STUDENT RACIAL INTERACTIONS IN AN URBAN NEIGHBOURHOOD SCHOOL: AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

David O. Coddens and Michael Shriner
National Louis University

ABSTRACT
This paper presents data collected and analyzed as part of a graduate-level action research project. First, preferred disassociation (gleaned via observational methodology) between Latino and African American racial students within an urban neighbourhood school located within a large Midwestern city in the United States is discussed. Second, additional data highlighted not only apparent disassociation in the classroom, but also in various other typical locations within the school, as well as commuting to/from school. Finally, interviews and subsequent surveys were conducted to gauge student perceptions of their own personal safety at different locations during a normal school day.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEST
David (the first author) is in his third year of teaching mathematics within a large public neighbourhood high school located within a socioeconomically disadvantaged section of a large city in the nation’s Midwest (Midwest High School). Being a neighbourhood school (versus that of a magnet or charter school) simply means that there are no enrollment barriers to attend Midwest High School—no entrance exam, neighbourhood residency requirements, or other prerequisites. Among fellow teachers and colleagues of David, it is widely viewed that alternative high schools are the only step “further down” the ranks, though he is not convinced education of individual students can be seen as so teleological. Nevertheless, Midwest High School parallels the surrounding neighbourhoods’ array of socioeconomic problems that epitomize the typical stereotypes one would immediately
associate with large urban school districts portrayed in pop-culture movies like *Dangerous Minds* or *Stand and Deliver*. This includes economic depression with a lacking job market, lower average levels of education (especially post-secondary), and issues such as drug abuse along with the violence that so often is seen in tandem with the prominence of street gangs feuding for a drug market. For many urban students educated within such a vastly large school system, this typifies the elementary and secondary education experience. Though great reforms as of late have seen the emergence of successful charter network alternatives to the suffering public schools, a student’s local neighbourhood school remains the workhorse of the system.

With fluctuating attendance figures on any given day it would be difficult to tell that the student population was well over 1,200, but this does categorize Midwest High School in the upper echelon within the school district based on student enrollment. The school had an enrollment of over 1,500 during David’s first year of teaching, but the opening of a nearby selective-enrollment school has slightly diminished its numbers. This trend will almost certainly continue as a major charter network pushes to break ground to open a school of their own in a neighbourhood without viable options for a quality education at the secondary level. As is the case with many dysfunctional schools (and school systems), Midwest High’s administration was reluctant to provide much support when searching for student demographics and further information that would assist him in his research project. After informal discussions with a few counselors, he could say with some certainty that over 95% of the school’s students were on free or reduced-lunch programs, meaning that the state subsidizes all or part of the cost for students to eat breakfast and lunch in the school cafeteria. For some students, this is the only guaranteed meal they received in a day because the economic situations at home had become too dire for parents, grandparents, aunts/uncles, or legal guardians to adequately feed everyone. When he first began teaching there, the unofficial racial demographics would estimate the student population was 60% Latino and 40% African American. Since then, due to the restructuring of some school boundaries, the school is now at more equal levels mirroring close to a 50/50% split. To David’s knowledge, the students representing any other racial demographic are less than 1%, and none of which are his students so they were not included in this research project. In comparison to most of the other neighbourhood high schools within the district, the fact that Midwest High is so starkly diverse in racial population is unique due in large part to the homogenous nature of demographics in the neighbourhoods the school serves. David’s high school literally sits on a major crossroad of neighbourhoods and races where a majority of the African American students came from East or South of the school and many of the Latino students reside to the West or Southwest of the school.

The unique balance between African Americans and Latinos brings with it a strangely divided student population that is deeply rooted in their individual cultures. David truly enjoys the school’s diversity which gives him an opportunity to work with two very different groups of students. By his third year of teaching, he had become acutely aware of the unique diversity within the walls of his school in comparison to other neighbourhood schools. But he also noticed that these two races very rarely interacted. This was particularly disheartening given that a key factor in terms of a student’s academic and
social growth is his or her feelings of comfort with regard to interacting with classmates from different races and ethnic backgrounds (Bacon, Swartz, and Rothfarb, 1991). Nonetheless, when given group work during class, his students would rarely choose group members of the opposite race. If group members were assigned by the teacher then only an awkward cooperation between African Americans and Latinos would function in order to simply complete the assignment. Clearly a disconnect existed between the two groups of students. In the hallways, the same theme emerged as you typically found Latinos and African Americans hanging out and walking to class with others of their same race. The discrepancies between African American and Latino students abound, with obvious cultural differences propagating a lack of integration within a school population supposedly representing a diverse anomaly within the school system itself. David wondered how truly diverse his school was when compared to the students’ experiences at home, and if there was any connection between who they associated with outside of school versus while at school.

In addition to his interest in the racial diversity (or lack thereof) within the walls of his neighbourhood school, he was always also very interested in the violence that persisted within classrooms, hallways, and streets surrounding the school. With the socioeconomic nature of the neighbourhoods served clearly dilapidated, it is not surprising that drugs, violence, and street gangs were also very prevalent. Fights among students in the hallways occurred multiple times per day, occasionally spilling into classrooms, and frequently turning into larger-scale mobs of violence once in the streets outside school in the afternoon. Midwest High School has some of the city’s major street gangs well-represented in its student population: largely African American gangs like the Gangster Disciples, P-Stones, and Two-Six Nation as well as largely Latino gangs like the Latin Kings, Maniac Latin Disciples, and Satan’s Disciples were present. Depending on the current drug connections and turf wars, much of the violence inside the school is a direct result of gangs (or smaller “crews”) and students’ association with them when outside of school. That being said, there is also a great deal of violence that is not at all gang-related. The violent and disenfranchised attitudes that have existed within so many of these neighbourhoods for years has allowed for fights to become acceptable means of resolving conflict, and are quite frankly commonplace. David was unsure if there was a link between the racial tensions at Midwest High School and the violence that so frequently occurred. There were plenty of examples of fights between members of the same race. Reflecting on his three years of experience, he would in fact argue a majority of fights are between students of the same race. Still, he began to wonder if there were any links between the racial diversity of a student’s environment and the violence that occurred in that location. Because he was already so deeply interested in researching the racial diversity found within his school, it was not a stretch to also include a brief inquiry as to the nature of student violence as part of a graduate-level class project. While enrolled in a course entitled, “Research in Action, Becoming Practitioner Researchers” taught by the second author, David engaged in instructor-facilitated lengthy classroom discussions with classmates regarding the action research process. In addition, David’s instructor and co-author provided on-going and relevant weekly feedback regarding his inquiry in to the nature of student violence at his school.
LITERATURE REVIEW
With regard to student race and ethnic relations, Maxwell and Shammas (2007) contend that “most of the available research comes not from academic and scholarly periodicals but from the practical and action-oriented publications of college institutional research offices, government administrative centers, and education associations” (p. 348). However, the relational tension between different races has long been debated within various scholarly circles in the United States ever since the notoriously violent events erupting in the South when Federal courts forced the integration of schools nationwide with the ruling on Brown versus the Board of Education in 1954. In fact, Eitle and Eitle (2003) argued that "ever since the landmark case of Brown v. Board of Education, both efforts to desegregate schools and the consequences of such efforts have been the subject of contentious debate among scholars and laypersons alike" (p. 589).

Conflict inherently arises in things unknown. This can be especially salient when integrating classrooms where individuals are racially and culturally different, let alone charged. Almost three decades ago, Schofield and Sagar (1983, p. 339) posited that there is growing awareness of the societal costs of intergroup hostility and stereotyping. It is clear that under many conditions interracial contact can lead to increased intergroup hostility. Hence, unless interracial schools are carefully planned there is a real possibility that they will exacerbate the very social tensions and hostilities that many initially hoped they would diminish.

In order for conflict stemming from our differences to be resolved, it is essential to develop a true understanding of your counterpart. And though both Latino and African American students share the same hallways and classrooms on a daily basis in Midwest High School, separation along racial lines is starkly evident and ultimately implies a lesser understanding amongst the students. The two major races within Midwest High School are Latino and African American, despite the fact that there are a multitude of categorizations among each umbrella term. For example, the Latino students can be further classified as either Mexican or Puerto Rican. However, in Midwest High, the classrooms may have a diverse group of students, but this by no means implies direct student interaction or cultural awareness between these two groups which ultimately leads to ever-widening misconceptions and disconnect.

Having a school split evenly between two different races does not necessarily mean there is truly a heterogeneous environment despite the school’s diverse appearance from the outside. Reviewing the literature, Dickinson, Holifield, Holifield, and Creer (2001) reported that “one common finding in the literature was that students in desegregated schools primarily choose to interact at school with others of the same race” (p. 391). Sadly, Ascher (1986) argued that racial hostility was highest when student socioeconomic status approached equality amongst an evenly split population of Black and white students. Ascher further reported that despite all attempts at desegregation between the two races, immediate desegregation occurs when tracking and ability grouping curricula are
implemented – white students typically find themselves in classes with other white students (and vice-versa) based on academic criteria. For Midwest High School, this is only somewhat true. Larger Latino populations are indeed more frequently enrolled in the honors and Advanced Placement courses. So to some degree there exists a segregation of race as a function of academic segregation. But for the most part a lacking system of appropriate ability grouping for programming student schedules produces classrooms that maintain a level of diversity consistent with the general student body. Both races are well-represented and discomfort remains prevalent as a result of naivety. Moreover, Ascher also recognized a lacking cooperation amongst students of dissimilar race while in class. Much like David’s initial observations of students, her examination constantly saw students work together only for the academic end of completing the group assignment – once that was accomplished the separation between races bounced right back to the status quo. Clearly Midwest High School was not the only one dealing with an internal separation of races.

With a plentitude of research and interest on racial integration of heterogeneous student populations throughout this nation’s history, David had clear expectations for his own research project based on personal experiences. The initial observations that brought him to investigate race relations between African American and Latino students led David to believe that despite the diverse nature of Midwest High School’s student population, he expected to see little interaction between the two races on a daily basis. Furthermore, the higher levels of diversity students experienced at school versus in their homes or neighbourhoods throughout a typical student’s day would not result in the promotion of any such interracial relations. In order to test the validity of this argument, students were given a survey with a variety of questions asking them to rate their personal association with peers of different races at different times during the typical school day. These results would then be included with the levels of diversity seen by students at home, or on their street (the “block” as it is commonly referred to). By comparing these figures a general understanding could emerge of where Latino and African American students would interact the most with only students of the same race, and where they were more comfortable associating with members of the other race. As an addendum to David’s investigation on racial relations amongst African Americans and Latinos, he was also interested in determining where students felt most safe at these same locations. Based on previous research confirming the skepticism of that dissimilar/unknown, David expected to see levels of personal safety increase where the least diversity occurred. That is to say, students would feel most safe while in places they mostly associated with members of their own race, and less safe as the environment became more diverse. Again a survey would be conducted inquiring about student’s perceptions on how safe they felt at the same locations. Any positive or negative correlations found between racial diversity and student safety would directly link the two though not necessarily imply causation.
DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSES

Data were collected in a variety of ways to provide the best illustration of student interactions with members of both races. Observational data first drove David’s initial interest in the topic at hand, but more detailed and specific field notes observing his students while in the classroom were required for interpretation and analysis. David’s observations were first conducted both formally and informally by him on a variety of randomly selected school days to get a baseline idea of the general racial interaction amongst his students (see Appendix A). Unfortunately, David had a limited amount of time to observe because he was also the teacher leading classroom instruction, which did not allow for fully formal observations to be conducted. Often student behaviors were noticed, and a quick mental note or comment down on a piece of paper would suffice until he could formally write down the observations and interpretation later on after class time. Similarly, David admittedly would have liked more formal observations in the hallways where student interactions were mostly social in nature, as opposed to the structured academic setting of a classroom.

David’s observations were consistent with the initial assumption that interracial interaction was minimal among the general student population. Generally speaking, when entering the classroom, students typically did so with members of the same race if they were not entering class individually. There were only a few cases of students entering the room with another student of the opposite race. Once in the classroom, students almost always sat in groups of desks around peers of the same race. There were multiple cases of students actively searching for members of the same race immediately upon entering the classroom. During some class periods, there was entire halves of the classroom deficient in a particular race. For example, the back of the classroom would be entirely African American, and all the Latino students were clustered together towards the front. In David’s fifth period, a class largely dominated by Latino students with only 6% (2 of 33) being African American, both of the African American students sat near one another in the back corner of the room. Aside from a few exceptions, almost every student would sit adjacent to at least one other student of the same race, and most often there were small clusters of races evident throughout the room. Though he did not expect the races to uniformly alternate as you walked down the rows, the classroom did have the appearance of being diverse at times. As the class period progressed though, it became more evident that students would only talk to those immediately around them of a similar race and infrequently move outside that sphere of comfort. However, as is the case in most of David’s classes, there were also students who did not seem to conform to the physical separation between races that most students did. Nearly every student who seemed to be more comfortable with those different from themselves was African American, appearing to be fine sitting around Latino students with little connection to other African American students in the room.

In the room during instruction, little social interactions could take place because students were busy taking notes. There were, however, plenty of opportunities to cooperate with fellow students while working on practice problems or during time allotted for independent practice towards the end of class. While working on class work, the racial
barriers were even starker at times and less apparent on other occasions. Most students cooperated very well with members of their own race—once given the signal from the teacher, some groups of students almost immediately moved together as though it was a part of their routine to be working with these peers sitting around them of who were of the same race. On the other hand, occasionally there were cases where students of dissimilar races worked very well together on their assignments. Upon further investigation, they did well working on academics but the nature of their relationship seemed to deteriorate from there. After the work was done, or while packing up to leave class, these sets of students seemed to look more awkward and had less of a conversation between them. Once the work they both had together was complete, they suddenly felt they had nothing else in common to discuss. The use of Spanish by Latino students as an alternative to speaking English for communication was also very prevalent both in class and in the hallways. They could clearly bond over this commonality, and felt comfortable speaking to one another in their native language (that was also presumably spoken with regularity at home). The use of Spanish in the classroom has been a difficult obstacle for David to overcome personally with his limited exposure to the language in high school and college classes. He imagined that African American students lacking many Spanish skills were also intimidated by the Latino students speaking Spanish, which further caused the rift between the two races.

More numerical data revealing further racial discrepancies were the result of the first of two surveys that were conducted after David’s initial observations had been under way (see Appendix B). The survey first asked what their race was with an open-ended question. It then focused on rating each student’s association with others of the same race based on a 1-5 sliding scale (with 1 being no association with others of the same race, to 5 being only association with others of the same race). In other words, the higher the numerical response meant that student experienced less diversity at that location. Each question on diversity was asked for a particularly selected location the students usually visited on a daily basis. These locations included their home, their street/block, commuting to/from school, in the hallways, in the classroom, and in the cafeteria. The results of the survey can be found in table one.

It is first interesting to see how students identified themselves racially when asked the open-ended question “What is your race?” Most African American students, 77%, identified as such. This is interesting because they overwhelmingly prefer the more politically correct term rather than identification of being “black.” Furthermore, most Latino students did not identify themselves as Latino at all, but rather 71% chose the term Hispanic instead. The next-most frequent response was nationalistic in nature, with 20% of them identifying as specifically, Mexican. Responses for the diversity at home, on their street/block, commuting to/from school, and in the cafeteria between African American and Latino students were not statistically significant. Many of these were expected results because their homes and immediate neighbors on their street would generally be less diverse areas. The fact that they are not statistically significant would suggest similarities between African American and Latino neighbourhoods—in that they are largely homogenous in terms of racial makeup. However a great deal of information can still be highlighted in this data. The three locations that did produce statistically significant data
were three of the environments that would most publicly determine a student’s social status in school: the hallways, the classroom, and their peers whom they considered friends. In all of these categories Latinos answered a higher average response, meaning they more closely associated with other peers of the same race and less with African Americans. In accordance to David’s own observations in the classroom and hallways, students do in fact tend to stick with same-raced peers. Latino students also responded with a higher overall average response, 3.85 compared to the average African American response of 3.59. Aspects of Latino culture such as the use of Spanish when communicating with one another allude to Latinos feeling more comfortable with other Latinos, whereas such strong camaraderie was not as evident among African Americans. Somewhat surprising was the lack of statistical significance in the cafeteria, a location that would presumably determine social status publicly in school.

Once the figures on racial diversity were collected and analyzed, a separate survey was administered which asked the students to rate their feeling of personal safety at each of these locations (see Appendix C). Again students were asked to make a judgment of personal safety based on a sliding scale from 1 to 5 (with 1 being unsafe to 5 being very safe). Higher numerical responses would represent that location being safer compared to lower numerical responses. Finally, students were asked general questions on certain aspects of violence like how many fights they witnessed per week or how many gang members they knew. Responses were not categorized by either Latino or African American, but rather all students in aggregate.

Correlations between variables (and their associated means) can be seen in Table two. The locations where students feel safest were at home and in the classroom, with average responses of 4.67 and 4.18 respectively. These are definitely spaces that students spent the most time in during a typical day. At the same time, students felt least safe on both the commutes from home to school in the morning (3.19) and from school to home in the afternoon (3.34). Once in school hallways in the morning, one’s personal sense of safety appears to have slightly increased. In a similar fashion, on their commute home from school once on their own street and closer to home, students’ perceived sense of safety also shows an increase. Perhaps this means that students feel safer in places where they spend the most time, whether it is at school or near home. On a more personal note as a teacher, David was happy to see that his students feel safest at school while in the classroom because this is a major point he tries to emphasize in the classroom culture.

The last section of the second survey points to the pervasive nature of violence in the students' everyday lives. The fact that students reported witnessing so many fights at home could be due to a variety of factors. First, they could have interpreted the question to include family arguments that typically occur in any number of American households among family members and siblings. Second, they could also be accounting for the number of fights they see in their neighbourhood or on their street, which would similarly skew that data. A possible misinterpretation of survey questions seems to have occurred when reporting the number of gang members they knew versus gang members that were friends or family. It was our intention that both friends and family would automatically also be
included in the categorization of people they “knew” – meaning it was expected that students would know more gang members in general compared to those gang members who were specifically a friend or family member. Nevertheless, these results still highlight the number of gang members students generally encounter. Both average responses of 3.34 and 3.59 fall between knowing “some” and “a lot” of gang members.

Finally, after the observations and surveys were conducted, David included a brief interview with a few students inquiring why diversity was important as well as why the neighbourhood was plagued by such violence. The results of these interviews can be seen in the attached Appendix D. The interviews were conducted in rapid-fire succession intentionally, eliciting the students’ first reaction to the question. It was hoped that this quick-style of questioning would not allow students to over think their answers, but rather rely heavily upon initial gut reactions. This would eradicate any suggestive body language during the interview as well as giving a politically-correct response they felt their teacher was looking for. David did not want them to give the answer they thought he wanted, but rather the first answer they came up with. Upon looking at the student responses, it is clear that David’s students have a deeper understanding of the implications that diversity entails. Despite not necessarily living a fully diverse life, it is clear diversity was largely important to them as humans and Americans. Furthermore, it was also clear that David’s students were aware of the problematic nature that violence brings with it, both at school and in their neighbourhood streets. Many attributed the violence to apathy found within the neighbourhood residents, but even more so, to the drug and gang problems that typically abound in underprivileged neighbourhoods.

**Conclusion and Reflections**

To summarize, a great deal of data was collected for this action research project and only a portion of it is reported in this paper. Clearly subsequent extensions of this research project would include more in-depth analyses along with the incorporation of more extensive interviews and observations. However, the data collected suggests that David’s students are not as racially integrated within the school as one might think. As such, at a minimum, David was able to glean a greater understanding of his students in general—a common outcome of typical action research studies (Johnson, 2008). This is particularly salient given the fact that the investigation reported here did not follow the typically cyclical pattern espoused by a variety of action research theories or models (Hendricks, 2006; Piggot-Irvine, 2006; Riel, 2007). Future studies will address this absence by focusing on any changes in David’s teaching/classroom practices that have come about as a result of lessons learned from his observations, interviews, and surveys as part of this investigation.

Despite having similar numbers of both Latino and African American students, the two groups attend school daily and largely remain with only peers of their same race. Furthermore, the locations that illicit the greatest disparity in student responses are those places that students are outwardly seen interacting with other students on a social level or who they consider to be friends. Though we were unable to find a correlation between the levels of racial diversity and student perceptions of safety, it was still clear that students felt safest when in places they spent the most time – either near home or school.
David chose personal interviews with a few students because he wanted to report his initial research findings to his students first and foremost. This was intentional in that it allowed the opportunity to use his observations and interview responses to humanize the numerical data and relate it to their own lives. Students were clearly intrigued by David's action research project when he first explained it to them why he was administering the surveys. Moreover, because they were the research participants, David was excited to share his results with them, even though they might not like some of the results. It was David's hope that the quantitative results would be complimented by the interview responses, and used as a springboard for a discussion in class one day on racial interactions and student violence. As previously alluded to, David was unsure of his administration's interest in this action research project because it would highlight more problems than they were willing to admit within the school. In any case, it was his intention to use this information to better-inform himself and his students as to the nature of race relations amongst peers and the implications on student safety. Clearly this is a project that can be applied to his school as a whole, and he would very much like to continue this project by utilizing the same research methodology school-wide.

REFERENCES


**Biographical note:**

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**David O. Coddens** is a MAT student in the National College of Education at National Louis University.

**Dr. Michael Shriner** was an Assistant Professor of Educational Foundations and Inquiry at National Louis University in Chicago, Illinois and Co-Director of the Finnstitute: A Center for Child Development located in Chesterton, Indiana during the writing of this manuscript. Dr. Shriner is now a Graduate School Dissertation Chair at Northcentral University in Prescott Valley, AZ. His research interests include Quantitative Research Methods, Statistical (including Parametric and Nonparametric) Analyses, Qualitative Research Methods, and Program Evaluation. He continues to serve as Co-Director of the Finnstitute (now located in Menomonie, WI).

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## Appendix A - Observations

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<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Reflections</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The classroom is a typical size for the aging public school building, large with wooden floors and high ceilings. Desks are arranged in an orderly fashion with tape on the floor to indicate rows. The desks nearly fill all available space in the large room, with a majority of the desks on the left side, in three rows of six and one row of four in the back. On the right side of the aisle, two rows of seven desks sit next to the windows which have closed blinds the length of the classroom. All desks face forward.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The room is well organized and relatively neat compared to the average classroom at this neighbourhood school.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>1st Period Thursday 2/10/11</strong></td>
<td><strong>Latinos will commonly use Spanish when speaking to each other while in school, both in the hallways and the classroom.</strong></td>
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<td>• As students come into the room, they are typically alone. One boy was speaking in Spanish to a friend as he entered class and his friend continued down the hallway.</td>
<td><strong>At this point they are the only two African American students in the room.</strong></td>
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<td>• All students are Latino sitting by the two rows near the windows. Two black girls sit in front one behind the other, but across the aisle. One of them was already in class, and as the other walked in she called out her friend’s name after they’d made eye contact.</td>
<td><strong>All three appear to be friends because of the way they met each other and how they interact in class. I am not sure how much time they spend together outside class.</strong></td>
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<td>• Another black girl sat with the two up front. Four Latinos are also now sitting on that side, but across the set of desks to the far left and back.</td>
<td><strong>Is this because that’s who they sit next to, or because that’s who they’re comfortable working with?</strong></td>
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<td>• During guided and independent practice in class, students are working together with only students of their own race. There is physical separation in the room by race.</td>
<td><strong>It’s interesting to see how few interactions exist interracially during class, and what students more frequently do this compared to others.</strong></td>
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<td>• The one exception is a light-skinned African American girl sitting near the windows, which is otherwise entirely Latino. During guided practice she interacts with the Latino students around her, but twice was also called over by the group of three African American girls across the aisle.</td>
<td><strong>Again, Spanish is very common, especially</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Friday 2/11/11</strong></td>
<td><strong>...</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• After quiz students are discussing</td>
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how they did and answers they gave together in Spanish.

- Latina and African American girls have short conversation about school work.
- African American girl wins pack of gum in weekly class raffle. She shares a piece with everyone who asked her – four African Americans and one Latino.
- Same two girls from earlier talk on their way out of class, this time not about school work.

Monday 2/14/11
- African American male student disrupts class to give his (presumably) girlfriend a balloon, who is also African American.

2nd Period
Thursday 2/10/11
- At the beginning of class, Latino students often are coming in together talking in pairs or larger groups.
- Only two African American students walk in together talking. All others come in singly.
- During independent practice students work together entirely with others of same race. A few Latina girls in front are off task talking to each other (in English).
- African American boy and girl are similarly off task talking and on a cell phone.

Friday 2/11/11
- During quiz by end of period it's a very full class. Races are very evenly distributed throughout the room. Every student is adjacent to at least one student of each race.
- African American boy runs ahead to catch up to African American girl when bell rings.
- A few Latino students talk about a project for another class on their way out.
- Two African American girls walk in

when explaining math to each other.

Was this conversation solely a function of the fact they were discussing school?

Her friends were immediately visibly happy for their friend having won the raffle, like they knew they would get gum.

Clearly there are interactions at some level beyond just that of school work.

Though interracial couples are becoming more common these days, I do not feel there are many open to this concept from these students.

Are they coming in from the same place and walked together, or are they just now meeting up for this class?

Why are the African American students coming in more individually?

When conversation gets very personal, English usually turns to Spanish.

Whether on task or off task, students are still rarely associating with other races.

The students have no seating chart, and have done well on their own to integrate on the overall. But once you truly observe, you realize they still mostly talk with those around them of the same race.

School work talked about by same-race too
for next class in the room, but keep to themselves. As they sit waiting for their English teacher, they do not interact with the other African American boy or Latina girls also in the room.

Monday 2/14/11
- In beginning of class, conversation of the weekend happens. Most students who contribute are Latino – some shout out and some raise their hands. Of the 9 students who share what they did over the weekend, 7 are Latino.

Why is it the African American students speak less in class discussion? Do they feel excluded because of the prevalence in Latinos answering?

5th Period
Friday 2/11/11
- Room (and class roster) is entirely Latino except for two African American students, who both sit in back right of room but not adjacent to each other.
- Two African American students rarely, if ever, talk with each other during time for class work. The girl keeps largely to herself, only speaking twice to her neighbour. The male student both discusses math problems and talks off topic with multiple neighbours.

This is my honors class. Why is it comprised almost entirely of Latinos? Perhaps this is a hugely weighted topic I could focus on in an entirely different project.

The two African American students so rarely talk with each other, but consistently talk with the Latino students around them. There seems to be less of a racial association here.

6th Period
Thursday 2/10/11
- Students sitting in back two rows of class are all African American except for one Latina girl. They are very energetic, often switching from personal conversation to being on task during independent practice.
- Similarly large group of all Latino males talk and work together in two rows by windows. They work on their math in English, but also have personal conversations and switch to Spanish for those.

By the numbers, this is my most diverse class. And yet, they still separate by race on their own. This is also probably the best example of physical separation in the classroom because of the stark contrast between where students sit (on their own accord, no seating chart).
• Latino students for the most part sit in the very front or in the two rows near the windows.
• After quiz, students work on extra credit worksheet. Though most work independently, there are a few whispers between students. Of the 9 that I saw, 4 were interracial.

Monday 2/14/11
• Students enter class boisterously in light of Valentine’s Day festivities throughout the day. Though some conversations are among same-race friends typical of them walking to class together, I also saw 4 separate interracial conversations that were more atypical. They were all talking about Valentine’s-related festivities or who their Valentines were.

7th Period
Thursday 2/10/11
• Students are again very well dispersed throughout the room racially.
• Unlike the other classes, the quieter/independent students seem to be Latino instead of African American.
• Two students are talking out a problem together in Spanish.
• African American girl walks to another African American boy’s desk to ask for help.
• Later she checks her answer at the answer key up in front, and does not say anything to Latina girl up checking answer at the same time. They do communicate subtly in body language, both affirming they had the correct answer.
• Two African American boys sit in back right by windows surrounded by larger group of 6 Latina girls. They are off topic in conversation a lot, but also smiling and giving all indications they are all friends.

Monday 2/14/11
• Latino boy comes closer to front of room to see board better. While walking to front he asks African American

Seems to be interracial intrigue in light of Valentine’s Day. It’s almost like they are more inquisitive towards the other race today because they want to understand how the other side celebrates its holidays.

This is the only class that the majority of quieter students are Latino.

Body language between fellow girls or between fellow students? Either could have been the link for that non-verbal communication.

Although they exist in any class (also seen best in 5th period) there are certainly students unassumingly able to freely associate with others of a different race with no hesitation.

Clearly they have classes together and know each other well. But in class, they sit relatively far apart with people of their own race. Yet when their paths cross, a seemingly cordial friendship exists. So, why don’t they sit near each other?
classmate how his day is going. They exchange small talk but engage in casual conversation. Only at the very end do they discuss anything school-related.

- Same two African American boys in back are again getting along well with Latina girls in back of class – this time much more on task. They feel comfortable asking each other questions, regardless of race.

Appendix B – First Survey

1) What is your race? __________ 2) How old are you? __________

3) What language is spoken at home? Is this different from what you speak most of the time at school?

For the following questions, circle your answer based on the following scale:
1 = none, 2 = a few, 3 = some, 4 = a lot, 5 = all

4) How many of your family members at home are of the same race?
1 2 3 4 5

5) How many residents of your street/block are of the same race?
1 2 3 4 5

6) On your commute home from school, how much of your time is spent with people of the same race?
1 2 3 4 5

7) How much of your time in the hallways is spent with people of the same race?
1 2 3 4 5

8) How much of your time in school classrooms is spent with people of the same race?
1 2 3 4 5

9) In the school cafeteria, how many students do you talk to that are of the same race?
1 2 3 4 5

10) How many of your friends are of the same race?
1 2 3 4 5
Appendix C – Second Survey

Rank the following places you frequent on a daily basis on how safe you feel in each of the surroundings based on the following scale: 1=unsafe to 5=safe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street/block</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commute from home to school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School hallways</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>School classrooms</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School cafeteria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commute from school to home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the following questions, circle your answer based on the following scale: 1=none, 2=a few, 3=some, 4=a lot, 5=all

1) How many days per week do you witness a fight at home in a typical week?
   1          2          3          4          5

2) How many days per week do you witness a fight at school in a typical week?
   1          2          3          4          5

3) How many gang members do you know?
   1          2          3          4          5

4) How many of your family members or friends are gang members?
   1          2          3          4          5

Table 1. Descriptive and inferential statistics for the first survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Black (n)</th>
<th>Hispanic (n)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Members at Home</td>
<td>4.74 (19)</td>
<td>4.67 (70)</td>
<td>.368</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>.714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residents of Street/Block</td>
<td>3.44 (18)</td>
<td>3.51 (70)</td>
<td>.262</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>.794</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commute Home from School</td>
<td>3.58 (19)</td>
<td>3.64 (70)</td>
<td>.260</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>.796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallways</td>
<td>3.32 (19)</td>
<td>3.73 (70)</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>.079*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classrooms</td>
<td>3.32 (19)</td>
<td>3.67 (70)</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>.034**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cafeteria</td>
<td>3.53 (19)</td>
<td>3.80 (70)</td>
<td>.925</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>.358</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>3.53 (19)</td>
<td>3.90 (70)</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>.073*</td>
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</table>

* significant at the .10 level
*significant at the .05 level
**Table 2. Correlations amongst second survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location (Mean)</th>
<th>Home</th>
<th>Street/Block</th>
<th>To School</th>
<th>Hallways</th>
<th>Classrooms</th>
<th>Cafeteria</th>
<th>To Home</th>
<th>Fights at Home</th>
<th>Fights at School</th>
<th>Gang Members</th>
<th>Family/Friends are Gang Members</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home (4.67)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Street/Block (3.39)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>To School (3.35)</td>
<td>.215*</td>
<td>.404**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hallways (3.59)</td>
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<td>.376**</td>
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<td>Classrooms (4.18)</td>
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<td>.345**</td>
<td>.481**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cafeteria (3.50)</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>.250*</td>
<td>.296**</td>
<td>.687**</td>
<td>.489**</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Home (3.19)</td>
<td>.178</td>
<td>.394**</td>
<td>.714**</td>
<td>.209*</td>
<td>.180</td>
<td>.288**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fights at Home (4.67)</td>
<td>-.054</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>.154</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.106</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fights at School (3.39)</td>
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<td>.070</td>
<td>-.054</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>.060</td>
<td>.042</td>
<td>-.042</td>
<td>.346**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gang Members (3.35)</td>
<td>.187</td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>.116</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>-.029</td>
<td>-.184</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>-.143</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/Friends are Gang Members (3.39)</td>
<td>.161</td>
<td>.314**</td>
<td>.144</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.133</td>
<td>-.092</td>
<td>.130</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.563**</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*correlation is significant at the .05 level

**correlation is significant at the .01 level
Appendix D - Interviews

Question 1 - “Why is diversity important?”

Student #1 (African American)
Because that way you can know about other kinds of people. If you don’t have diversity then you only know about your family and there are lots of other people in America.

Student #2 (African American)
Diversity is good because it can’t be just people like you. That’s not the way the world is. If you have diversity, then you know how to get along with others like at a job or something. But not everybody always gets along either.

Student #3 (Latino)
Diversity is important because that is the way America is. Nobody is the same, even if you are both Hispanic you can still be different like if I was Mexican and someone else was Puerto Rican. But in America all these people are here no matter where you are from.

Student #4 (Latino)
I don’t know why it’s important. I think when people are different they might not like each other. It is important to know about different people, but what if you don’t want to know about them. Or what if they don’t like you.

Question 2 - “What makes this school/neighborhood unsafe?”

Student #1 (African American)
Because you have to protect yourself. People let others know who they are. They are reppin’ where they live because that’s where their friends are. So if other people try to start something with you or your friends, you have to fight back.

Student #2 (African American)
People do a lot of drugs or are in gangs and that causes fights in the hallway. When groups of people don’t get along or want more money or girls, they have to fight to show who is better and stronger.

Student #3 (Latino)
Nobody cares. Kids can just do whatever they want here and they know they won’t get in trouble. You can do a lot of things and not get in trouble, so nobody cares what will happen. I wish we could just have a school where people acted better.

Student #4 (Latino)
When kids jump on you they are jealous or want to fight you because you made them mad. They think you have something they don’t or want to show they are better than you. Or they do it for no reason because you aren’t them. Like if someone asks you who you’re with, and you say nobody, they beat you up just for that, just because.