

Book Review

Coady, M. R., Golombek, P., & Marichal, N. (Eds.). (2023). *Educating multilingual students in rural schools: Illuminating diversity in rural communities in the United States*. Brill.

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For decades, advocates of rural education have highlighted that rural students are often overlooked, considering them as a neglected minority (Azano & Stewart, 2015). In the same line, and for many decades, the field of multilingual education has recognized that the effectiveness of language teaching and learning is deeply impacted by teachers’ personal experiences, personalities, history as both language learners and instructors, and perspectives on teaching multilingual learners (Hong et al., 2022). It is within this convergence of topics that Coady, Golombek, and Marichal offer an edited volume that serves as a reflective reminder about the tensions that emerge in and from rural spaces as we strive to steer away from reproductive pedagogies and move toward the realm of transformative learning communities. In continuing to uncover the expansive concept of multilingualism, and to fight against pervasive neo-colonizing practices in our rural schools and communities, researchers and educators have long recognized the need to consider our identities as fluid and hybrid (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

For the reader who already has access to the demographic information which simplistically classifies individuals according to fixed notions of race and ethnicity, this information does very little in explaining the connection between hybrid identities, languaging practices, rurality, and how communities develop place-based practices that support “new” (a term that potentially erases the historical richness and legacy of our immigrant and migrant communities) culturally and linguistically diverse children, teenagers,

and their families. Because numbers can only do so much in capturing the lived experiences of multilingual learners in rural contexts, and because experiential recounts without critical theoretical foundations cannot produce change (Ladson-Billings, 2014), this edited volume becomes a vital resource in addressing this long-standing gap in our collective theory-research-practice triad. By presenting and resignifying a variety of historical insights, research studies, and lessons learned across states such as Florida, Indiana, Montana, and West Virginia, both editors and authors create a space for loving critiques and calls for action.

From the outset, Coady, Golombek and Marichal provide a descriptive framework and present key concepts on which readers should reflect as they move through the book. The editors start by addressing rurality as a multifaceted and dynamic concept, introducing the narratives that in subsequent chapters will shed light on the intricate interplay between individuals, communities, and their rural environments. The editors then effectively explain how their work is based on and inspired by a critical pedagogy of place, an educational approach that emphasizes the connection between education, place, and social justice in rural context.

A central theme within the book is that of the “multilingual learner” over the “English learner” as it highlights the richness and intricacy of language practices within these rural spaces. As such, the editors state that the term multilingual learner goes beyond a monolingual perspective and recognizes the value and significance of multiple languages and literacies as valuable resources for communication, cultural expression, and identity formation. Through this choice of terminology, the volume seeks to foster a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of the experiences, strengths, and needs of multilingual students and families in rural community spaces. Indeed, it recognizes students’ linguistic diversity as an asset and encourages educators and researchers to adopt a culturally

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responsive and multilingual approach to support their educational journeys.

In the first pages of the second chapter, Marichal takes us on what she calls a journey of “*melancolia*” where her story, as a Puerto Rican college student in New England, becomes the catalyst for her reflective problematization of place as an identity shaper. The chapter introduces a model of teacher knowledge that underscores the significance of the teacher-student relationship in supporting both academic and socio-emotional growth among rural secondary English learners. The author’s recognition of teachers’ personal characteristics, such as bilingualism, *hispanidad*, and faith, as potential sources of strength and connection in informing instructional practices is valuable and timely.

In chapter three, Li uses an insider-outsider theoretical framework to focus on a veteran elementary teacher, Ms. Payne, working in what she considers *her* rural community in Florida, where she belongs. Li seeks to answer the question, “What is the emotional journey of a rural teacher in working with multilingual learners?” (p. 50). Using Ms. Payne’s voice, Li describes the beginning of Ms. Payne’s teaching career and her process of becoming an ESOL-endorsed teacher and an advocate and a teacher activist to fight against cultural bias. This chapter clearly depicts the ups and downs, contradictory actions, and reactions faced by those educators who do not conform to the norms imposed by their rural communities and, in many ways, touches on issues of teacher retention and attrition.

One of the significant advancements in the field of rural education research emerges in chapter four, written by Reeves, who, through the lens of positioning theory and decolonizing scholarship, provides a description and critique of displacement and dispossession in rural America. Perhaps one of the greatest contributions of this chapter is the insightful lens that can broaden our understanding of contextual factors such as language ideologies and cultural power disparities—and how they are tied to the United States’ ongoing neocolonial project. For minoritized and racialized individuals, the limited identity spaces and pervasive stereotypes assigned to us continue to reflect outdated monolingual and monocultural norms that no longer accurately represent the diverse and multilingual nature of the rural communities we inhabit. By critically analyzing alternative community narratives in conjunction with prevailing ones, we can cultivate new insights and understanding concerning the concepts, ideologies, and interpersonal nuances that identity encompasses (Accurso & Mizell, 2020).

A captivating addition to the rural education agenda within this book is presented by Oudghiri, who continues with the quest to uncover and center Latinx paraeducators’ voices, bringing to readers’ attention that the limited literature on the personal and professional

histories of paraeducators who have migrated to the United States reflects a gap in research within the field of education, as well as a professional gap in educational systems’ conceptualization of these professionals. While paraeducators play a crucial role in supporting students and teachers in the classroom, their experiences as immigrants and the impact of migration on their personal and professional lives have received relatively little attention. With these elements on the table, Oudghiri provides a narrative inquiry which delves into the personal stories and reflections of two paraprofessionals, Daniela and Emilia, as they navigate their complex professional and community identities, their own experiences of migration and cultural adaptation, and the challenges they have encountered along the way. In line with the notion of “ensur[ing] inclusion of diverse community members by engaging families, diverse educators, and leaders in order to build a place-specific PD program” (Ankeny et al., 2019, p. 12), this chapter emphasizes the significance of place-based knowledge in the advocacy efforts of Daniela and Emilia, and, while their experiences in Indiana may be specific to that context, their stories are replicated throughout the country.

Remarkably, this book presents another addition to the body of literature concerning rural education through the contribution of Carjuzaa, who critically examines the categorization of American Indian/Alaska Native students as English learners and its implications, tracing and placing it within the longstanding issues stemming from brutally oppressive colonizing practices, inadequate academic support, unequal resource distribution, brutal disciplinary measures, and a lack of integration of Indigenous cultural knowledge and languages. By highlighting this oppressive historical legacy, including forced assimilation policies and the suppression of Native languages and cultures, Carjuzaa calls us to reexamine our own identity and positionality toward the English language categorization.

In chapter seven, Liu and colleagues highlight the challenges associated with identifying English learners in rural communities in West Virginia as well as with preparing teachers to effectively work with them. They discuss the “Improving Instruction” project, which aimed to address these challenges by providing professional development for teachers on accessible instruction and assessment for English learners. Additionally, the project established a multilingual parent-educator partnership to enhance collaboration between schools and families.

The final chapter of the book serves as a cohesive and reflective conclusion, gathering the key takeaways from the chapters as well as future directions for research. By problematizing our current approaches, we can strive to develop more inclusive and effective strategies for supporting multilingual learners. However, and although it is important to continually question and critically

examine our assumptions and practices to create equitable educational opportunities for all students, the book leaves the reader with an ever-present question regarding the lack of sustained institutional and systematic policy initiatives that could transcend individual and community-based efforts.

In short, *Educating Multilingual Students in Rural Schools: Illuminating Diversity in Rural Communities in the United States*, highlights the interconnectedness of our experiences and the complexity of our insider-outsider duality, which is so clearly depicted throughout the book. As such, this volume is suitable for both graduate and undergraduate courses in education, linguistics, and TESOL, as well as for pedagogical communities in inquiry.

While there is, undoubtedly, continuous work to be done in understanding and supporting rural multilingual learners beyond individual efforts, and part of this work will require examining and contesting structures of oppression, this edited volume successfully sheds light on the specific challenges and opportunities faced by actual communities and deepens our understanding of rural teachers and students in and out of schools. In doing so, the editors and authors leave the reader with a hope-informed, theoretically sound, and rigorous methodological toolbox of research studies, pedagogical interventions, and educational approaches while managing to do exactly what is promised in the title: *iluminar*, and I add, *iluminar el camino que tenemos por delante*.

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