

Article

Newcomer Children: Experiences of Inclusion and Exclusion, and Their Outcomes

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Abstract

This article explores the potential inclusion and exclusion factors affecting the developmental outcomes of immigrant children, and examines the influence of inclusive school environment, social/psychological isolation, and perceived discrimination by peers and teachers on the psychosocial and academic adjustment of immigrant children. Our study is based on a subset of data from the New Canadian Children and Youth Study (NCCYS), a national longitudinal survey including 515 foreign-born immigrant children (11 to 13 years) from three ethnic groups (Mainland China, Hong Kong, the Philippines) living in the Montreal and Toronto metropolitan areas, Canada. The results show that after controlling for socio-demographic background variables, teachers' discriminatory attitudes and psychological isolation contribute to the prediction of risk for immigrant children's self-esteem, social competence, and academic performance. Inclusive school environment has a significant effect on social competence and academic performance of immigrant children. Peer discrimination is also associated with self-esteem and social competence. These findings suggest that inclusive school environment, social/psychological isolation, and discrimination are critical factors affecting the developmental outcomes of immigrant children that, in turn, are connected to future prospects for their eventual inclusion and participation in other social, economic, and political venues of the host country.

Keywords

immigrant children; discrimination; psychological isolation; school environment; social isolation

Issue

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1. Introduction

For immigrant children, the experience of migration comprises uncertainty and significant changes in the socio-cultural, physical, and psychological aspects of their lives. It is related to the issues about what it means to belong to and thus to be included in or excluded from particular social settings. This article explores the experiences of new comer immigrant children and their parents in relation to social inclusion

and exclusion within the school context through their own accounts.

Much previous research involving children's social inclusion and exclusion has mainly focused on adult-centred approach with children recognized as passive recipients of economic and social resources of their parents (Jackson & Scott, 2002; Mejer & Siermann, 2000; Micklewright & Stewart, 2000). The conditions for social inclusion or exclusion of children have been determined mostly by the circumstances of their fami-

lies, particularly parents, in terms of family structure, income, and employment status. While it is important to understand how children are included or excluded based on adult-constructed concepts of inclusion, it is also critical to look beyond the adult-focused models or family poverty-focused models (Micklewright, 2002; Phipps & Curtis, 2001; Ridge, 2002). The importance of a children's perspective is reflected clearly in Article 12 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as follows: "all children are capable of expressing their own views; children should have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them and; children's views should be taken seriously in accordance with their age and maturity" (United Nations Human Rights, n.d., p. 4). It is imperative that children's own experiences are not rendered invisible by concentrating purely on the needs of parents or families.

There are some studies involving children in expressing their views of social inclusion and exclusion. According to the study conducted by the Canadian Council on Children and Youth (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2002), the focus group with children reported that social inclusion was related to the context of participating in and contributing to their community. They described the concept of social inclusion as having a significant attachment to people, specifically a group of friends and peers. Another Canadian research conducted by Frazee (2003) found that social inclusion was defined by the youth group in terms of participating, being understood, being accepted, and belonging. As revealed by these studies, social interactions and social relationships are key factors for children and youth to describe the concepts of social inclusion and exclusion.

Furthermore it is also important to examine children's experiences from a developmental perspective. This article includes a sample of immigrant children in the transitional period from childhood to adolescence. The establishment of identity is a major developmental task for all youth (Broderick & Blewitt, 2006). Identity lays the foundation for how individuals view themselves and their future prospects. As part of the life course of immigrant children, identity processes are defined specifically by how individuals make meaning of their own experiences, and by the contexts they encounter at multiple levels including families and schools (Spencer, 2001; Spencer, Swanson, & Cunningham, 1991). The study of social inclusion and exclusion at school experienced by immigrant children in this transitional period can lead to insights into the factors that promote healthy social and academic adjustment.

The current article attempts to frame children's experiences of social inclusion and exclusion in their daily lives at school from children's own perspective—what they think of the concepts of inclusion and exclusion, and how these experiences affect their outcomes. Four potential factors are analyzed in relation to social in-

clusion and exclusion that children may face in their new educational settings: social isolation (lack of social group participation), psychological isolation (feelings of disconnectedness from others), perceived peer discrimination (being rejected by peers), and perceived teacher discrimination (being rejected by teachers). The perception of inclusive school environment reported by parents is added to children's experiences since schools are significant social sites of immigrant family adaptation, including parents as well as their children. This article also examines whether the factors of inclusion/exclusion and children's outcomes are different between the two settlement cities selected in Canada: Montreal and Toronto. A broader description of study objectives is presented after the study background.

2. Study Background

2.1. Social Isolation and Psychological Isolation

For immigrant children, schools are the most critical arena in which their development and major social interactions occur with profound consequences for their adaptation to the host society. However, newcomer children often face the significant differences of educational settings between their original countries and the host countries. As compared to native-born children, they encounter additional challenges related to school adaptation and social adjustment due to conflict between school and home cultural values, linguistic mastery of receiving country language (Duffy, 2003; Rummens, Tilleczek, Boydell, & Ferguson, 2008), and acculturation processes (Brown et al., 2013; Nigbur et al., 2008). For newcomer children, a main factor involved in the adaptation process of the new social settings is the social relationships with significant others such as peers and teachers (Fulgini, 1998; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). Social relationships play a critical role in the growth of sense of belonging as members of social groups as well as in the development of secure social identity and social skills. With respect to the children's experiences of social exclusion at school, the current article focuses on two aspects: first, social isolation which is defined as the lack of opportunities to participate in social group activities with their peers and; second, psychological isolation which refers to feelings of disconnectedness from others, including peers and teachers.

To promote positive peer interactions of immigrant children, participating in social groups provide opportunities to learn new kinds of pro-social skills, to develop new value systems through mutual interactions among group members, and to gain acceptance into new peer groups (Chen, Chang, He, & Liu, 2005). Previous studies indicated that peer interactions serve as buffers to loneliness and as bolsterers of self-confidence and self-efficacy providing emotional sus-

tenance (Gibson, Gandara, & Koyama, 2004; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008; Way & Phal, 2001) that supports the development of significant psychological competencies. In contrast, negative peer interactions are associated with poor academic performance and a range of harmful psychological consequences such as low self-esteem and social anxiety (Juvonen & Graham, 2001; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009). Social group engagement can be beneficial where group members share similar values and obligations in terms of academic achievement, and may provide aspiration for children. The study on Asian-American children (Zhou & Kim, 2006) demonstrated that the academic success of immigrant children is related to the social group engagement in the provision of academic enrichment.

Connections with caring teachers and adults at school can be an important protective factor for immigrant children's psychological isolation. These social relationships can provide immigrant youth with compensatory attachments, critical encouragement, information about new cultural norms, practices, and tools vital to success in school (Roffman, Suárez-Orozco, & Rhodes, 2003; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008, 2009). Research on relationships with teachers demonstrated that children showed better health outcomes and higher levels of self-esteem when they felt cared for and understood by their teachers (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). Crosnoe, Johnson and Elder (2004) found that stronger teacher-student bonding in school was related to higher academic achievement for Hispanic American girls. Other studies (LaRusso, Romer, & Selman, 2008; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009) also indicated that children who felt rejected by teachers were more likely to disengage from school, thereby jeopardizing their emotional adjustment and academic achievement.

2.2. Perceived Discrimination by Peers and Teachers

Discrimination is a salient stressor that immigrant families encounter after migration. At school, discrimination expressed by teachers and other students is a significant source of social exclusion (Micklewright, 2002). With regard to social exclusion by peers, ethnic discrimination can be expressed in many different ways. Peer victimization is an example of types of discrimination among children and youth at school. Peer victimization based on one's ethnic group membership tends to be interpreted as peer discrimination (Verkuyten, Kinket, & Wielen, 1997). This article focuses on *ethnic* victimization based on one's ethnicity rather than *personal* victimization. Verkuyten et al. (1997) refer specifically to those situations where negative peer experiences are related to children's ethnic group membership. Peer victimization can take many different forms and ranges from overt behaviour such as physical and verbal aggression (bullying) to indirect forms, for instance,

ignoring or spreading rumours about the victimized child. Previous studies of perceived discrimination have focused on the relationship between psychological outcomes and the prevalence of discrimination towards children from diverse ethnic background. Social rejection and exclusion from significant others are connected to self-doubts and produce low self-esteem, while social acceptance is associated with self-confidence and produce high self-esteem (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Graham's study (2006) revealed that children who perceive high levels of peer ethnic victimization based on one's ethnic background, experience psychological distress such as self-blaming attributions. Oppendal, Roysamb and Heyerdahl (2005) found that perceived discrimination reported by first generation youths was a significant predictor of emotional problems. Such existing evidence about the effects of negative peer experience on self-esteem suggests that perceived discrimination may influence other adaptive social outcomes such as pro-social behavior and social skills (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Mounts & Steinberg, 1995). In recent research with data from the national longitudinal study of immigrant children and youth in Canada, Oxman-Martinez et al. (2012) demonstrated the link between perceived discrimination and negative outcomes such as low self-esteem and less social competence.

Research on academic adjustment of immigrant students (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009) suggested that students belonging to ethnic minority groups experienced negative ethnic stereotypes and diminished academic expectations by teachers and other staff because of their ethnic background. Mansouri and Kamp (2007) found that perceived discrimination was related to negative consequences in educational outcomes among immigrant groups, suggesting that some immigrant children experienced considerable disadvantage in school, particularly related to discrimination or "racism" practiced by teachers. It also showed that these negative social experiences are associated with lower student achievement. As well, perceived discrimination from teachers has been found to predict lower grades and negative academic self-concept (Davison, Guerrero, Barajas, & Thomas, 1999).

2.3. Parental Perceptions of School Environment

Discourses associated with notions of inclusion and exclusion in formal educational schooling have been documented by an increasing number of scholars (Ainscow, 1999; De Haan, 1999; Dei et al., 2000; Evans et al., 2001; Klasen, 2000). As social inclusion is understood with particular reference to students from diverse minority groups, Dei et al. (2000) define an inclusive school as one in which "every student is able to connect with the school's social environment, cultural and organizational life". Research on educating immi-

grant students (Rong & Preissle, 1998; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2008; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) highlights the following significant factors related to inclusive school environment for immigrant families: welcoming attitudes created by school policies and staff; high academic expectations for all children regardless of their backgrounds that facilitate students' academic engagement and success in school; respect for heritage cultures and languages; and an emotionally and physically safe school climate. Therefore, within these inclusive school contexts, immigrant students seem to feel proud of their school and enjoy their school lives.

There are migration-related issues that may contribute to immigrant parents' perceptions of their children's school environment: a limited knowledge of how the host educational system works; cultural differences in expectations between immigrant families and schools; and a misunderstanding arising from language issues and customs. Accordingly, in many cases, immigrant parents are often less involved in schools, as indicated by previous research (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Ramirez, 2003; Schofield, 2006). Carreon et al.'s study (2005) showed the negative experiences of parents' interactions with schools: feelings of exclusion from school activities, communication difficulties with school staff, and a sense that their contributions were not valued. The possible dissonance between immigrant families and the educational environment may increase the risk of disengagement in schools which, in turn, negatively influence children's psychosocial and academic adjustment.

For foreign-born immigrant children and their parents, parental perception of inclusive school environment may be particularly significant in relation to children's experiences of social inclusion/exclusion and their outcomes. Immigrant families including both parents and their children concurrently face similar resettlement challenges such as adaptation and acculturation to the new social settings. As the school is one of the major social institutions encountered outside their homes, immigrant parents' perceptions of school environment may provide additional information regarding the levels of social inclusion or exclusion at schools. While there has been bare research attention to the relation between parental perception of school environment and children's adjustment, a recent study on immigrant parents' school perception and their children's adjustment (Hamilton et al., 2011) revealed that parental negative perception of school environment was associated with children's emotional distress and physical aggression.

2.4. Differential Regional Effects on Children's Experiences of Social Inclusion and Exclusion, and Outcomes

This study examines whether the factors of inclu-

sion/exclusion and children's outcomes are different between the two urban settlement cities selected in Canada: the greater Montreal (Quebec) and the Toronto (Ontario) areas. While Canada is a multicultural country, the Federal Canadian policy of multiculturalism is supplemented by provincial and municipal policies, including those in Quebec (Montreal) and Ontario (Toronto). Quebec differs from the other provinces, focusing on the policy of interculturalism rather than multiculturalism (Barett, 2014). It is characterized as essentially multicultural and diverse, but only under the framework that establishes French as the public language (Alain-Gustave & Iacovino, 2008). Although the Quebec policy emphasize the main components of multiculturalism - heritage cultural maintenance and the encouragement of full social participation by all ethno-cultural communities, French language and culture are given a privileged status (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008). There are two main grounds addressed in the current article that contribute to making differences in the experiences of inclusion and exclusion between these two regions: first, immigration policies and practices, and second, educational policies and practices. In terms of immigrant policies, while the government of Canada is responsible for determining national standards and objectives for immigration across all provinces including Quebec and Ontario, under *the 1991 Canada-Quebec Accord*, the Canadian federal government and the Quebec government share the responsibilities for immigration to Quebec (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006). The government of Quebec has the right to select most immigrants destined to the Quebec province and is responsible for the linguistic and cultural integration of permanent residents. Given the different approaches of immigration policies and practices between Quebec and Ontario, it is expected that migration experiences of immigrant families in terms of social inclusion and exclusion may vary across regions. Moreover, federal-provincial division of responsibility for resettlement can be a source of inequity. Although the federal Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program provides funding for settlement programs, the amount of money spent per immigrant varies widely from province to province (Ministry of Supply and Services, 1988). Inequities translate into differential access to language training, day care, job training programs and health services, each of which may affect the adaptation of migrant parents and their children. With regard to education, Section 93 of *the Constitution Act of 1867* designated education as a matter of provincial jurisdiction, considering an essential condition to protect regional cultural identities (Government of Canada, n.d.). *The Constitution Act of 1867* outlined the distribution of power between the federal government and provincial governments. As a result, there is a great deal of variation in Canada in the regulation of education among the provinces.

3. Study Objectives

Existing research has identified a number of factors that contribute to immigrant children's psychosocial and academic adjustment. However, very limited attention has been given to the importance of framing experiences of social inclusion and exclusion within the school context mainly based on the child-perspective in particular for first-generation immigrant children in early adolescence whose experiences and perceptions may be different from other children. The current article seeks to address this gap.

It first explores the potential inclusion and exclusion factors from the perspective of the child that may affect children's outcomes: social isolation, psychological isolation, perceived peer discrimination, and perceived teacher discrimination. In addition, given the fact that first-generation immigrant parents and their children simultaneously go through adaptation processes in the host society including educational settings, parental perception of inclusive school environment is examined as a predictor of inclusion and exclusion experiences in relation to children's outcomes. Secondly it analyses the influence of the potential inclusion and exclusion factors on children's self-esteem, social competence and academic grades. Finally, it investigates whether the factors of inclusion/exclusion and children's outcomes are different between the two settlement cities: the greater Montreal (Quebec) and Toronto (Ontario) areas.

4. Methods

4.1. Data

The current study is based on a subset of data from the New Canadian Children and Youth Study (NCCYS), a national longitudinal survey of the health and well-being of approximately 4,000 immigrant children living in Montreal, Toronto, the Prairies (Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary), and Vancouver in Canada (Beiser et al., 2010). Children participating in the survey were either foreign-born or Canadian-born into families in which at least one parent had immigrated to Canada within the ten years preceding the study's beginnings. They were also in one of two age-defined inception cohorts at the time of the survey: 4–6 years and 11–13 years of age.

Our article focuses on a sub-sample of the full survey, with 515 foreign-born immigrant children (11 to 13 years) from three ethnic groups (Mainland China, Hong Kong, the Philippines) living in the Montreal and Toronto metropolitan areas, Canada. These three Asian groups were selected as the national-level samples of the NCCYS across all sites because, during the decades preceding the initiation of the NCCYS, they were the leading source countries for Canadian immigration (Beiser et al., 2010; Citizenship and Immigration Cana-

da, n.d.). The Montreal and Toronto metropolitan areas represented at the research period, the Canada's largest urban areas that had the highest proportion of foreign-born population (Chui, Tran, & Maheux, 2007). From the sample of this article, 65.4% were recent newcomers (less than 5 years in Canada).

4.2. Sampling and Procedures

The NCCYS used respondent-driven snowball sampling strategies in order to identify hard-to-reach and highly mobile immigrant populations during the beginning years of resettlement (further details of the study design available in Beiser et al., 2010). Representatives from each of the targeted ethno-cultural communities in each city were invited to become members of Community Advisory Councils (CAC). After identifying families from their respective communities who fit NCCYS inclusion criteria (a. length of time in Canada—less than 10 years; and b. two age cohorts—4 to 6 years old or 11 to 13 years old), CAC members contacted potential sample families to request permission to introduce a research team member to explain the study and to obtain written consent to participate. Interviews were conducted by bilingual interviewers in the home of the family and took approximately 2 to 3 hours. The NCCYS received ethics approval from the universities involved in the research, including University of Montreal and McGill University in Montreal and University of Toronto in Toronto in order to cover the greater Montreal and Toronto areas.

4.3. Instruments and Measures

Structured interview instruments were used to complete the NCCYS survey, including five questionnaires developed by the New Canadian Children and Youth Study (NCCYS) and the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY): Demographic Information, Parent about Family, Parent about Child, Child about Child, and Child Identity. Standard back-translation procedures were utilized to ensure cultural equivalence of concepts in the different languages of the study. All questionnaires were translated from English to each of the heritage languages (i.e., Mandarin, Cantonese, and Tagalog). The project team consulted with the specifically formed Ethno-cultural Community Advisory Councils for the appropriateness of questions as well as language.

The variables used in the current article were drawn from the following questionnaires completed by two informants, the child and the *person most knowledgeable* (PMK) about the child (mostly the mother): Demographic Information (DI), Parent about Family (PAF), and Parent about Child (PAC) reported by PMK; and Child about Child (CAC) reported by the children themselves aged 11–13 years.

4.3.1. Dependent Variables

Three dependent variables were used to measure children's psychosocial functioning and academic performance: self-esteem, social competence, and academic grades.

Children's self-esteem was assessed using a four-item index measure (derived from the CAC questionnaire): I like the way I am; I have a lot to be proud of; a lot of things about me are good; and when I do something, I do it well. The self-esteem measure is a subscale of the General-Self Scale of the Marsh Self-Description Questionnaire developed by Marsh (Marsh, 1988). Each item has four response categories from 0.never to 3.most of the time. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for this scale is 0.82. Higher scores indicate a greater sense of positive self-esteem.

Social competence was measured by utilizing the social acceptance and close friendship scale derived from two sources, the Peer Relationships Subscale (Marsh, 1988) and the study by Beiser et al. (1993). It consists of four statements (derived from the CAC questionnaire): I have a lot of friends; I get along easily with others my age; others my age want me to be their friend; and most others my age like me. Each item has four response categories from 0.strongly disagree to 3.strongly agree. Its reliability coefficient is 0.74. Higher scores represent higher levels of social competence.

Academic grades (Grade Point Averages derived from the CAC questionnaire) were used to assess children's academic performance. Children's factual grades were reported in either letter grades or percentages. These grades were transformed to a ten-point Likert scale from 1. F or <50% to 10. A or >90%.

4.3.2. Independent Variables

Inclusive school environment was assessed using a six-item index measure (derived from the PAC questionnaire) (Beiser et al., 2010): parents are made to feel welcome in this school; this school offers parents opportunities to be involved in school activities; children are very proud of their school; most children in this school enjoy being there; getting good grades is very important at this school; children are safe in this school. Response choices ranged from 0.strongly disagree to 4.strongly agree. The reliability coefficient for this scale is 0.75.

The social isolation scale (derived from the CAC) contains four items asking how often the child participated in organized groups such as sports, music groups or lessons outside of class, community/church or other religious groups. Responses from each item ranged from 0.never to 3.two or three times a week. They were transformed into a dummy variable, coded as either 0.not socially isolated (participating in any organized groups) or 1.socially isolated (never participating in any organized groups).

Psychological isolation (derived from the CAC) was measured by a single question about the child's feeling of psychological isolation or exclusion at school: the child feels like an outsider or left out of things at school. It has a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 0.never to 4.all the time.

Perceived peer discrimination was measured by two statements of youth's discrimination experiences (derived from the CAC questionnaire), asking whether they felt that they had been treated unfairly by peers: by other students at school in *direct* forms of hostile behaviours (hitting, name-calling, pushing, being insulted in front of people, threatening) and; by other students at school in *indirect* forms of hostile behaviours (ignoring, excluding in social interaction). For children respondents, to facilitate understanding of discrimination experiences, the discrimination questions were preceded by the following introduction: "People sometimes get treated unfairly because of who they are—I mean because they look different, were born outside of Canada, speak with an accent, or because of the color of their skin. I want you to think about the last month and tell me whether you were treated unfairly because of who you are". Each item contains five response choices from 0.never to 4.all the time. It has a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.67.

Perceived discrimination by teachers (derived from the CAC) was used to measure discriminatory attitudes or behaviours by teachers towards their students. It has three items related to physical appearance and language of children with immigrant background: my teachers in general treat me fairly; my teachers generally treat children equally regardless of how they look; and my teachers generally treat children equally regardless of how they speak. Each item has five response categories from 0.all the time to 4.never. The reliability coefficient is 0.74.

4.3.3. Demographic and Background Variables

Background variables included six characteristics: child sex (male or female), parent education, low income family (poverty), ethnic group, length of time since arrival in Canada (years), and settlement region (Toronto or Montreal). Parent education (less than bachelor's degree or bachelor's degree/higher), was constructed as a dichotomized variable.

Family poverty was measured by the Low Income Cut-offs (LICO) of Statistics Canada based on total household income during the 12 months prior to the interview. Canada has no official poverty measure and the LICO is a relative measure based on family size and community size (Lightman, 2003). For the purpose of this study (focusing on family poverty), data for the family income level were re-coded by the LICO: families with the adjusted income below 75% of the LICO were classified as living in poverty. This definition includes a

correction of income level for both family size and place of residence. A household income above 75% of the LICO was coded as *above poverty line*, and a household income below 75% of the LICO was coded as *below the poverty line*. To retain cases with income missing data and to avoid uncertain assumptions of imputed data, another category for *income not reported* was created (Beiser et al., 2010). Among the three categories, *above poverty line* was used as the reference group in regression models.

Ethnic group is considered as a proxy measure in the current study as it is the marker that differentiates one group from the other group in terms of their history, social and cultural heritage. To control for ethnic heterogeneity, two dummy variables were included in the regression models: Hong Kong and Philippines. Among three ethnic groups, Mainland Chinese group was used as the reference category because it represents the largest group of immigrants in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2008).

5. Statistical Analyses

Descriptive analyses of the frequencies and means of all study variables were first performed to describe the sample and characteristics. Bivariate analyses (independent-samples t-tests and Chi-square tests) were used to compare mean/sampling distribution differ-

ences of predictors and outcome variables between the two settlement regions, Toronto and Montreal. In addition, Pearson Correlation was performed for the bivariate correlations between dependent variables and each of the predictors.

To address the study objectives, a series of multiple regression models were tested for each of the three dependent variables. They examined the effects of children's experiences of inclusion and exclusion (inclusive school environment, social isolation, psychological isolation, perceived peer discrimination, and perceived teacher discrimination) on their developmental outcomes (self-esteem, social competence, and academic grades), controlling for background variables.

6. Results

Descriptive statistics for demographic and socioeconomic characteristics are given in Table 1. The sample consisted of 49.5% males and 50.5% females. 60.0% of PMK (mostly the mother) had a bachelor's degree. Based on the family income, 44.4% of the immigrant families lived in poverty. The percentages of ethnic origin were 40.2% for Mainland China, 28.9% for Hong Kong, and 30.9% for the Philippines. Average length of time in Canada was 4.3 years. The percentages of settlement region were 50.1% for Toronto and 49.9% for Montreal.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of study variables.

	Mean/Total Scores	Percentage	S.D.	Range
<i>Background variables</i>				
Child sex (female)	50.5%			
PMK education (bachelor's degree)	60.0%			
Family income (poverty)	44.4%			
Ethnic group	Mainland Chinese	40.2%		
	Hong Kong Chinese	28.9%		
	Filipino	30.9%		
Length of time (years)	4.33		3.15	1–13
Settlement region (Montreal)	49.9%			
<i>Predictor variables</i>				
School inclusion	17.04		2.85	0–24
Social isolation	18.9%			
Psychological isolation	0.85		0.94	0–4
Perceived peer discrimination	0.81		1.42	0–8
Perceived teacher discrimination	1.54		2.32	0–12
<i>Dependent variables</i>				
Self-esteem	8.57		2.73	0–12
Social competence	11.57		2.45	0–16
Academic performance (grades)	8.44		1.34	4–10

Table 2 shows mean/total scores and proportions for each of the study variables including demographic background variables, predictors and outcome variables, by settlement region. Significant differences were found for family income (poverty), ethnic group, inclusive school environment, and social isolation. The results indicated that more than half of the Montreal sample (53.2%) lived in poverty (a household income below 75% of the LICO), as comparing with 35.9% of the Toronto sample. For the percentage of ethnic group, the Montreal sample included higher proportion of mainland Chinese group (45.5%), compared to 34.9% in the Toronto sample. The scale scores for the inclusive school environment were significantly different between the two settlement regions; the Toronto sample reported a higher level of inclusive school environment than did the Montreal sample. Immigrant children from the greater Montreal area scored higher than children from the greater Toronto area on social isolation. Perceived peer discrimination was marginally significant ($p < 0.10$) although this did not reach the .05 level of statistical significance. Montreal immigrant children reported higher scores of perceived peer discrimination than did Toronto immigrant children.

Due to significant regional differences in poverty and ethnic group among the background variables as presented in Table 2, subsequent multivariate analyses

were conducted (not provided in table) to take those regional effects into account. After controlling for background variables (child sex, parental education, poverty, ethnic group, and length of years), regional differences in three predictor variables remained significant in the same directions: inclusive school environment ($F [8, 513] = 8.018, p < .01$); social isolation ($\chi^2 [df=8] = 7.307, p < .01$); peer discrimination ($F [8, 498] = 1.345, p < .05$). No significant regional differences in outcome variables were found.

A correlation matrix between the predictors and dependent variables is illustrated in Table 3. Inclusive school environment was positively correlated with children's social competence. Social isolation was negatively correlated with academic grades. Psychological isolation and perceived teacher discrimination were negatively correlated with all psychosocial functioning variables and academic grades. A negative correlation was also found between perceived peer discrimination and self-esteem as well as social competence.

Multiple regression analyses were performed to determine the relationship between the predictor variables and children's outcome variables. Table 4 illustrates the associations of inclusive school environment, social/psychological isolation, perceived discrimination, with psychosocial functioning and academic grades, controlling for the background variables.

Table 2. Study variables by settlement region.

Variables	Mean/Total Scores or Percentage		Statistical Test (<i>t</i> or χ^2 /Fisher's Exact Test)	<i>P</i> -Value
	Toronto	Montreal		
<i>Background variables</i>				
Child sex (female)	49.6%	51.4%	<i>2-sided</i>	$p = .725$
PMK education (bachelor's degree)	63.2%	56.8%	<i>2-sided</i>	$p = .151$
Family income (poverty)	35.9%	53.2%	<i>2-sided</i>	$p = .000^{***}$
Mainland Chinese	34.9%	45.5%		
Ethnic Group Hong Kong Chinese	33.7%	24.1%	$\chi^2 = 7.71$	$p = .021^*$
Filipino	31.4%	30.4%		
Length of time (years)	4.37	4.29	$t = .28$	$p = .783$
<i>Predictor variables</i>				
School inclusion	17.42	16.65	$t = 3.10$	$p = .002^{**}$
Social isolation	13.9%	24.4%	<i>2-sided</i>	$p = .005^{**}$
Psychological isolation	.91	.78	$t = -1.59$	$p = .113$
Perceived peer discrimination	.70	.92	$t = -1.76$	$p = .083$
Perceived teacher discrimination	1.61	1.48	$t = .55$	$p = .541$
<i>Dependent variables</i>				
Self-esteem	8.70	8.45	$t = -1.06$	$p = .288$
Social competence	11.61	11.53	$t = .36$	$p = .717$
Academic performance	8.48	8.40	$t = .69$	$p = .491$

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Correlations between predictor variables and dependent variables.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1.School inclusion	-							
2.Social isolation	.027	-						
3.Psychological isolation	-.068	.105*	-					
4.Peer discrimination	-.059	-.019	.210***	-				
5.Teacher discrimination	-.036	-.041	.210***	.089	-			
6.Self-esteem	.041	-.052	-.160***	-.150**	-.165***	-		
7.Social competence	.143***	-.046	-.290***	-.218***	-.185***	.309***	-	
8.Academic performance	.034	-.115*	-.114*	-.073	-.186***	.226***	.099*	-

Note: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests).

Table 4. Regressions of psychosocial functioning and academic performance on predictor variables.

	Self-esteem			Social Competence			Academic Performance		
	B	β	S.E.	B	β	S.E.	B	β	S.E.
<i>Background variables</i>									
Sex(female)	-.196	-.036	.260	.392	.079	.221	.357**	.132	.124
PMK education	.032	.006	.326	.135	.027	.275	.073	.027	.153
Poverty	.167	.030	.295	.403	.080	.248	-.197	-.072	.139
Hong Kong	-.266	-.044	.506	.959*	.176	.427	-.929***	-.312	.240
Filipino	-.210	-.035	.343	.620*	.114	.291	-.897***	-.299	.165
Length of time	.077	.085	.063	.003	.003	.053	.021	.049	.030
Region(Montreal)	-.248	-.045	.280	.176	.036	.238	-.064	-.024	.133
<i>Predictor variables</i>									
School inclusion	.013	.013	.048	.108**	.125	.041	.046*	.097	.023
Social isolation	-.324	-.046	.338	-.177	-.028	.286	-.394*	-.112	.163
Psychological isolation	-.455**	-.159	.145	-.609***	-.236	.123	-.050	-.035	.070
Peer discrimination	-.196*	-.104	.092	-.265***	-.156	.078	-.056	-.061	.044
Teacher discrimination	-.132*	-.112	.059	-.139**	-.130	.050	-.069*	-.115	.029
Constant	9.175***		.956	9.784***		.815	8.255***		.454
R^2	.076			.186			.167		
Adjusted R^2	.047			.161			.141		

Notes: Significant differences appear in boldface; * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

The first regression model for self-esteem accounted for 4.7 percent of the variance. The results revealed that psychological isolation, peer discrimination and teacher discrimination made significant contributions to explaining variation in self-esteem scores. Children who were psychologically isolated were more likely to show low levels of self-esteem. Higher levels of perceived discrimination by peers and teachers were associated with lower levels of self-esteem

For the social competence scale, the predictor variables accounted for 16.1 percent of the variance. Inclusive school environment, psychological isolation, perceived discrimination by peers and teachers were highly significant in relation to social competence. Higher levels of inclusive school environment were associated with greater social competence. Psychological isolation was negatively related to social competence. Immigrant children perceiving more discrimination by peers and teachers rated themselves as being less socially competent.

The last regression model for child academic adjustment measured by academic grades accounted for

14.1 percent of the variance. Inclusive school environment, social isolation, and perceived teacher discrimination were significant in relation to academic grades. The effect of inclusive school environment was positively related to academic grades. Social isolation was significantly associated with academic grades, indicating that children who felt socially isolated were more likely to show lower academic grades. Among demographic variables, child sex and ethnic group made significant contributions to academic grades. Females reported higher scores of academic grades than males. Immigrant children from the Mainland Chinese group scored higher than children from the Hong Kong and the Filipino groups on academic grades.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

This article has been guided by the research objectives concerning the potential inclusion and exclusion factors of immigrant children in school settings, and the relationships between these factors and children's out-

comes. Overall the findings demonstrate that the experiences of inclusion and exclusion contribute to children's psychosocial and academic adjustment.

Participating in social group activities significantly increase peer interactions and social acceptance in terms of social inclusion, as revealed by the study on Canadian children (Canadian Council on Social Development, 2002). Positive peer interactions and affective bonds established by children in social groups can play an important role in determining children's better outcomes. The results of our study indicated that the experience of social group disengagement was significantly associated with low levels of academic grades, but not with psychosocial adjustment. The link between social group participation and academic adjustment is supported by an Asian immigrant children's study (Zhou & Kim, 2006) showing that the academic success stems in large part from the role of the social groups, providing positive academic behaviour and aspiration. For newly arrived immigrant students, forming the companionship in social groups seems to be especially important, since these peers can serve as significant sources of information on school culture and orientation, which leads to positive school adaptation and better academic performance (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009). In many cases, however, participating in organized social groups requires parents' financial support that is often lacking in recent immigrant families. Moreover, because of immigrant parents' lack of time and lack of knowledge of social activities for their children, foreign-born parents are less likely to become involved in their children's social lives. It is required for school professionals to provide new and different strategies for grouping children to facilitate immigrant children's peer interactions and develop social skills. A limitation in our study is the lack of distinction between involvement in different types of social groups such as academically oriented-groups vs. recreational activity groups, or co-ethnic community groups vs. mainstream social groups. Future research needs to examine how various social groups would influence differentially immigrant children and whether they positively or negatively impact children's outcomes.

Immigrant children also need to overcome important psychological aspects of exclusion. Our research found that psychological isolation was a significant exclusion factor in understanding the psychosocial adjustment of immigrant children, showing that psychological isolation was associated with low self-esteem and less social competence. For immigrant children, a sense of acceptance or a feeling of inclusion within the school community is a crucial part of their successful adaptation process since they have unique characteristics related to ethnicity and race as demonstrated by previous studies (Micklewright, 2002; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Immigrant status, unfavorable economic status, and discrimination may

provide additional challenges to form their potential friendships, compared to native-born children. They may have also limited access to supportive adults in schools. Teachers and school staff may be ill-equipped with the culturally sensitive skills and knowledge needed to work with diverse immigrant students. There is some research evidence that the presence of teachers with minority group backgrounds has a positive influence on minority student achievement (Schofield, 2006). School policies would benefit by recruiting teachers with ethnically diverse backgrounds in order to decrease the cultural distance between immigrant students and school, and to raise the educational opportunities of minority students.

Our study found that perceived discrimination at school was an important predictor of psychosocial and academic adjustment. The results suggest that discrimination by peers can constitute a critical source of social exclusion for immigrant children affecting negatively their outcomes. In particular, perceived peer discrimination based on ethnicity and migration backgrounds was associated with decreasing the likelihood of displaying self-esteem and social competence. This finding is supported by previous studies on immigrant children (Graham, 2006; Oxman-Martinez et al., 2012) highlighting the possibility of exclusion by peers that might result in impairing the development of friendships and decreasing self-esteem. The current study also found the link between perceived teacher discrimination and children's outcomes; the perception of teachers' discriminatory attitudes was significantly related to poor psychosocial adjustment as well as lower academic grades. Based on these findings, teachers can also be a potential agent of exclusion through failure to treat their students fairly regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. As an anti-discrimination policy within the school context that combats the obstacles hindering more participation and higher educational achievement of students from ethnic minorities, it is expected that initial teacher education and training programs such as integration and intercultural education for new teachers in multi-ethnic schools, should prepare teachers adequately for treating and teaching immigrant children.

The results showed that the parental perception of school environment was significantly related to children's social competence and academic grades, but not to self-esteem. These findings are consistent with relatively similar results of previous research (Hamilton et al, 2011) that negative immigrant parental perceptions of school environment influence children's maladjustment—emotional distress and behavioural problems. Since there is a paucity of research on the link between parental perceptions of school environment and children's outcomes, our findings add new empirical evidence regarding positive parental perceptions of school environment and children's healthy adjustment—social competence and academic grades. This

result also implies that the possible dissonance between immigrant families and the educational environment may deepen parental disengagement in schools affecting negatively the children's psychosocial and academic adjustment (Carreon et al, 2005; Ramirez, 2003; Schofield, 2006). As immigrant parents often tend to feel powerless, alienated, and culturally estranged from their children's school (Carreon et al, 2005; Shor & Bernhard, 2003), they need professional guidance and carefully structured programs to enhance effective ways to become more involved in the school lives of their children. Considering lack of language fluency, stresses of acculturation, and economic insecurity in particular during the beginning years of resettlement, outreach to immigrant parents should be a priority for schools: for instance, home visiting with involvement of co-ethnic community organizations and communication with parents in either their mother tongues or official languages.

When examining variations between the two settlement regions, we found significant differences in children's experiences of social isolation and peer discrimination, and parental perceptions of school environment while not in outcome variables. The regional differences in three predictor variables remained significant in the same directions even after controlling for demographic background variables. In our study sample, children from the Montreal region as compared with those from Toronto were more likely to show higher levels of social isolation and perceived peer discrimination. Moreover, Montreal parents also reported lower levels of inclusive school environment than those from Toronto. These results are less positive for the Montreal immigrant group. These findings may be related to differential official language requirements between Quebec and Ontario provinces: French and English, respectively. As the current study sample contains three Asian immigrant groups, Quebec's linguistic policy may magnify adaptation difficulties and resettlement stresses for Montreal immigrant children and their parents, in spite of compulsory French immersion classes. In Quebec, the educational provisions of the *Charter of the French Language* (Bill 101) in 1977 established the attendance of French language schools as the norm for all students including immigrant children (Driedger, 2003; McAndrew, 2004). One of the Charter's articles stipulates that all children under 16 must receive their primary and secondary education in French schools, unless one of the child's parents has received most of their education in English, in Canada, or the child has already received a substantial part of his/her education in English, in Canada. With respect to social isolation and peer discrimination, immigrant children are more likely to be at higher risk because of language barriers, language-dependent social skills and cultural norms such as initiating pro-social interactions and setting limits or boundaries with peers. Children's ability to communicate effectively

with peers is related to their language ability as well as their social behaviour such as their interactions with peers that either promote or hinder the development of healthy peer relationships (Von, Kochenderfer-Ladd, Perren, & Alsaker, 2010). For immigrant parents, insufficient proficiency in an official language may be the main barrier to both parental participation in children's socialization and involvement in children's schools. Implications raised from this issue for school professionals are related to the need to help immigrant children adapt better to their school settings by providing additional language means and social supports. As well, the services are required both for immigrant parents and teachers (in-service training): for instance, translation, interpretation, counselling and techniques for including newly-arrived parents in the education of their children.

Our results also showed that despite the presence of risk factors—social isolation, perceived peer discrimination, and lower levels of inclusive school perceptions, the Montreal immigrant children in our sample demonstrated no significant differences in the outcome variables as compared to their counterpart in Toronto. It seems that children in the Montreal group have protective or resilience factors contributing to psychosocial and academic adjustment. Further longitudinal research of the NCCYS is needed to explore protective factors to produce positive outcomes for those immigrant children who live under negative circumstances.

There are some limitations that should be noted. First, as the study results are based on cross-sectional data, the direction of causal relationships between study variables cannot be determined. Future longitudinal analyses with wave 2 data of the NCCYS should disentangle the direction of variable effects. Second, sample groups were recruited from the specific regions of the Greater Montreal in Quebec and Toronto in Ontario where the educational systems and structures are different from the other Canadian provinces. Thus, the findings must be interpreted with caution to the wider Canadian context. In addition, although we found many significant relationships between variables in our regression models in key areas of important child outcomes, the amount of variance explained varies only from about 5% to 16%, leaving a great deal of variance unaccounted for. Lastly, this study did not include school demographic variables such as majority or minority ethnic concentration and the number of minority group teachers. These school characteristics may have different consequences according to whether they bring social cohesion and mutual support or social disorganization within educational settings. Future research needs to consider these features of school environment.

In an ethnically diverse society, the phenomenon of ethno-cultural, linguistic and religious diversity characterizes the education systems of Canada. Formal schooling and educational-related issues have become more important in wider political discussions and

strategies regarding inclusion and exclusion, particularly with respect to children with diverse ethnic backgrounds. Educational institutions need to find ways to accommodate this diversity in their educational policies and practices. It is necessary that educational settings should develop a systematic effort to increase a better understanding of different cultures, a greater capacity to communicate with those from other cultures, along with positive attitudes toward other groups among both the majority and the minority.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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