



Living in Uncertainty: Understanding Immigrant, Migrant, & Refugee Student Populations

EDUC 201: Identity and Difference in
Education

Week 15: December 2, 2025

FLEX Course Evaluations

- **Online course evaluations (FLEX) – open until December 11**
 - Please complete course evaluation!
 - The feedback is key for assessing course strengths & areas of growth!

Course Updates

- **No lecture or discussion sections next week!**
- **Community Placement Project**
 - **Individual written component**
 - Due: Tuesday, December 16 by midnight
 - **Group presentations**
 - Due: Friday, December 12 (9 – 11 am):
College of Education Building
 - TAs will share additional details in discussion sections
 - Please, please, please communicate with your group members! Don't ghost one another!

Key Terms

- **Immigrant:** someone not born in the U.S.
 - Undocumented immigrant: someone in the U.S. without documentation.
 - Undocumented students are also called “Dreamers.”
- **Migrant:** someone who travels to different communities for employment (may or may not be immigrant).
- **Refugee:** someone in the U.S. fleeing persecution, seeking asylum.
- **1.5 generation immigrant:** an immigrant (documented or undocumented) who spent most of their life in the U.S.
- **Mixed status families:** families with a member(s) of their family who are undocumented and some who are documented.

Language Matters

- Embrace using humanizing language when talking about immigrant communities that don't have documentation – consider using the language of "undocumented."
- Using terms like "illegal immigrants," "illegal aliens," or "illegals" is harmful:
 - Using these terms is dehumanizing and degrading.
 - Using these terms reinforces pre-existing negative attitudes toward immigrant communities, regardless of legal status – used to connect immigration with criminality.
 - Using these terms fuel perspectives that such people have limited or no rights, when in fact they have a wide range of rights.
 - Using these terms facilitates scapegoating communities for larger systemic issues.

Relationship Between Immigrants and Refugees

- Immigrants and refugees, while sharing similar experiences are also different.
- Immigrants migrate to pursue better opportunities (e.g., work, education).
- Refugees migrate to flee persecution, conflict, or violence – thus why these communities seek asylum when leaving.

Important Immigration Numbers

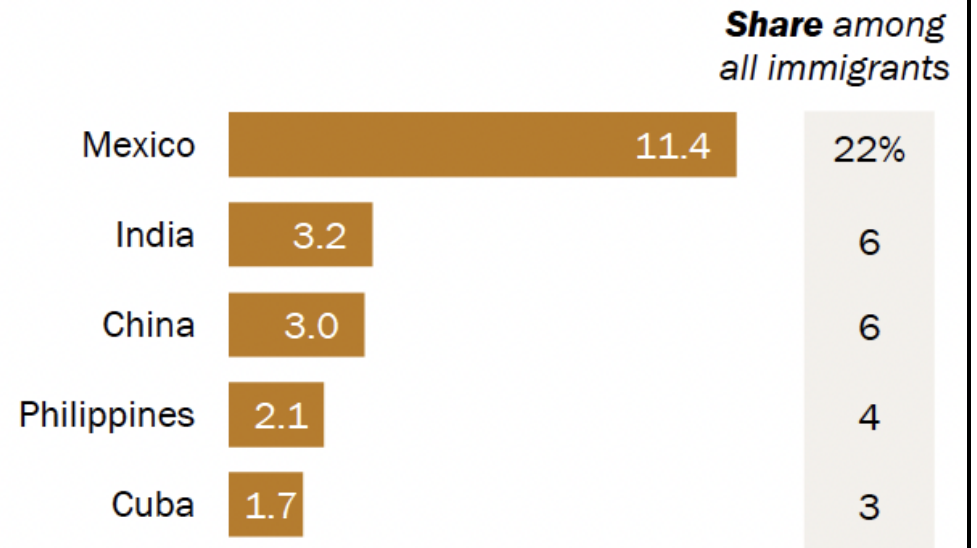
- 51 million people in the U.S. were born in a different country.
 - Most immigrants have some sort of legal status (citizenship, visas, permanent residents).
- 13.7 million people in the U.S. are undocumented.
 - Between 2007-2019, number of undocumented immigrants held steady at around 11 million, but since then the numbers have increased by almost 3 million.
 - Increases in undocumented immigration stems from border crossings by migrants from Central and South America.
- Immigrant-origin children are the fastest growing segment of the school-age population.

Not Every Immigrant is Mexican

- Most immigrants come from Mexico, but ...
 - Significant populations also come from India, China, Philippines, & Cuba.
 - Recent increases in immigration come from Asia and Central America, particularly from Guatemala, El Salvador, & Honduras.

Mexico is by far the most common birthplace for U.S. immigrants

Top 5 countries of birth for immigrants living in the U.S. in 2023, in millions



Note: China includes Hong Kong but not Taiwan.

Source: Pew Research Center estimates based on augmented U.S. Census Bureau data (IPUMS).

Source: [Pew Research Center \(2025\)](#)

What's Happening in Illinois?

- 15% of the state's population are foreign-born.
 - 8.6% of U.S. born residents live in mixed status families.
 - 4.2% of immigrant population in Illinois is undocumented.
 - Estimated number of refugees: 82,100.
- Among immigrant population, 76.9% are between 16 - 64 years of age.
- Top countries of origin for immigrant communities: Mexico, India, Poland, Philippines, & China.
- Top countries of origin for refugee communities: Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Venezuela, Syria, & Afghanistan.

Note: Regardless of how you feel about immigration or immigration policy in the U.S., immigrant and refugee students (regardless of legal status) have a constitutional right to an PreK-12 education.

Access to Public Schools

- ***Plyler v. Doe (1982)***: guaranteed access to K-12 public education for undocumented students.
- Supreme Court decided (5-4) that undocumented children and their families, though not citizens of the U.S., are people “in any ordinary sense of the term” and therefore afforded 14th amendment protections.

“By denying these children a basic education, we deny them the ability to live within the structure of our civic institutions, and foreclose any realistic possibility that they will contribute in even the smallest way to the progress of our Nation.”

- Justice William J. Brennan

Significance of *Plyler*

“This case is the high-water mark for immigrant rights [...] It was courageous and strategic. Winning is one thing, but it’s not static, It has to be fought for, it has to be defended, reconceptualized and re-applied.”

- Michael Olivas



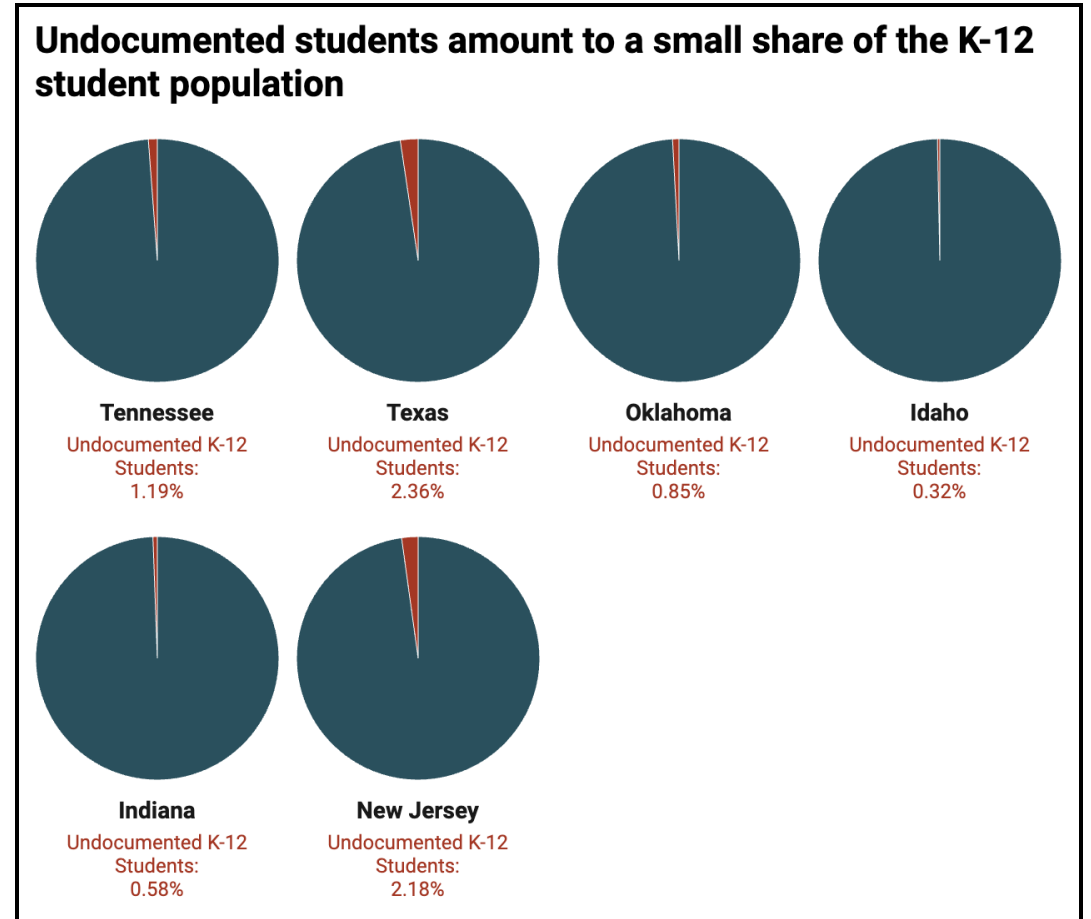
Photo of Michael Olivas

Protecting Undocumented Students in Illinois

- **Safe Schools for All Act (HB 3247):**
schools in Illinois cannot deny children an education based on child's perceived or actual citizenship or immigration status.
 - Law also requires schools to have procedures for law enforcement requests to enter a building.
 - Law goes into effect in January 2026.

Challenges to *Plyler*

- For the first time in four decades, the constitutional protections guaranteeing undocumented immigrant children the right to attend public school are coordinated and credible threat.
- Since early 2025, lawmakers in 6 states (Tennessee, Texas, Oklahoma, Idaho, Indiana, & New Jersey) have introduced legislation aimed at restricting or denying public education to undocumented children.
 - Goal is to prompt legal challenges with the potential to reach the Supreme Court.



Source: *Niskanen Center* (2025)

Shifting Support for Immigrant/Refugee Student Populations in Schools

‘Can I just be a kid?’ Students shaken by immigration raids seek help from school counselors

News headline from the *Los Angeles Times*

Attendance drops at Chicago schools in communities with increased immigration enforcement

By Reema Amin and Cherry Salazar | October 31, 2025, 3:19pm CDT

News headline from *Chalkbeat*

Harsh Immigration Policies Affect Students’ Academic Performance

“The constant fear and uncertainty that produces in children carries over to everything.”



ISABELA DIAS
Reporter
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News headline from *Mother Jones*

Oklahoma Takes Step to Require Parents to Provide Schools Proof of Citizenship



By [Ileana Najarro](#) — January 28, 2025 ⌚ 4 min read

News Headline from *Education Week*

Impact of Anti-Immigrant/Refugee Climate and Policies on Students

- Increase in discriminatory practices
- Feeling unsafe in school & community
- Increase in student absenteeism
- Decrease in academic performance & increased likelihood of dropping out of school
- Decrease in student sense of belonging
- Increased mental health challenges

Source: [*Brookings Institute \(2025\)*](#)



‘This is What I go Through’: Latinx Youth Facultades in Suburban Schools in the Era of Trump

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines reflections of 11 Latinx youth in Illinois and Colorado in their predominantly White, suburban high schools. We center the experiences and perspectives of Latinx youth, as we stand to gain insights into how they perceive their schools prepared and impacted their engagement for civic life. We highlight how youth from two distinct schools share similar reflections about their high school experiences and muddled approaches for civic life. We draw upon Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of facultad to examine how these particular youth engage their instincts, knowledge, and sensibilities to survive predominately White educational contexts. We then bring together literature that responds to the question about the role of schools and preparing young people to be engaged in socio-political discussions and action.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 24 January 2019
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KEYWORDS

Latinx youth; suburban education; race; social justice

Introduction

This article focuses on the voices of Latinx youth as they reflect on their experiences navigating and surviving Whiteness and White supremacy in two suburban communities just outside Chicago, Illinois and Denver, Colorado. As the population of Latinx students continues to rise in suburban schools, we examine the reflections of Latinx youth who attend[ed] predominantly White, well-resourced high schools during the 2016 elections and the current presidency of Donald Trump to understand how their experiences compared across contexts. Our collaboration as two Latinx scholar-educators, and as former students of predominantly White, suburban schools, served as an entry point to view one another’s distinct projects with youth in these contexts and better understand the educational experiences of Latinx youth during this particular moment in time. In theorizing from our own experiences, we continuously found overlap and intersecting points of interest that are important for better understanding Latinx education, as a field of study. Our upbringing in the Chicagoland suburbs facilitated some of our relationships with our participants and our understanding of their experiences attending predominantly White, well-resourced, suburban schools. This provided a base for thinking about and researching what these contexts are like for Latinx youth in suburban schools during an era of resurgent White supremacy and xenophobia brought on by the Trump

“I can’t think of any other time when my grades have mattered the most than after this election. If anything happens to me at least I have good grades, [to] build on my case. Maybe if I’m excellent they won’t kick me out. The fear is so real. Right now, we don’t know what’s going to happen. My parents tell me, ‘Do well in school.’ So really, I’m worth a grade right now. I want to excel in academics. Hopefully, I’m one of the good ones.”

- Jesus, undocumented Latinx student

What does it mean to advocate & be in solidarity with immigrant/refugee communities?

“We should assume that all of our public classrooms-no matter where we teach-are mixed-status classrooms that include U.S. citizen and undocumented students that deserve our attention. This means that we should create curriculum that identifies the strengths of immigrant communities and also critically examines the structural barriers they face in the U.S.”

- Ariana Mangual Figueroa



Photo of Dr. Ariana Mangual Figueroa and cover of her book

Knowing Students' Rights

- **Can U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents enter schools?**
 - Schools have historically been regarded “sensitive locations” and viewed as protected areas that were off-limits for immigration enforcement actions – this [policy](#) changed in 2025.
 - ICE can only enter a school with a valid court order or judicial warrant.
- **Can schools share student records with ICE?**
 - Only with valid court order or judicial warrant.
- **Can I ask a student or their family to share their legal status?**
 - No! Schools are legally forbidden from asking about immigration status.

Supporting & Advocating for Students

- Making sure that students and their families understand their rights.
- Remain updated on local community resources, familiarize yourself with whatever protocols your school might have.
- It's okay to talk about what's happening with your students – it's okay not to know all the answers – students have questions and need space to talk and process.

Where do we go from here?

As you continue develop your teaching identity, as you develop your commitments to equity and justice, I want you think back to the core themes and questions of EDUC 201.



Photo of Valeria Luiselli and cover of her book

Tell me how it ends, Mamma, my daughter asks.

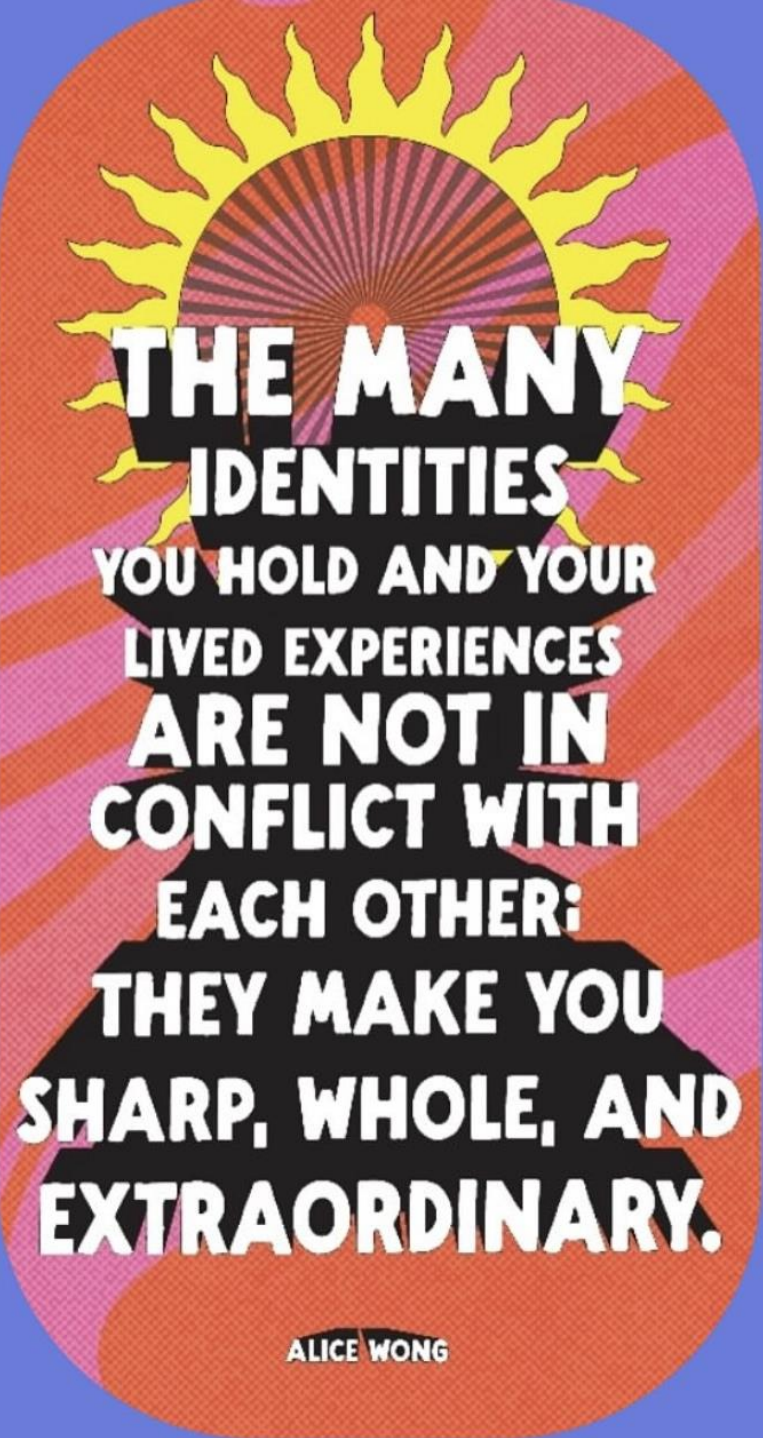
I don't know.

Tell me what happens next?

Sometimes I make up an ending, a happy one. But most of the time I just say:

I don't know how it ends yet.

- Valeria Luiselli



Where do we go from here?

As you continue develop your teaching identity and commitments to equity and justice, I want you think back to the core themes and questions of EDUC 201.

EDUC 201 Takeaways

- Its all about relationships, without them you will struggle!
- Build community with colleagues, students, and families.
- Listen! Embrace the role of learner – being a reflective educator will go a long way.
- Embrace humanizing, asset-based practices.
- Know yourself – how are your identities and experiences shaping your approach to teaching?
- Be nosy, make time to know what is happening outside of your classroom.
- Strong educators have high expectations, rules, but that doesn't mean you have to be a dictator, are there opportunities for you to empower students in decision-making, sharing power?