of the cases, because we're only two blocks away from the International Bridge, there are students that cross the border every single day."

Analysis

For data analysis, we problematized traditional talk analysis, expanding the scope from talk-in-interaction analysis to both the "social and practical" (Psathas, 1995, p. 143) talk. Methods and analysis followed several of Psathas' (1995) tenets: Talk 1) is not analyzable apart from social and institutional contexts; 2) should be ground in how individuals perform or perceive actual, ongoing situated practices, and work competencies; 3) phenomena are discoverable by examining individuals' talk in their settings as it happens or after; and 4) investigates social actions locatable in everyday discursive practices in sayings/tellings/speaking/talking. We focused particularly on institution-specific concepts, analyzing talk to gain understanding of the climate of an institution, its importances, and its norms (Drew & Heritage, 1992).

We analyzed audio recordings, transcribing the "naturally-occurring" verbal interactions during observations, guided discussion, and from field notes. For analysis, we centered on participant discussions, isolating extracts of discussions for aspects of space, school climate and

organizational norms related to 1) Goals tied to participants' work-relevant roles, 2) Constraints or mediators of space, school climate, organizational norms, and emergent themes; and, 3) Explicit and inferential frameworks and procedures particular to specific institutional contexts (i.e., discursive arrangements that impact climate and reception). This approach helped us scrutinize the structural and attitudinal components that can create an ethos of reception.

Findings

We sought to understand how school leaders' talk and actions may create an ethos of reception and school climate for undocumented students. We do so by illuminating how discourses are replicated, protected, and preserved—or challenged—in spaces in institutions like schools. Our findings show that leaders' talk emphasized the relationships and the environmental-structural components of climate across al schooling levels. The CTA analysis revealed three themes 1) Supervising the Creation of a Culture-based Schooling Climate, 2) Status-blind Schooling? Un/Tying the Double Knot of Dispossession, and 3) (Re)Producing Climate Conflicts and Constraints. Participants worked to lead their teachers to see and mediate culture and the "contradictions…in the local community and the larger world" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 382). They advocated, nurtured, and sustained a school climate conducive to student learning and professional growth, engaging in dialogue and practice with their teachers and other educators in a way to advance a school climate that supported school diversity. However, talk analysis also revealed that with scarce resources, attitudes and actions were complex and fluctuated according to perceptions of students' or families' behaviors and conformation to schooling policies and norms.

Supervising the Creation a Culture-based Schooling Climate

The crux of leaders' practice was to "supervise" school climate and employ culturally applicable practices as a norm in fostering an ethos of reception. Supervisory transactions were multi-faceted, including consideration of school culture and climate. Jackson (2011) conceptualized a "pedagogy of confidence," positing that all students benefit from value placed on high

intellectual performance. True benefit occurs when learning spaces promote interactions among culture, language, and cognition. Leaders in this study constructed school spaces to imbue in students that student learning and participation in schooling activities was a leadership priority, but a positive culture and learning relied on *students'* contributions.

Leaders tried attracting students and families through programming initiatives and education to engage them in learning spaces. High school principal, Alejandro, said,

> The successes obviously are going to be those that—I think the family culture is critical to the expectation of the family, and I think to the success of the student. If you have a student that has a good, strong backing from the family, they're going to be very successful here. They're going to be individuals that are going to want to learn and exit [ESL classes] as quick as possible. They don't leave. They don't put anything on the pathway to say, 'I'm not going to be able to do this because of that—…because 'I'm a 17-year old that is coming here that doesn't know English.' That is put aside.

Alejandro linked student success to familial support, including for newly arrived immigrant students, but his work-relevant role as leader was to create a climate where *students* knew they had to succeed. Programming complemented academic expectations: he said, "We try to get them involved into extracurriculars, whether it's student leadership, we try to get them into ROTC. We try to get them into athletics. We really try to engage the student into something that they like doing....". Carlos, an elementary principal facing the potential closure of his school, focused on communicating high and clear expectations. He explained to students,

> Look. At home, there's only so much I can do. I can give you advice. I could ask the counselor to speak to you. But I can't control your home life. But what I can help you with is how you engage here in school, with your teachers, with your classmates. And if you make that a more positive approach, then you won't have to have problems here at school and then [have] problems over there at home.

Carlos communicated that being fully part of school life was in students' control; schooling spaces were co-constructed and students' efforts shaped positive or negative experiences.

Marco, a secondary school assistant principal, described a school initiative: "…we're trying to establish here right now is called 'Padress,' P-a-d-r-e-s-s. This Saturday will be our first—I'll say cadre. Something where we bring parents and we actually have eight lessons that we go over with parents on how to help your sons or daughters academically." Marco expressed the desire to engage in culturally responsive leadership practices. He and other administrators, through their talk, conveyed using asset-minded approaches to incorporate families, saying, "So our first thing parents are going to learn about is 'why is it important to maintain our culture'? And how do we embrace that culture into our school? 'If we're not doing enough to embrace your culture, let us know, because we don't want to seem like your culture doesn't matter to us.'" Marco's talk demonstrated supervising culturally responsive leadership practices by seeking to integrate diverse community discourses.

Leaders used practices of embodying space (Low, 1996; 2000) to stimulate student and familial connections to school and efforts to center school in parents' lives: Alejandro's school had multiple programs, like a child development lab for parents to learn tools to strengthen family relationships. The ESL department met monthly with families to share school programming information. They provided food and babysitting, and held meetings in Spanish. Leaders attempted to make school attractive to families and to make them feel welcome and supported.

Diego, an assistant principal, spoke of providing students as much assistance as possible. He mediated the use of space in a climate where human and material resources were at premium. His school had a School Support Team (SST), a social worker, a parent volunteer center, and "one SPED/inclusion teacher, one regular teacher, [plus one] counselor" to improve student learning and opportunities. Teams figured out and evaluated areas to strengthen:

> Everybody comes back, brings their pieces together. They have a discussion. And they say, 'okay, well, is this working? Is this helping the child?' And if you happen to be involved in it as the administrator, you just kind of oversee and make sure that all the steps are being

followed through with, and it's kind of done in a timely manner, so
the child can receive services to see if it works or doesn't work.

For leaders, the ethos of reception depended on communicating
expectations to students and norms for student success. Leaders like Diego
engaged teachers in student learning processes; others like Marco made
space for their own learning with community input. Diego and other
administrators built cultures and climates to amplify student strengths,
nurturing high performance and providing enrichment experiences.
However, some participants conveyed to students that they mediated spaces
and places: contexts external to the schooling environment should have a
limited effect students. Alejandro commented, "That is put aside." He drew
distinctions between school matters and home matters, and his acceptance
of students' excuses to not do well in school.

Participants utilized official and unofficial spaces of learning to value,
promote and support practices as useful tools of climate and as means to
create counter-discourses. However, they also intentionally produced space,
physically and materially (Low, 1996; 2000). Home spaces were sometimes
supported as potentially problematic, or hindering the "work" of school.
Some leaders' messages were that school was a positive counter-space to
home or cultural contexts. Gutiérrez, Baquedano‑López and Tejeda (1999)
theorized that hybrid language and schooling practices that bridge home
and school promote and sustain learning zones

Status-blind Schooling? Un/Tying the Double Knot of Dispossession

Participants sought to create what we call status-blind schooling norms
where legal status was *intentionally* ignored or pushed aside. Participants
also engaged in "relabeling" students (Achinstein, Curry, & Ogawa, 2015).
Carolina, an elementary principal, purposefully set aside consideration of
legal status. She said, "When they [students and families] walk through that
door, whether it's the front door or my office door, I'm not even thinking
about documentation, because people made the same assumption about me
and my family, simply because we didn't speak English; however, we're
United States citizens. My siblings and I, and so I don't make that
assumption, and I'm certainly not going to ask, because I don't need to
know."

Carolina's approach developed from personal experiences she perceived as unjust. As a leader, she did not want biases against students' legal status replicated. She said, "We don't talk about undocumented status [with] staff. We talk about helping children. We talk about 'so and so is having behavior problems, so let's talk to mom. Let's have them do the mentor program.' Their status never comes up." Instead, status came up indirectly, like if a child needed medical care, or a family needed Medicaid. Carolina set a school ethos so that school personnel did not willfully look for legal status markers. Echoing other leaders, Diego, said, "… I'm not here to dictate who should come to school, who shouldn't come to school. I'm here to provide a safe learning environment for students, and that's it. Period."

Cahill, Gutiérrez, and Cerecer (2016) used the phrase "the double knot of dispossession" to describe how the discursive nature of illegality (the first knot), entwines with racialized cultural marginalizations (the second knot). Together, they normalize certain everyday practices. "Illegality" is frequently a narrative of construction and control, constructing an ethos of place in educational settings that are often already sites of exclusion. However, participants attempted to influence a positive school climate by removing stigma around legal status. These acts meant to challenge inequitable social structures, norms, and values. As undocumented families deeply fear their lack of legal status could be used to their detriment, Carolina and Diego's approach can be viewed as promoting safety, which is essential to a healthy school climate (Cohen, et al., 2009).

Alejandro also proactively worked to build trust with the school community and students, intentionally crafting the expectation that legal status would be used to limit student educational access. For Alejandro, it was essential to students' feeling safe. He said,

> The environment that we create with those students is once you're here, you're going to get it. What goes on that you don't want us to be privy to, we really don't cross that line. I think it's critical in having a student that is comfortable, coming in and knowing that their immigration status is not going to play a factor or role in what they're going to get here at the campus. We go through staff development with our teachers about questions that we shouldn't be asking our students about. We go through that every single year, because it's

> important to us that the student knows and the family knows that is
> not of importance to us and none of our business, I guess…

Alejandro's talk revealed he constructed a school norm of equitable treatment for undocumented students by training personnel. His tactic potentially reduced pressure on students fearful about their status or conscientious of it used as a stigmatizing label. He emphasized to personnel and students that *students* had choice and security over their information.

Participants recognized legal status could replicate inequalities in school, so the intent was to make students feel safe. This was salient, as other socially constructed labels could further marginalize students: "Taken individually, the constructs of language proficiency, socioeconomic status, immigration status, and race/ethnicity pose challenges for Latino youth and parents in American society and its schools. A convergence of these four constructs creates greater vulnerability" (Olivos & Mendoza 2010, p. 347). Leaders worked to undo the "the double knot of dispossession" (Cahill, Gutiérrez, & Cerecer, 2016), preventing students from scrutiny.

It may seem counterproductive for schools to be status-blind when "immigration status still remains a significant obstacle for first and one-and-a-half generation Latino youth in U.S. schools, for second generation students and beyond" (Olivos & Mendoza, 2010, p. 343). In *denying* personnel opportunities to talk about status in schooling spaces and its implications, opportunities to acknowledge the realties and complexities status has on students' lives can also be denied. Teachers in Alejandro's school were told, "[status] is not of importance to us and none of our business…". Without talk and guidelines for appropriate contexts for talk of status, personnel may paradoxically not communicate to students that the undocumented label is not shameful, or understand how it colors student experiences inside and outside of school.

(Re)Producing Climate Conflicts and Constraints

The third finding highlights that despite participants' efforts at inclusivity, they could be unintentionally complicit in larger discursive, deficit-oriented narratives about newly arrived and undocumented immigrants. Patricia expressed deep frustration with the school district in pressuring her to raise student test scores without providing resources for additional personnel and

supports. She remarked, "We should hire, and it should be easy for us to. We should have all the funds, we should have all the resources, all the stuff that I should get, and it's the opposite in this district." Diego was frustrated with the amount of testing his school did, saying, "I'll be honest with you, 'we're trying to make sure that you are complying with all of the mandates.' There's district mandates…state mandates…federal mandates. And by the time you're doing everything, you're trying to keep every plate spinning on every stick that you have, it's difficult."

Immigrant students are often funneled to schools that are over-tested and under-resourced (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Even in diverse schools with positive climates, an academic hierarchy can impact and be influenced by the social capital of parents and students (Portes & Rumbaut, 2011). The emphasis on testing, the scarcity of resources, and the impact of serving in low-income, high-need communities could strain and constrain relationships with families. Accountability discourses increased the pressures and difficulties for leaders to best serve their communities. Participant accounts of their relationships intersected in nuanced and conflicting ways; pressures for student performance were high.

Talk vacillated between values of compassion and commitment to communities and expectations for contributions back to the school or U.S. society. Patricia felt accountability pressures, but showed concern for student wellbeing and the hardships for students who commuted over the border, remarking,

> ….I mean, the kid comes in late every day and I'm here, like, 'why are you late?' And he'll tell you, 'It's because I'm coming from [Mexican City], and I have to walk.' They leave [Mexican city] at 4:00 in the morning to take a bus to get over here. You know the danger? We're talking little kids, 12-years-old. And then they go home. There's tutoring here, and they stay here tutoring until 4:00, 4:30, and they walk to the bridge, and then they still have to go home to who knows where, and they're getting home at 8:00, 9:00. When do they have homework time? When do they have 'me' time? They have to go home and do chores and take care of all the other little kids. Or work.

While Carolina, Patricia, and Diego were proud of their schools and students, their talk revealed tensions and challenges concerning families' undocumented status. Patricia said,

> So you could have—technically have a child who is—doesn't have any English skills, major gaps in instruction—years and you could have a lot of people from Mexico, they come down here, they really want to bring their kids down here, because there's no special ed services in Mexico. So they know their kids are needing special ed. So they find a way to come over here or hand them over to a guardian. Sometimes they even pay people to—'can you take care of my kid so he can come to school here?'…. They don't understand the education system here. They think that because a child is born here in the U.S. that they have the right to get an education here. And they don't understand the fact that you have to live here and pay taxes and all that. They don't understand that.

Patricia held families to specific standards of behavior, expecting families to "pay" for students' education. She reified discursive constructions of undocumented immigrants by asserting they do not pay taxes. Carolina also set expectations, or "rules" for families' behavior:

> I had a parent in here that week before we went on spring break, and I already told her, 'if I have something like this happen again, I will ban you from this campus. I will not have you come on campus ever again'….And I mean it, because she's violent, she's mean, she's ugly, she's rude, and she does not live here. I have been told that she commutes from [Mexican city]. 'If you're going to be ugly, I will target you.' As awful as that sounds, there are a lot of parents who follow the rules who want their kids really— they truly do want the best for their child, but they can't afford to live here. I think it's a very personal decision that the administrator has to make….

Carolina prioritized school safety, but a perceived violation of her rules could prompt prompt to report immigration status and residency issues. Participant talk revealed a mix of asset and deficit-minded codes. Leaders occasionally and unknowingly (re) produced deficit-oriented discourses of

undocumented immigrants as undeserving of educational or other public services. Some families were expected to prove they *earned* the right to participate in school, potentially highlighting leaders' discriminatory use of power.

Conclusion

Leaders acted to increase student performance, sense of belonging at school, and to enhance student integration and participation in school as paths to a welcoming school climate. Their talk revealed they used practices and strategies to reduce barriers between home and schooling cultures. These components of a school environment are essential for newly arrived and undocumented students (Rumberger 2004; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2009). Talk was also used to encourage culturally responsive leadership, displaying awareness of the social realities situating their leadership (Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). Even in diverse schools with positive climates, however, an academic hierarchy can impact and be influenced by the social capital of parents and students (Portes & Rumbaut, 2011). In this study, leaders' relationships were mediated through their sense of accountability pressures, limited resources, legal status, and expecations student and family behavior.

Leaders also explicitly expressed that, in school, biases against students or families without legal status was unacceptable. Yet, policy and rules were occasionally viewed with flexibility. Carolina and Patricia used their positions to generate positive schooling experiences for every student. However, if confronted with a "troublesome" or complaining parent, they demonstrated susceptibility to immigrant biases and discourse. Legal status was used as a way to exert control over families and became salient to decision making, conflicting with other school practices where discrimination or talking about legal status was expressly discouraged. This underscores how marginalized groups are often expected to be grateful or simply "content with what they have." Immigrants, both documented and undocumented can uffer from hyper-visibility, and an increasing intensification of issues of citizenship and stigmatized identity (Chaudry et al. 2010). It is also often presumed that immigrant families are deficient *because* of their status (Ngai, 2001; Valencia & Black, 2002). Truly, marginalized people have not always passively accepted social inequity.

Immigrant and U.S.-born Latino communities have a significant history of challenging the educational system to increase educational opportunity, even taking their cases to court as acts of resistance (Valenzuela, 1999). However, educators must also critique their pedagogical practices and personal and institutional biases that alienate Latino/a youth and families and protect social inequities (Olivos & Mendoza 2010, p. 343).

In relation to policy, no participant talk included discussions of law or de facto policies pertaining to newly arrived or recent immigrant students. There was talk about policies concerning residency requirements for school attendance, but no broader conversations about district, local, or state-level policies. Alejandro alone referenced it in his training sessions, noting questions personnel should not ask students. This sensitivity to legal status that may match U.S. Department of Education (2015) guidelines for educators working with undocumented students. Additional research should explore leaders' training around district policies that influence the intake and care of students whose legal status.

Schools are the first spaces where immigrant students are likely to have constant contact with members of the receiving community. It is where students internalize the rules of engagement of their new spaces and places and discourses of reception (Kenway & Youdell, 2011). All leaders, even those sensitive to their community's context, may benefit from exercises that bring to light overt and implicit biases. Social justice-minded educators, politicians, and community member must resist and protest damaging rhetoric that perpetuates stereotypes of undocumented immigrants.

NOTES

[1] In the U.S., K-12 education includes kindergarten, primary, and secondary school.
[2] The term undocumented immigrants is often used to refer to immigrants who do not have official government approval to be in the country.

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