

Educating Multilingual Students in Rural Schools

Illuminating Diversity in Rural Communities in the United States

Maria R. Coady, Paula Golombek and
Nidza V. Marichal (Eds.)



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Educating Multilingual Students in Rural Schools

*Illuminating Diversity in Rural Communities
in the United States*

Edited by

Maria R. Coady, Paula Golombek and Nidza V. Marichal



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Introduction

Maria R. Coady, Paula Golombek and Nidza V. Marichal

When we, Maria, Nidza, and Paula, each arrived at the cafetorium, a “common” high school event was taking place—college/career night—at the rural middle-high school in our neighboring county, we felt a sense of pride in this teacher’s accomplishment, her agency in organizing this event as part of her work in the Project STELLAR professional development (PD) program. Maria had conceptualized this PD program owing to her many years working with the educators and community in this setting; Nidza and Paula came aboard taking varied instructional and supportive roles. This evening, we helped set up chairs and tables, bringing in drinks, paper goods, and snacks. We also mingled with the parents to make them feel welcome and to break the ice. The teacher who had organized the event directed the students to help here or there, as their parents milled around, chatting with each other, and picking up pamphlets on the college application process, including financial aid info and application forms.

Take a closer look. This common event is uncommon. It is college night en español. Parents have brought in trays of food they cooked from their home cultural traditions. Some students are practicing lines for a play they will enact and some are practicing songs—todo en español. The organizing teacher, a Puerto Rican secondary Spanish teacher, greets the parents with a kiss on the cheek. The college and career counselor, a Puerto Rican professional from the local community college, knowingly guides the parents through key concerns of the college application process en español (in Spanish). Pamphlets on the application process, including financial aid info and application forms, are en español. Different tables were organized by the teacher according to various pertinent informational themes: college transcript information, seal of biliteracy affiliation, financial aid, and college entrance examination procedures and applications. Con amor, cariño y respeto (with love, affection, and respect), this college night is intentionally designed to support students and their families in a linguistically and culturally sustaining way in which these parents can engage, build relationships with each other and educators, and know that they and their language matter.

This college night took place in December before the shutdown that would happen some two months later. It is one short, but powerful story about PD and

educational research taking place in rural areas with increasing, changing, and hard to capture multilingual students and families. We know that this teacher's agency to create this event for these families did not emerge overnight. Her participation in various focus group activities allowed her to collaborate with other educators from the same rural school community but not necessarily from her middle-high school. Through these dialogic interactions, teachers shared personal and professional experiences, and they were able to establish and build trusting relationships while collaborating in multiple projects as a community. This teacher's idea to organize the college/career fair was a response to these PD experiences and her becoming critically aware of her 'place' and the inequities experienced by the multilingual (ML) students in her school.

This volume is a foray into an intersection of educational research that, in recent years, has garnered increasing attention nationally, in part due to the spotlight placed on rural communities from the COVID-19 pandemic surrounding the production of food by immigrant and migratory workers, and the digital connectivity divide between rural and non-rural communities. Rural ML students, and the educators who work with them, are as diverse in languages, cultures, and experiences as any subgroup in the United States. Yet as a scholarly community, we have not yet captured—either qualitatively or quantitatively—the lived experiences of rural ML students in schools nor the educators who work with them.

Currently, there are about five million identified K-12 public school ML students (MLs) in the United States. Recent data suggest that about 11% of ML students attend rural schools, and rural schools account for 1/3rd of all public schools in the country (Irwin et al., 2021). However, national data at the intersection of rurality and ML students is nebulous at best (Coady, 2020). We know little, in fact, about the kinds of language education programs that rural ML students attend, less about the languages that they speak and use at home and in the community, and have no national or state-level data on how rural MLs perform on tests of English language development. It is not that the data do not exist; rather, data that lie at the intersection of rurality and ML student learning is not readily obtainable.

Rural ML students attend schools across all 50 states, yet how states organize public schools for funding and resource allocation matters tremendously in how data are collected and presented. For example, in some states, school districts are organized by county classification, and one large county may be comprised of rural, small town, suburban, and urban schools. Thus, the district itself may not be classified as rural, and may not receive supplemental educational funding for rural and low income schools, but the ML students attending schools in that district may, indeed, be rural and/or low income. In similar

ways, data on MLs attending rural schools may be easily masked by superimposed geographic categories. Obtaining nuanced data on *rural ML* students such as educational program model (e.g., dual language immersion or English as a Second Language [ESL]), content area learning, standardized content area assessments, English language proficiency, home language and literacy proficiency, to name a few, are rarely accessible at an aggregate level (that is, rarely found at the state level). It remains difficult for scholars and advocates to engage in meaningful conversations surrounding the needs, resources, learning, and achievement of rural ML students and their families without data that describe and demonstrate how that subgroup of students is doing.

What we do know at the national level is based on the national teacher and principal survey (NTPS) and overview data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The NTPS consists of descriptive data derived from questionnaires conducted every two or three years. Educators responding to the NTPS in 2017–18 report that rural educators of MLs are less likely to use students' first language for language and literacy development, and rural high schools offer the lowest number of first language instructional programs or approaches to support MLs (NCES, 2018). Data from the National Teacher and Principal Survey (USED, 2016) indicate that only 62.7% of MLs in rural settings participated in instruction specifically designed to address their language learning needs. And while the number of MLs in the United States continues to grow steadily, there remains disproportionate growth of those students in rural settings (Johnson et al., 2018).

States play an important role in the policies, funding, and educational programs for rural ML students. States like Florida, for example, vehemently oppose the use of native language assessments (NLAs), which we consider to be foundational and essential in guiding instructional practices for all ML students (ESOL Florida, 2022a). Currently, about 35 states offer NLAs in their educational practices (ESOL Florida, 2022b; MPI, 2020; Tabaku et al., 2018). The use of NLAs can assist educators in learning what new immigrant ML students already know academically, in order to build on that knowledge for further learning. They can also be used as a way to measure student content area learning, such as on standardized tests. Rather than states lamenting what it would cost to produce and administer NLAs, the *real* focus should be on the actual cost of how much learning time is lost while educators of ML students try to unravel where to begin and how to differentiate their instruction for MLs.

Complicating the rural landscape of data on ML students is the role of the states. States determine how 'rurality' is defined and set guidelines for school funding. This is important because we know that (1) there are structural, financial inequities in funding allocations for schools based on the use of local

property taxes, where agricultural land is taxed at a lower rate; and (2) the unit (e.g., districts or towns/metropolitan areas) aligned to the state's definition of rurality influences the amount of additional funding that schools can obtain through federal programs such as Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP), which includes targeted funding for Rural and Low Income Schools (RLIS). Rural ML students and the educators who work with them continue to face these oppressive policies that limit equitable access to resources and opportunities. Addressing and disrupting these policies is at the core of the work we do with MLs in rural communities.

In order to fully grasp the research base on rural ML students and to advocate for programs, policies, and practices that address these inequities, we heeded the call to bring together scholars working in the field. We began this book as a way to set a footprint and corral the little scholarship we knew of taking place in this area nationally. We were not surprised to see that scholarship does take place in rural communities around the United States, yet just as Coladarci (2007) and Biddle, Sutherland, and McHenry-Sorber (2019) have described, scholars do not necessarily unpack rurality with depth and detail, noting, “[f]ar too often, it remains unclear whether the researcher has uncovered a rural phenomenon or, instead, a phenomenon that is observed incidentally in a rural setting” (Coladarci, 2007, p. 3; Biddle et al., 2019, p. 7). We were surprised to find that there is indeed a dearth of rigorous research that could speak in sophisticated ways to the relationship between rurality, equity, and ML students.

As referenced above, most of the research in education focuses on urban and suburban schools (Thier et al., 2021; Williams & Grooms, 2016) with limited research at the intersection of rurality and ML students (Coady, 2021) despite calls from the National Education Research Association (NREA, 2019) and scholars (Cicchinelli & Beesley, 2017) for research addressing rural EL education. One reason for the limited research on rural MLs is diseconomies of scale. That is, where ML students are present in low numbers or “low density” in rural schools, research remains a low priority. At the same time, despite geographic unevenness in access to resources and opportunities, which Soja (2009) refers to as *spatial injustice*, rural educators face the same urban-normative based learning benchmarks and teacher education.

1 Framing Our Work

1.1 *Rurality*

The stories of the authors in this book illustrate the varied relationships that we have with rural place and space, yet rurality is not a simple construct to

capture in a mere few words, phrases, or descriptors. Scholars of rural education have written and debated the construct rather extensively with little agreement over ways to accurately describe rurality. For instance, the U.S. Census Bureau loosely describes rural as decidedly “not an urban area”, while a highly referenced definition in educational research derives from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) that delineates twelve urban-centric locale codes—city, suburb, town, and rural—based on geographic distance or population density. Qualitative scholars conducting research in rural communities advocate for rich descriptions of the social process and practices that take place in rural settings. They note that the tensions that are created within rural schools due to threats of anonymity when communities are described in depth and the limitations of research generalizability due to the unique nature of rural places. Recently, Thier, Longhurst, Grant and Hocking (2021) mapped the research on rural education by examining 524 studies geographically and methodologically. As a first task, the authors examined the variety of definitions that might categorize research as ‘rural,’ noting that “definitions still vary colloquially and within formal policy designations” (p. 3). They found that the definitions ranged from those used by federal agencies that demarcate geographic spaces to qualitative scholars who describe rurality as a “felt” term (Donehower, 2014, p. 168) with much scope in between.

Although there is a range of definitions, most of which gravitate toward the NCES geographic delineations (Thier et al., 2021), we believe that central to the construct of rurality is an individual’s or community’s connection to land and to the ways communities function socially. Underscoring Eppley (2009), we concur that rurality is more than a backdrop to life. As a social construct, it implies a deep connection to place and the social functioning that takes place within it. In our own work, we have leaned into the metaphor *terroir* used nearly a decade ago by Howley and Howley (2014) to enrich our understanding. *Terroir*, a French term, references the specific environment, practices, and habitat that affect (crop) production, including the natural environment of terrain, soil, and climate. The metaphor is especially fitting because, as we examine rural schools, we acknowledge that it is not only the natural environment that plays a role in framing the construct, but also the human practices that take place in and around rural locales. Returning to the example of *terroir* and wine, the soil, climate, and terrain have a direct influence on the flavor of the grapes (and ultimately the wine itself) but human activities such as irrigation and the addition of mineral rock to the soil also influence the crop and the resulting product. In similar fashion, rural communities are connected to the land and natural environment, and this is further shaped over time by the people who inhabit and work in those places.

1.2 *Critical Pedagogy of Place*

As educators, we continue to learn about the realities that rural schools and educators face, and the inherent inequities. In 2022, as we were establishing new connections with rural schools in Florida and North Carolina to partner in a critical place-based rural multilingual educator professional development (PD) program, one of the ESL (English as a Second Language) administrators from a rural school district remarked quite forthcomingly, “no matter what we do [in the proposed PD], we cannot change the curriculum. We are working with Benchmark and it is very scripted from day 1 to day 180 of the school year.” The comment struck a chord surrounding the persistent urban-normativity of curriculums in our 21st century hyper-capitalist culture for its negative and often invisible impact on rural schools. We wondered how rural schools unwittingly contribute economically to state-mandated curriculums that support large educational corporations and simultaneously reify the absence of local, rural knowledges from those curriculums. Corbett (2016) similarly asks *how* rural schools can embed students’ knowledge of the world, if “the ‘known’ world of the child happens to have been declared peripheral and redundant by economic and spatial politics of capitalist development” (p. 144). That is, rather than emphasizing the strengths, knowledges, and experiences of rural schools and communities, and rural communities’ agency to create curriculums that underscore those strengths and knowledges, corporate capitalist culture has placed downward pressure on rural schools to operate like their urban and suburban counterparts. This is precisely the “geographic blindness” that Green and Letts (2007) refer to in their examination of space, equity, and rural education. This educator’s concern was that we not disrupt the district’s attempt to follow the Benchmark curriculum with fidelity, because doing so might have a negative effect on student learning outcomes, based on the same urban-normative tests used to measure learning.

Eppley (2015) reminds us that “places are pedagogical” (p. 70). Places teach us about the world around us and, indeed, shape the work we do. As scholars, we have remained concerned and vigilant about how *not* attending to place in education, specifically within teacher education for ML students, has reified inequities across the national educational landscape. To that end, we frame our work as ‘critical,’ identifying issues in education such as inequitable access to resources and opportunities for language minoritized students, while further aiming to disrupt and transform those spaces. We follow Freire (1970) and Gruenewald (2003), whose work aligns at the intersection of place and social justice. Freire’s early literacy circles in rural Brazil were grounded in the local knowledges and experiences that derived from members of the working class community and that were used to create the curriculum itself. In this regard,

Freire demonstrated how curriculums and teaching that occurred through dialogue not only identified social inequities but challenged those inequities that existed between workers and landowners. Freire's work has been applied extensively around the world to various contexts, reaching beyond social class to issues of race, gender, environment, and language.

Gruenewald (2003) invokes Freire when he advocates action research as one of the intellectual traditions to revive to support the practice of a critical place-conscious education. Action research is presented as the means through which people, teachers and students can engage in Freire's (1972) concept of *praxis*, or "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 52). Engaging in praxis is necessary in the development of *conscientização*. Through the developmental process of *conscientização*, people learn in community and through dialogue about the social, historical, political, and economic contradictions that exist in their lives to transform their lives and reality. Gruenewald, introducing the centrality of place in praxis and *conscientização*, asks the following: "What are our places telling us and teaching us about our possibilities" (p. 639). He then advocates Freirean praxis by describing how teachers can encourage students to undertake their own place-based action research to problematize familiar places, reflect on and critically analyze them as social, political, and economic constructions, and to take some kind of action to expand possibilities.

2 Dynamics of the Insider-Outsider Continuum

The range of relationships of the authors in this book to rural communities is demonstrated both in their writing and in the final section of the book. Our collective rural positionalities convey a range of personal and professional knowledges and experiences to rural places. At times, the authors describe how an insider's knowledge of rurality can evoke insightful, critical, hopeful, and painful experiences that educators grapple with (see Chapter 3 by Li). Other authors in the book approach rurality with an outsider's lens, bringing with them experiences that aim to connect rural educators with national, state, and local trends and approaches to the education of MLs (Liu and colleagues in Chapter 7).

We recognize that this volume consists of a dynamic range of place-based positionalities and standpoints (Roberts, 2014). As scholars of rural educational research we continue to reflect upon and grapple with our own positionalities and histories with relation to rurality and the implications of that for research. For instance, in her work in rural Australia, Hamm (2014) describes finding the

“space between” the insider-outsider duality, while simultaneously reflecting on her rural upbringing and the need to establish rapport and trust (p. 99) in a rural community that was not her own. She notes insightfully that her “research would have been a different project if [she] had conducted it in [her] own rural community, where [she] may always be received as an insider” (p. 98). Thus, we underscore the varied positionalities of scholars in rural settings: as insiders, outsiders, or what Gristy (2014) refers to as “both ‘in’ and ‘out,’ both or neither, avoiding binary positions like this and embracing a multitude of roles whilst living, working and researching in my rural place” (p. 105). As you read this volume, we encourage you to identify the intentional ways through which each of these scholars learns about and contributes to the communities they research to become insiders. Identify the ways in which their outsider status provides affordances and constraints. Imagine for yourself what factors might enable you to become an insider in each community, as well as factors that might inescapably make you an outsider.

3 Nomenclature and the Multilingual Learner (ML)

In 2021, Maria was visiting a 4th grade mathematics class with ML students. The students were given an opening math problem to solve as the class began. You could hear a pin drop, it was so silent. This was a practice question for the upcoming Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) test being held the following week in the district. The room was organized in sets of four individual desks placed together as a quad. Sitting towards the front of the room was a thin boy with dark brown hair. Just glancing over to him, she saw that he seemed lost and confused. Maria asked the administrator with whom she was standing where the boy was from. After inquiring with another administrator in the room, she said that the boy was from Cuba and had only just arrived that week.

The math word problem was displayed on each individual student’s computer, and projected on the classroom screen was an extremely large digital countdown of how much time was left to answer the problem. (No pressure.) The boy from Cuba looked around the room and helplessly at the girl seated next to him. After about 4 or 5 minutes, the teacher walked over to the boy and tried to explain the word problem while pointing at the screen, but the boy did not understand English. As the teacher walked away, attending to another student, she instructed one of the girls who was seated near the boy to come over and translate the problem.

The word problem involved calculating how much orange juice remained in a jug that was $\frac{3}{4}$ full and from which $\frac{3}{8}$ of the juice was removed. The girl began to

translate word by word, using the Puerto Rican term, “jugo de china,” for orange juice. The boy looked more thoroughly confused. Three other Spanish-speakers chimed in from across the table, “no, no se llama así. En Cuba se llama jugo de naranja” [No, no it’s not called that. In Cuba, it’s ‘orange juice’]. When Maria asked, the others stated that they were from Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Venezuela.

As this story demonstrates, the multilingual students in our classrooms frequently bring with them various languages, language varieties, and literacies, often completely invisible to the educators who teach them. Yet this simple real scenario reveals the depth of cross-language knowledges that these young students had already acquired—variations in Spanish, interpreting cross languages, and navigating classroom dynamics as a small group of Latinx students.

In this volume, we use the preferred term multilingual (ML) students and families to highlight the multiple languages and literacies that students and families use and bring with them in rural community spaces. Some of the authors in this book have chosen to frame their work with students as English learners (ELs) or English language learners (ELLs), in part due to guidelines in federal grants and following state and national narratives about those students. In either case, we defer to the authors to choose—as we have—how they frame populations with whom they work.

4 Reading This Book

This volume represents a variety of practices across different states (Florida, Indiana, Montana, and West Virginia). As with many educational policies in the United States, state educational policies play a strong role in the allocation of resources for rural schools. Florida, for example, uses large counties as units to determine Title V, Rural and Low Income Schools (RLIS) funding. Other states such as Oklahoma use small towns and cities as allocation units for funding. These state-level variations in how geographical spaces are defined and used for resource allocation undoubtedly have an effect on rural schools, educators, students, and families.

What you are about to read are place-based research studies and descriptions of professional development (PD) projects that address local challenges for working with rural ML students and families. The authors illuminate the complexities of and diversity in rural ML education as it relates to broader historical, cultural, linguistic, geographical, and societal issues in particular communities. Thus, we have structured the chapters to highlight what we conceive as compelling and critical but overlooked aspects of educating ELs: affective issues, actors, and place-based PD.

Chapters 2 and 3 in this volume uncover how affective issues shape teachers as they engage with rural ML students in north Florida. Marichal (Chapter 2) develops a model of teacher knowledge that centers on teacher-student bidirectional relationship-building, informed by teachers' place-based and personal knowledge, which guides their instruction and interactions with students. More specifically, teachers' bilingualism, hispanidad (Hispanic ethnicity), and faith were leveraged to build relationships with their rural secondary ELs and to inform instruction. Li (Chapter 3) stories the emotional journey of an elementary school teacher, an insider to the rural community in which she taught, as she confronts the educational inequities experienced by a Spanish-speaking student. Her emotions acted as a catalyst for her becoming an advocate for EL students while simultaneously becoming an outsider in her own community. Ultimately, the teacher's decision to leave the community represents how educators grapple with social and educational issues that have personal and professional implications.

The next two chapters (Chapters 4 and 5) uncover critical but overlooked actors in the education of rural ELs. Reeves (Chapter 4), using positioning theory and decolonizing scholarship, details the identity work of two Spanish bilingual paraeducators in an elementary school district of a rural, agribusiness company town on the Great Plains. The paraeducators experienced contradictions between the identity positions they wanted to claim and those assigned to them by White monolingual teachers and administrators. Oudghiri's year-long narrative inquiry (Chapter 5) centers on two sisters, bilingual paraeducators in Ririe, Indiana, who describe and navigate their own (im)migrant identities while advocating for newcomer multilingual students, by creating a linguistic and cultural 'bridge' between the school and families.

Chapters 6 and 7 uncover the historical, cultural, linguistic, and geographical dimensions of place when creating PD for teachers working with ELs in rural communities. Carjuzaa (Chapter 6) educates us about how the oppressive historical legacy of the American Indians/American Natives (AI/AN) in Montana has resulted in their being categorized as "ELs" (author's term) and in educational inequity. She details the MontTELLs grant project which was designed to provide professional development to secondary classroom teachers to address the academic achievement of ELs in order to narrow the achievement gap between Native and non-Native students. Offering a divergent perspective, Liu and colleagues (Chapter 7) show how challenging it is to identify ELs in rural communities in West Virginia and to prepare teachers to work with them. They detail the Improving Instruction project which created a teacher PD on accessible instruction and assessment for ELs and a multilingual parent-educator

toolkit. In contrast to Carjuzaa, this chapter demonstrates a dominant-culture intervention for rural educators of linguistically-minoritized students.

As you read each of these chapters, you should recognize the importance of place-based knowledges in developing both instruction and PD for rural educators of MLs. Because this book is grounded in critical place-based theory, we do not conceive of this research and PD as transferable to the work you do in your specific rural community. Place matters. As a result, while reading each chapter, we encourage you to think about the specifics of your place in relation to the local knowledges, resources, and strengths that characterize your rural community. Clearly, rural schools in Montana operate and look differently from those in New Hampshire and differ tremendously from those in Florida. A keen awareness of the “terroir” and the specific ways that schools function in those spaces is necessary in order to appreciate the cultural and linguistic diversity of each, as well as ways that educators approach their work with diverse students and families. And as the authors in this book convey, how educators approach their work with students and with each other has important implications for them personally and professionally.

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Teacher Knowledge and Secondary English Learners in Rural Florida

Reimagining Place-Based Education through Relationship Building

Nidza V. Marichal

Abstract

Rural schools in the United States are facing an increase in the number of English learners (ELs). Teachers in rural communities must facilitate learning for ELs whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds differ from the mainstream. However, rural teachers are less prepared, and less able to integrate EL differences and address their educational needs. Although some research on what teachers need to know to effectively teach language and content to ELs has been conducted, little is known about the actual teacher knowledge (TK) required to provide effective EL instruction in secondary rural settings. Grounded in TK and place-conscious education frameworks, this narrative-informed qualitative study addressed two main questions: (1) what personal and professional knowledges do secondary teachers reveal about teaching ELs in rural settings? And (2) what place-based knowledges do secondary teachers reveal about their work with ELs? Primary data from four secondary teachers teaching ELs in a rural school in the southeastern United States consisted of video-recorded interviews and photo elicitation that illuminated teachers' personal, professional, and place-based experiences via stories. Thematic data analysis followed an iterative approach. Findings from this study demonstrated that the teachers' personal and place-based knowledges emerged as the most prominent influences in their work. By leveraging their bilingualism, hispanidad, and faith, teachers in this rural school community built authentic relationships with their ELs. Thus, relationship-building was central to teachers' knowledge base of working with ELs. A four-dimensional model is proposed. Findings may inform teacher education programs and extend the research base on rural EL education.

Keywords

English learner – rural education – emergent bilinguals – place-based education – teacher education – Latinx – Hispanic – relationship-building – ESOL education

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Mi tierra

De mi tierra bella, de mi tierra santa,
 Oigo ese grito de los tambores y los timbales al cumbanchar.
 Y ese pregón que canta un hermano, que de su tierra vive lejano
 Y que el recuerdo le hace llorar, una canción que vive entonando
 De su dolor, de su propio llanto, y se le escucha penar.
 La Tierra te duele, la tierra te da
 en medio del alma cuando tú no estás.
 La tierra te empuja de raíz y cal.
 La tierra suspira si no te ve más.
 La tierra donde naciste no la puedes olvidar
 Porque tiene tus raíces y lo que dejas atrás.

[*My Homeland*

From my beautiful homeland, from my holy homeland,
 I hear the cry of the drums and the timbales partying
 And a refrain is sung by a brother who lives far from his homeland,
 And the memories make him cry.
 The song that he sings springs from his pain
 and his own tears, and we can hear him cry...
 Your homeland hurts you
 Your homeland strikes your soul when you are gone.
 Your homeland pushes you forth from its roots,
 Your homeland sighs when you are not there.
 The land where you were born, you can never forget
 Because it holds your roots and everything you've left behind.]

GLORIA ESTEFAN (*Mi tierra*, 1993)

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1 Introduction

Place matters for Cuban singer Gloria Estefan as she entertains us with a serenade of imagery, sounds, and emotions linked to her beloved island. By employing imagery such as the tropical land, the sounds of congas, bongos, and kettledrums, coupled with feelings of “melancolía,” Estefan evokes memories of her *terruño* or homeland that include an essence of her culture, heritage, and the people she left behind when her family fled her homeland as a child during the 1959 Castro Cuban revolution. Estefan says: “la tierra donde naciste no la puedes olvidar, porque tiene tus raíces y lo que dejas atrás” [the land where you were born can’t be forgotten because it has your roots and all you left behind]. Estefan’s emotional experiences and heartache for her *terruño* that shaped her growing up and continue to shape her life are evident in her lyrics. Estefan intuitively knows that the essence of a *terruño*, all those unique cultural elements and ways of being experienced in her homeland are part of who she is no matter where she goes. Her dialectical connection with her *terruño*: “La tierra suspira si no te ve más” [The land sighs when it does not see you anymore], reminds us of Gruenewald’s (2003) notion of places as being pedagogical: we learn from places, as they shape us and as we shape them.

That cognitive and affective reciprocity with her *terruño* expressed in Estefan’s lyrics echoes my personal and professional lived experiences as a Puerto Rican living in the diaspora. As a young college student/English learner (EL) in snowy New England, imagery and sounds of my tropical Puerto Rico made me feel connected to and comforted by the essence of my homeland as well as the memories of my people and traditions. In the cold wintry nights, gathering, reminiscing, and building relationships with other Puerto Rican college classmates comforted us as we felt emotionally closer to our tropical *terruño*, as we conversed and sang tunes in our home language, uttering words such as “ay bendito,” as we shared tostones, arroz y habichuelas (fried plantains, rice, and beans), and as we all danced to salsa music, bomba, y plena.

Years later as a Spanish teacher in Florida, I instilled in my students the desire to learn Spanish while introducing them to culture, language, and images and sounds of my *terruño*, shaping their knowledge as I learned from and about them and as they learned about el cantar del coquí (the singing of the tiny tree frog), la música de nuestro adorado (music of our dear) Ricky Martin, and Daddy Yankee’s reggaetón. Letting them know who I am and where I came from not only humanized me in their eyes but was crucial in building trusting relationships while facilitating instruction. Back then, I could not have grasped the power of place in shaping our experiences and our surroundings as my students and I

simultaneously interacted with it. Back then, I was not aware and could not have embraced how I do now the notion that place matters because it is part of who we are even when we relocate to a new space. Place matters because we shape our new spaces with our own affective and relational sense of *terruño*. Like Estefan suggests, we need not take place for granted as it is within us and omnipresent.

Many years later as a teacher educator working with secondary teachers of English learners (ELs) in a Florida rural community, I continue to learn in a more profound way why and how place matters. In this chapter I intend to share this knowledge with you. The wisdom of these rural EL educators reminded me that place permeates and shapes who we are as we shape that particular place. An affective sense of place underscores the importance for all educators to be familiar with both the strengths and challenges of a rural school community and how these might facilitate or hinder the educational process, especially for our culturally, geographically, and linguistically diverse EL students who are often marginalized in the mainstream classroom by their teachers and by administrators at their schools. Problematizing place involves educators' exploration of their personal and professional experiences as they shape and are shaped by place while simultaneously engaging in authentic relationship-building with EL students to meet their needs in this new space. As I describe in this chapter, the nexus of rural EL teacher education requires teachers to complicate the "rural experience" by being aware of how rurality affects the education of ELs.

2 Rural EL Knowledge

Rural education scholars argue that educators in rural communities must be familiar with both the strengths and challenges of rural places to develop a sense of place (Greenwood, 2013; Gruenewald, 2003; Howley & Howley, 2014; John & Ford, 2017). Place is more than a 'backdrop' (Corbett, 2016); rather, place defines and shapes how people come to know and participate in the world and relate to others. In rural spaces, attention must be directed "to social processes, to the ways in which people live, work, play, desire, and hopefully, cooperate" (John & Ford, 2017, p. 13). That is, teachers must possess a personal and contextual knowledge of the rural community in which they work (Greenwood, 2013; Howley & Howley, 2014). Greenwood (2013) contended that to study places means to know more about people's experiences in a specific place. Thus, the interaction among teachers' personal and professional identities, informed by one's life biographies and experiences, "contribute to the construction of an identity that is linked to a particular place" and, subsequently, "how a person

views herself both informs and is informed by a sense of place” (Reagan et al., 2019, p. 87). Biddle and Azano (2016) recommended to

reevaluate education’s relationship to marginalized places and spaces in a holistic and inclusive way. [...] The lived realities of students, teachers, administrators, and community members happen within the context of a school, situated in a place, and [...] much of the local economic and social realities of that place determine the opportunities and constraints of local schooling. (p. 316)

Thus, educators working with students in rural communities must recognize, embrace, and understand the diversity of rural places to recreate a more integrated sense of community and education.

An integrated sense of community and education is to reimagine the preparation of rural EL educators to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of ELs in their rural communities. Preparation and professional development (PD) programs for rural EL educators must encourage educators to become familiar with both the strengths and challenges posed by the rural context in which they work. Rural settings pose specific challenges for EL students and educators, e.g., limited educational funding due to a low property tax base, the lack of well-prepared teachers in English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) methods (which provide language learning supports to students), the lack of language-focused education, misconceptions, and deficit views about culturally and linguistically diverse students, and a dearth of PD for rural EL educators. In light of these challenges, EL educators in rural school communities need to develop a deep knowledge of place in a way that extends beyond geographic location, i.e., an understanding of how community, geography, topography, diverse demography, way of life, and limited resources shape EL teaching and learning. Despite an emerging research base on how to prepare teachers for linguistics diversity in the field of EL education (Coady et al., 2016), little is known about the intersectionality of rurality and EL education as a subfield in education research (Coady, 2020).

3 Teacher Knowledge and Secondary English Learners in Rural Communities

Over the last decade, research has illuminated the knowledge that teachers need to effectively teach language and content to diverse ELs (e.g., Coady et al., 2011, 2016; de Jong et al., 2013; Gallagher & Haan, 2018; Turkan et al., 2014).

The research investigating teacher knowledge (TK) for EL teaching and learning has been focused largely on what teachers need to know and be able to do (Genessee et al., 2006; Goldenberg, 2013; Téllez & Waxman, 2006) and little is known about what teachers know to provide EL instruction conducive to learning, especially in secondary school settings in which teachers are likely to be unprepared to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of ELs. Research on secondary teachers of ELs needs greater attention, because in advanced grades the demands of academic language are more complex (Bunch, 2010; Fang, Schleppegrell, & Cox, 2006). Secondary ELs face a rigorous curriculum structure, including the simultaneous development of academic language and English in the content areas and high stakes testing. While research has demonstrated that ELs continue to be outperformed by non-ELs in state standardized assessments and the achievement gap percentage continues to increase in higher grades (Coady et al., 2018), the scholarship related to secondary teachers' personal and professional experiences, and preparation to provide quality EL instruction has been largely overlooked (August & Shanahan, 2006; Faltis et al., 2010; Reeves, 2006).

Even when some states mandate specific preparation of teachers, substantial evidence is lacking concerning whether mainstream teachers engage in differentiated instructional practices for EL students (e.g., Coady et al., 2016, 2018, 2019). Research has shown that most mainstream teachers who have ELs in their classrooms are not prepared to teach such a heterogeneous group of students (Calderón et al., 2011; Coady et al., 2011; Li, 2013; Menken, 2006) and are not sufficiently prepared to teach students who come from homes and backgrounds where English is not their first language (Li, 2013).

In fact, most rural school communities do not have access to teachers who understand the special linguistic, cultural, and educational needs of the heterogeneous group of ELs. There is a documented cultural and linguistic disconnect between rural teachers and EL students—US rural teachers follow the general trend, in that they are primarily white, middle-class, monolingual, English-speaking females with a bachelor's degree (Hansen-Thomas et al., 2016; NCES, 2017). The mismatch between teachers' and EL students' experiences results in numerous problems including teachers and students misunderstanding each other and students feeling unmotivated (Carothers et al., 2019). Scholars have recognized the need for EL teachers to get acquainted with students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds to tailor effective EL instruction (Coady & Escamilla, 2005; Lucas & Grinberg, 2008; Moll et al., 1992). Other bilingual education scholars have posited that bilingual and Hispanic teachers possess multiple knowledges that inform their professional decisions and positively affect the lives of ELs with the potential to improve their academic outcomes

and experiences (e.g., Clewell et al., 2005; Okhremtchouk & González, 2014; Villegas & Irvine, 2010).

In addition to the documented challenges faced by EL educators in the United States—namely, (1) persistent increase in the number of ELs; (2) shortage of well-prepared teachers; (3) widely documented pattern of underperformance of ELs on state and national tests (Coady et al., 2018; Kieffer & Thompson, 2018); (4) lack of empirical examinations of TK to inform EL teaching and learning; (5) limited scholarship on secondary TK and experiences working with ELs; and (6) lack of understanding of how local, state, and national policies shape TK for secondary ELs—rural EL students and educators lack access to human, material, and digital resources such as highly prepared teachers and programs that use ELs' first language in learning (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Burton & Johnson, 2010; Lewis & Gray, 2016). Even though there are approximately 5 million identified EL students (NCES, 2019) and about 600,000 ELs attending rural schools in the United States (Hussar et al., 2020, NCES, 2018), most studies on education in the United States are conducted in urban or suburban schools (Williams & Grooms, 2016). Educational research that illuminates the necessary TK that will enhance rural secondary ELs' academic performance is, thus, needed.

4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine what secondary teachers say they know about working with ELs in a rural community. This study will complement the limited number of studies of TK for teaching ELs in US secondary rural settings and explore how rural teachers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds interpret their personal, professional, and place-based knowledges. Two research questions guide this study: (1) what personal and professional knowledges do secondary teachers reveal about teaching ELs in rural settings? and (2) what place-based knowledges do secondary teachers reveal about their work with ELs?

5 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study integrates two main components: teacher knowledge (TK) and place-based education (Gruenewald, 2003). Three interrelated dimensions of TK, i.e., personal (e.g., bilingualism, cultural, lived experiences); professional (e.g., content-area, professional preparation, and PD); and place-based knowledges (e.g., rurality and community

functioning), are used as a theoretical lens to understand how teachers know what they know. Here, I theorize that these dimensions shape each other in teachers work with secondary ELs in a rural setting. In other words, the constant interaction among personal and professional knowledge—what teachers know about themselves (ontology) and what they know (episteme) about their profession—shaped by one's history and experiences as well as by beliefs and expectations of what it means to teach in a rural setting, contributes to the overall TK linked to a particular place.

The first component of this theorization framed the idea that teachers, in their professional work, are thinkers and creators of knowledge, and that knowledge is mediated by personal experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987; Elbaz, 1983; Reeves, 2009). Underscoring the subjective and more personal nature of TK, Clandinin and Connelly's (1987) definition of TK or personal practical knowledge (PPK) highlighted the influential role that teachers' moral and affective aspects played on their personal and educational experiences, which constantly interacted with classroom events and were closely connected to the personal and professional narratives of teachers' lives.

Through exploring literature emphasizing the importance of the personal-professional nexus in teaching (e.g., Pedrana, 2009; Reeves, 2009), I posit that these areas are two essential components of the overall knowledge base of teachers that affected teachers' work with EL students. I argue that teachers do not cease to be personal when teaching, and their professional lives and experiences do not disappear when they leave school. For instance, Pedrana's (2009) study of Hispanic teachers of ELs highlighted the direct influence that personal and educational experiences exert over who teachers are and what they teach, "what their students learn and how they engage students in their learning" (p. 176).

The empirical research on the specialized TK for effective EL instruction focuses mainly on what all teachers need to know and should be able to do (Coady et al., 2016; Genessee et al., 2006; Goldenberg, 2013; Lucas & Grinberg, 2008; Téllez & Waxman, 2006). Specific research on TK for effectively addressing secondary ELs is largely absent (Faltis et al., 2010; Reeves, 2006). Turkan et al. (2014) observed "beyond these attempts to inform and guide teacher education, the growing body of empirical and conceptual literature has not been translated into a TK base to guide educating *all* teachers to teach ELLs" (p. 5). Likewise, Coady et al. (2016) stated that although conceptual frameworks held promise for developing competence in teaching ELs, empirical evidence is lacking that these frameworks work in practice. Thus, I argue that the understanding of the relationship between TK and instructional EL secondary practices continues to advance and be debated among scholars (Coady et al., 2011, 2016; Turkan et al., 2014).

The second component of my theorization is that rurality plays an important role in shaping TK for ELs. Knowledge of place reflects the contextual dimension that shapes TK or the essence of being, knowing, and living in a particular space. To connect TK to instruction, rural teachers must learn the specific culture not only of their new school, but also of the rural community itself (Eppley, 2009) because effective teaching in rural areas requires that educators recognize and respect this unique sociological dynamic (Burton & Johnson, 2010). As Gruenewald (2003) posited “places produce and teach particular ways of thinking about and being in the world. They tell us the way things are” (p. 627) in *that* particular locality.

EL scholars have demonstrated how knowledge of place directly influences the work of rural teachers of ELs, heightening educators’ advocacy stances and promoting educator leadership and collaboration (Ankeny et al., 2019; Bustamante et al., 2010). Place-conscious approaches to education is “a response to some of the shortcoming of schooling, especially standardized schooling” which overlooks the uniqueness and diversity of particular places (Greenwood, 2013, p. 2). In this study, I theorize that problematizing place is central for teachers to know and understand the specific “circumstances and specificity of rural education” (Green & Reid, 2014, p. 27). In other words, TK that is place-based holds promise for reimagining effective instruction as well as promoting advocacy and equity for rural EL students.

Thus, I propose that TK for teaching secondary ELs in rural settings is found at the juncture of these three dimensions: personal knowledge, professional knowledge, and knowledge of place. TK for teaching ELs is a complex, “messy” proposition constantly shaping and shaped by the three components of this framework, e.g., teachers’ own constructions and understandings of their personal, professional knowledge and experiences are constantly and mutually informed by the particular demands of place. Teaching ELs requires a specialized linguistic knowledge and a command of second language acquisition processes which includes explicit instruction of academic language in school. For this reason, TK for teaching ELs is found at the intersection of the three components and it is here where this study is situated.

6 Methodology

This qualitative, yearlong research study with four secondary teachers of ELs is grounded in a constructivist epistemology and uses narrative data collection methods to elicit teacher stories surrounding teacher personal and professional

knowledge for rural secondary EL students. It was conducted in rural Florida in the context of a project funded by the US Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) in partnership with a local education agency (LEA) that has been identified as ‘rural’ following NCES guidelines in 2006. Project STELLAR (Supporting Teachers of English Language Learners Across Rural Settings) aimed to provide support to teachers of English learners (ELs), ELs and their families who resided in rural settings across the United States.

Employing qualitative research methods allowed me to focus “on process, understanding, and meaning” and on obtaining “richly descriptive” data from the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 15). Scholars have recognized that teachers’ knowledge is “event-structured” in which descriptions of teaching sound more like stories than theories because they are unique instances of teachers’ personal experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987; Elbaz, 1983). As Cortazzi (2002) posited, “teachers’ stories could be a productive way of finding out more about teachers’ knowledge” (p. 10). Narrative data collection methods elicited teacher stories surrounding their personal, professional, and place-based knowledges for working with rural secondary ELs.

7 Participants

Employing purposeful sampling selection criteria (Patton, 2002), four secondary teachers in Ivy County (pseudonym) who worked directly with EL students were recruited and selected. The purposeful sampling selection criteria allowed for the selection of teachers’ school level, their personal and professional characteristics, and their experience working in a rural setting with ELs. For instance, participants varied in cultural and linguistic backgrounds (e.g., Hispanic versus American English-only speakers and monolingual versus bilingual) and provided different perspectives in light of their personal, professional experiences and knowledge of place, and how lives and experiences shaped the TK of teaching ELs. In addition, participants were teachers (1) working in a secondary rural school who had or were working towards ESOL endorsement; (2) with more than two years of experience in that rural setting; (3) with ELs in their classrooms and/or within a year from the time of the study; and (4) participating in Project STELLAR. Participants were provided with electronic IRB-approved consent forms, and their confidentiality was assured through the use of pseudonyms and de-identified data.

8 Research Site Selection

My decision to select this research site was guided by several reasons. First, due to the noted failure to meet the benchmarks set by the Florida Department of Education Annual Measurable Achievement Outcomes (AMAOs) in 2017 that addressed the listening, speaking, reading, and writing English language proficiency-level targets for ELs in this area (Coady et al., 2019), it was imperative to question what secondary teachers know about teaching ELs in this particular north Florida context to find out how these knowledges interacted shaping their instruction. At the time of the study, there were less than 200 ELs in middle-high school in Ivy County and the majority of EL students scored significantly below state averages on the standardized test and below state averages on the English Language Proficiency test, WIDA ACCESS 2.0 (V. Boughanem, personal communication, February 6, 2019). Second, the small number of ELs in mainstream rural classrooms presented a challenge for teachers to deliver differentiated instruction for such low numbers of culturally and linguistically diverse ELs.

Third, my work in this small rural district had allowed me to establish rapport with teachers and administrators in this area. Besides collaborating in the infusion of curriculum with ESOL content, providing on-site, and school-based coaching and mentoring to teachers, I was able to observe classroom instruction closely and work individually with teachers and ELs prior to this study. These observations revealed that teachers were not implementing some of the ESOL instructional strategies learned in the PD courses. This experience led me to pursue my research questions related to TK for teaching ELs in a rural school community.

9 Rural Research Context

The large, agricultural north Florida school district, Ivy County, had consolidated middle-secondary schools in three main towns: Hibiscus, Calla Lily, and Alamanda. There were low numbers of EL students who were primarily Hispanic from various Central American countries and Mexico, and about 94% were Spanish speakers. The families worked in peanut, hay bale, and equestrian industries and supported the economy through direct labor on the land. At the time of the study, US Census (2017) data indicated that 87% of the county population was predominantly White, and about 8.3% was Hispanic (approximately 3,320 people). The percentage of persons living at or below the poverty line in Ivy County was 20.8% (US Census, 2017).

Over the past decade, research by Stacciarini et al. (2011) had identified several social issues that characterized and affected families' emotional well-being and safety in rural Florida. First, families and children faced extreme social isolation. For undocumented immigrants, social isolation intersected with limited public transportation that would otherwise facilitate social and emotional support networks; data revealed that members of the community felt largely "unheard" (Stacciarini et al., 2011, p. 490) or invisible in the rural community. Second, the social isolation and rural nature of the community meant that mental health concerns could not be addressed, as families preferred to stay invisible from public sight as they could not risk potential deportation after being pulled over when driving (Coady & Sorel, 2013). This became exacerbated at the time of the study under the new presidential administration's anti-immigrant stance (Massey, 2020).

10 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection and analysis was an inductive, deductive, and comparative 25-week process to generate findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Primary data included four video recorded semi structured interviews for each participant, and photo and picture elicitation, which was used to guide teachers' storytelling. Interviews were divided in four stages that examined each knowledge dimension, e.g., personal (Stage 1), professional (Stage 2), place-based knowledge (Stage 3), and, the fourth interview was used to make connections between the three dimensions of TK to explore what teachers said they knew about teaching ELs and the role that rurality played on TK and secondary ELs. I inserted photo elicitation into the interviews to interpret participants' own understandings of their images and their intentionality behind the chosen pictures (Harper, 2002). These temporal data collection techniques were used to illuminate teachers' told narratives of their personal, professional, and place-based experiences via stories.

11 Findings

Findings from this study demonstrated that participants' knowledges, e.g., personal, professional, and place-based, are to be understood as contextualized dimensions. The unique interconnectedness of these dimensions constantly guided teachers' professional work and informed the different approaches teachers appropriate to enact their instruction and relationships with ELs.

12 **Prioritizing Teacher-EL Relationships through Bilingualism, Hispanidad, and Faith**

Participants highlighted three knowledges related to the personal and professional TK dimensions: (1) teachers' knowledge that their bilingualism, hispanidad (Hispanic ethnicity), and faith were resources for teaching ELs; (2) teachers' knowledge that conceptualizing emotional and authentic two-way relationships with EL students was a priority in their work with ELs. That is, teachers showed their authenticity by leveraging their bilingualism, ethnicity, and religious beliefs to build these relationships; and (3) teachers' knowledge of EL specialized instruction was necessary for teaching ELs in this rural school community. Thus, findings demonstrated that as the participants engaged in their place of work their own constructions and understandings of their personal knowledge, e.g., their personal lived experiences and backgrounds, were prioritized over their professional knowledge and experiences in their work with secondary rural ELs in *this* rural school community.

All four participants underscored the fundamental role that bilingualism and hispanidad played in building teacher-EL student relationships. For instance, all four focal teachers in the study acknowledged that their linguistic and cultural knowledge, i.e., their background and experience, directly affected their work with ELs and EL families. Specifically, the three bilingual participants, Marisol, Adela, and Jacqueline, asserted that their bilingualism and hispanidad were resources for building communication with ELs which helped them to establish strong bonds with EL students. This included learning about their socio emotional and academic needs and sharing aspects of their lives with them as well. The bilingual teachers also relied on their cultural backgrounds to inform cultural and instructional activities in the classroom. Even Jack, a monolingual participant, noted the importance of being bilingual in that he failed to capitalize on learning the language when he had the opportunity early in life. He expressed,

I kind of kicked myself for, is not realizing how important it would have been for me to learn Spanish better, whenever I was in college [...] I really wish someone in the education program would have stressed the importance of being [...]. You don't have to necessarily be bilingual, but being able to communicate with students, that's one of the hardest parts. [...] The students may be able to do this task, but it's going to take me an extra five to ten minutes to explain to them verbally, what exactly I would like for them to. (Jack, Interview #2, 6/25/19)

Despite his stated language limitation, Jack also described the importance of building relationships by being an authentic teacher with his EL students. Although he acknowledged the difficulty of developing a relationship with Hispanic ELs, he knew that “you’ve got make those connections because a lot of times that’s going to be how you make that difference” (Jack, Interview #3, 7/4/19). Jack established relationships in creative ways using technology in pedagogy. Using dialogue journals and Google translate allowed Jack to share aspects of his personal life with his students as well as to learn about their Hispanic culture, lived realities, and educational inequities. Jack asserted that learning about his students’ lives also let them know he cared for them. Moreover, getting to know each other in this way allowed Jack to use that information in his work with ELs in the classroom. Even though Jack could not leverage his own hispanidad, he recognized its importance, learned about it, validated it, and brought it into the classroom.

Growing up in an African American low-income family in south Florida, Jacqueline was exposed to cultural and linguistic diversity. She recalled, “being born in Palm Beach gave me exposure to Latinos because in our neighborhood at that time, [there were] Blacks and Latinos, not so much Whites.” In her neighborhood, the Latinos were mostly Cubans who spoke primarily Spanish. She learned quickly that speaking Spanish to the Hispanic elders made them feel at ease. Jacqueline realized that her bilingualism and exposure to languages and cultures growing up bridged cultural gaps in the classroom and facilitated the connections she made as EL teacher and teacher/mentor-leader at her school. These experiences helped her to see “the whole picture” and to identify the academic and socio emotional needs of ELs that often go beyond language barrier (Jacqueline, Interview #1, 6/13/19).

Marisol, a Neorican with a fusion of New York and Puerto Rican heritage, was of the first generation in her family to be born in the United States as both her parents were originally from the island of Puerto Rico. Her personal background combined with her hispanidad and bilingualism provided the confidence to enact instruction for EL students and to communicate with EL families. She remarked,

In order to be able to teach these kids you have to learn to communicate first. Through the communication you’re going to gain their trust, you’re going to gain a friendship where they’re going to let you teach them. There’s a lot of kids that won’t let you teach them because they don’t feel comfortable. So, confident I am and it’s mostly because of my background. I think that’s a very big plus. (Marisol, Interview #2)

She added,

Meeting them, getting to know them first it is a heart to heart thing and if they know where I come from, then they know I understand where they come from. And that makes the first connection, and it makes it easier to teach them too. (Marisol, Interview #1, 6/17/19)

Marisol underscored the importance to conceptualize connections with ELs in a sincere, authentic, and loving way. She explained that connecting emotionally with students facilitated teachers' work with ELs because they learned to feel the teacher's empathy. She asserted,

I feel that in order to see a student succeed is not just all about his classes at the professional level but it is also to let the student feel that you are actually there for them at an emotional level, you know. They know who is real and who is not and it is the way you act with them. I've always said that the value that you have as a teacher is your word. And your word is covered by your actions and kids see that. (Marisol, Interview #1, 6/17/19)

Similar to Marisol, Adela revealed that being authentic during the teacher-EL student relationship-building process meant allowing ELs to see who the teacher is authentically, i.e. the teacher as a person with her humanity. A certified Spanish teacher from Puerto Rico with twelve years of teaching experience and who had been working in Ivy County since 2013, expressed that being Hispanic and bilingual were important resources in her teaching. She asserted that her strong connection with EL students stemmed from her *puertorriqueñidad* (Puerto Ricanness) and her respect for all Hispanic cultures. She knew that ELs opened up more easily and felt more comfortable with instruction, if they knew each other in a more personal way. Adela described the importance of building these bidirectional relationships with great emotion,

Pero yo digo que esto [la conexión] tiene que formarse desde el día primero. Ellos tienen que ver el humano en el maestro, para poder [conectar]-[...] No que te hagas vulnerable a que ellos sepan mucho. [...] Pero también tú tienes que entender, ellos no tienen coraje contigo, ellos no tienen—ellos no te odian a ti, ellos no están—ellos no—la malacrianza no fue contigo. ¿Tendrá hambre, tendrá sueño, tendrá sed, tendrá...? Las niñas, ¿tendrán dolor?, ¿tendrán lo que necesitan?

[But I say that this connection needs to be established from day one. They need to see the humanity of the teacher, to be able to connect. You don't

have to be totally vulnerable. But you [teachers] also need to understand that they are not mad at you, they don't hate you, the bad manners were not directed at you. Will [the student] be hungry, sleepy, thirsty...? The [female students] were they going through [menstrual] pains? Do they have what they need?] (Adela, Interview #1, 6/28/19)

Guided by their personal religious belief and their deep knowledge of place and EL students, the participants displayed religious motifs in their classrooms (see Figure 2.1), prayed for students' intentions as requested by the students themselves (Adela), and used the Spanish Bible as an instructional tool for developing L1 literacy to facilitate L2 (Jacqueline).

For instance, Marisol acknowledged that her religious background was a source of comfort and has played a big role in her life shaping the way she teaches and live. Because she knew that most of her EL students in this rural community were deeply religious, she wanted them to know her at a more personal level and recreate the same safe community environment she experienced at church every Sunday. By decorating her classroom with religious motifs as shown on Image 1, Marisol made her ELs feel comfortable and prepared for learning. She explained,

I put things that represent me. Sometimes I won't use words. I'll have a cross, I'll have butterflies, I'll have quotes of believe, dreaming, anything positive. The kids would walk into my room and they would have an idea of me without me even telling them about me at first. [...] I've always experienced that when the students walk into the classroom, and they



FIGURE 2.1 Marisol's shrine (photo courtesy of Nidza V. Marichal)

looked around first, they had an idea of what type of teacher was in the room. At that moment, I started winning their trust, their respect without saying a word. Then from there on, we continued to grow together. (Marisol, Interview #3, 7/3/19)

Their deep spirituality and religious beliefs served as an additional source of knowledge that allowed these participants to further develop a personal and emotional relationship with her EL students.

13 Secondary Teachers of ELs in *This* Rural School Community

Addressing the place-based knowledges or participants' knowledge of rurality, two knowledges were most salient: (1) teachers' knowledge of the uniqueness of the rural community and (2) teachers' knowledge to be the voice of secondary EL students in *this* Florida rural school community. Teachers' personal knowledge interacted with their deep knowledge of rurality to enable teacher-participants to make sense and express the professional knowledge. Along with teachers' personal knowledge, place-based knowledges were the most prominent influences in their work with secondary ELs in *this* particular rural school community. The interplay of these two dimensions of TK informed how participants constructed and prioritized the relationship-building process with students as people.

13.1 *"This Is Not the Way We Do It": The Uniqueness of the Rural Community*

All participants in the study demonstrated deep knowledge and understanding of specific physical aspects of space in Ivy County, such as its geographic distances, infrastructure, and school funding, impacting the ELs' educational opportunities. Echoing Estefan's affective sense of place or *terruño* in the song *Mi tierra*, when addressing questions of space specifically, participants demonstrated the interconnections between Ivy County's space and its social and cultural processes. As noted, spaces are localities inscribed by social processes, and they foreground spatial, social, cultural, and historical knowledge production (Gruenewald, 2003; Reagan et al., 2019). The participants acknowledged how their rural community functioned and aligned their work to the social functioning.

Jack recognized the uniqueness of rural communities in that rurality must not be overgeneralized because "there are intricacies to each place and each space" (Jack, Interview #3, 7/4/19). Through photo elicitation (see Figure 2.2), Jack was able to contrast his experiences with rurality in Tennessee (TN) and



FIGURE 2.2 Jack's childhood home in rural Amaryllis, TN
(photo courtesy of Nidza V. Marichal)

Florida (FL) by asserting that the physical space in a rural community influences the lifestyle of that community. He remarked,

Each rural place is different. [...] so growing up in our rural space you had a different, you had a different emphasis on what's important as far as where you're looking to go. Like what are the expectations, all those kinds of things. [...] Like for us, I was in a rural area but it wasn't as agriculturally based, it was working class based and it was a lot more of a rural place where you drove to where you worked, not worked on the ground. Uh, and so we, we didn't have an FFA [Florida Farmers of America] at all. Even though we had a lot of agriculture around us, we didn't have that emphasis within our school on that. Instead, we had an emphasis on things like, uh, trades. (Jack, Interview #3, 7/4/19)

The deep knowledge of place acquired in TN allowed Jack to anticipate obstacles that geography imposed on his EL students' daily life as he engaged in *this* new rural community. He explained the daily challenges faced by ELs, often unnoticed by teachers and school administrators,

they've got to walk a farther distance to get to a bus stop to, to be picked up. And if they miss the bus, there's no catching a ride with someone else. [...] Whenever you missed the bus or whatever it may be then you are not going to school that day. (Jack, Interview #3, 7/4/19)

Findings from this study suggested that places are more than a geographical space or location. For instance, Jacqueline noted, "Place informs what you need to

know,” and repeatedly underscored the uniqueness of place. She acknowledged that teachers as well as EL students come to Ivy County with different personal geographic backgrounds and entered their relationship together in *this* particular place. She described her priorities related to ELs’ education,

I strive to comprehend and internalize the place. Your first place is your place, and that’s another thing: we have to understand as teachers, these students, our ELs’ first place, is their place. So, we have to teach them about this place. (Jacqueline, Interview #3, 6/27/19)

Jacqueline added: “one of the things [teachers] have to realize is that, if a child cannot navigate the place, the child cannot possibly settle down to learning. Just can’t, it’s too much tension to just figure out the place” (Jacqueline, Interview #3, 6/27/19). Jacqueline asserted that teachers must not assume that ELs’ previous knowledge and experiences are the same as their English-speaking peers in this school community. Jacqueline explained that teachers must get to know ELs, what they know about secondary school cultures, and what they learned in their previous school in order to design instruction for newcomer ELs and to help them navigate the different school and classroom rules.

Participants revealed knowledge that rurality impacted finances and funding for EL education. In Hibiscus Middle High school (HMHS), a school that three years prior to this study had been consolidated from a single middle and single high school, the bigger class sizes resulted in less time dedicated to the education of ELs. Marisol understood that the merging of schools combined with low teacher pay resulted in a lack of bilingual teachers who would facilitate the education of Hispanic ELs. Thus, the lack of bilingual teachers due to financial reasons had affected the education of ELs.

Participants acknowledged the ways in which rural social processes in *this* Florida community intersected with EL education. Participants’ data demonstrated that matching the teaching style to Ivy County way of living was a knowledge base for working with ELs in *this* rural community. For instance, Marisol underscored the impact of the community way of life on schooling. She explained,

This is a family community. They have their traditions, they have their customers, they got each other’s back. They know who’s who and what’s what. You’re not going to come in and scream it out. They’d be like, “I don’t think so ma’am.” They will let you know now this is not the way we do it. You know? So, [the rural social processes] it would affect the teaching. (Marisol, Interview #4, 7/22/19)

Marisol knows that one could not assume that the physical aspects of rurality were experienced in the same manner in every rural community because she understood that knowledge of rurality included the space and the social processes characteristic of that particular rural community.

Contrasting rurality in Ivy County to the rurality experienced by some of her Hispanic EL students, Marisol described,

This rural here is different from theirs where there's more houses. You still have campos [countryside] alrededor, but then you still have roads. You know, you may have vehicles over there, they may have horses, you know, the atmospheres would be different. (Marisol, Interview #4, 7/22/19)

13.2 *“Uno aquí es como un fantasma” [Here, One Is Like a Ghost]:
Advocating for ELs*

Participants asserted that their knowledge of the rural school community (e.g., insularity, access to material and financial resources, and the way of life) and their personal relationship with the ELs allowed them to recognize the existing inequities and deficit discourses towards ELs in the school. The participants recognized the marginalization that ELs were experiencing as they were “ignored and overlooked” by educators. They also recognized that EL families lacked power in *that* place. They understood this reaction was due to the educators’ inability to communicate directly with ELs and families. Thus, participants felt empowered to serve as the voice and advocates for ELs in *this* rural community and felt a responsibility to mentor and lead other colleagues to advocate for the needs of ELs and their families in their school.

Jack, for example, felt the responsibility to improve ELs’ academic success as well as to increase their visibility in the school community by organizing a Hispanic awareness project and planning the implementation of a self-contained ESOL sheltered classroom. He remarked,

I feel the responsibility. I don't feel like I've been able to step out yet. But I feel like I am an advocate for ... Even like the language used or the keeping it to where it's something that we can constantly keep on our minds with our EL teaching practices, that is something that I tried to keep in the forefront of our school, and our instruction. (Jack, Interview #2, 6/25/19)

Similarly, Adela experienced that her EL students were constantly ignored by both the administration and other educators. As she described,

hay niños que te dicen: “Uno aquí es como un fantasma,” están, pero no están porque nadie los ve, son invisibles, están en mí salón y les doy clases, pero, son invisibles para cierto—y eso duele, duele.

[there are children that say, “here, one is like a ghost” They are there but they are not because no one sees them, they are invisible, they are in my classroom and I teach them but, they are invisible for [certain people]—and that hurts, it hurts.] (Adela, Interview #2, 7/5/19)

Adela felt it was her responsibility to bridge cultural gaps by creating cultural activities that valued students' home language and culture. This was a way for Adela to not only learn from and connect with her EL students, but it was also a way to make ELs less invisible to school administrators, educators, and the rest of the students. One of her most popular activities was el día de los muertos celebration (Day of the Dead), in which Mexicans honored their dead relatives. Adela would celebrate the Day of the Dead in her classroom every year during the month of November as her students looked forward to the event. For the ESOL Fair, Adela decided, with the help of some of her students, to showcase a sample of Mexican culture for the entire school by recreating the altar honoring the dead. They cooked favorite foods of their deceased families and brought pictures of them, candles, papel picado (tissue paper with cut-out shapes), and colorful sugar skulls (Figure 2.3).



FIGURE 2.3 Adela's Day of the Dead celebration, celebrating Mexican culture at the ESOL fair (photo courtesy of Nidza V. Marichal)

Adela was also compelled to fight their EL students’ invisibility by promoting her students’ bilingualism in her rural school district. She implemented the Seal of Biliteracy in her Ivy County school to recognize achievement in oracy and literacy for her EL students (Marichal et al., 2021). As a result, Adela became a fierce advocate of her EL students by disrupting deficit practices in her school.

14 **Discussion: Reimagining TK for Rural Secondary EL s**

This study has demonstrated the connections between teachers’ personal, professional, and place-based knowledges in the work of EL secondary teachers in *this* particular rural community by proposing a new model in Figure 2.4. TK for secondary EL s in *this* rural community is composed of four dimensions of teachers’ knowledge: (1) personal; (2) relational; (3) place-based; and (4) professional. The circle connecting the four bubbles in Figure 2.4 shows a more dynamic, dialectic, and continuous relationship amongst the dimensions. The larger bubbles of personal, relational, and place-based dimensions represent their significance in guiding and shaping teachers’ professional EL TK. The large bidirectional arrow in the center represents the prominent influence and interconnectedness of teachers’ personal and place-based knowledge dimensions which underscore the significant influence of both personal and place-based knowledges in relationship building and in humanizing teachers’ work with secondary EL s in *this* Florida rural community.

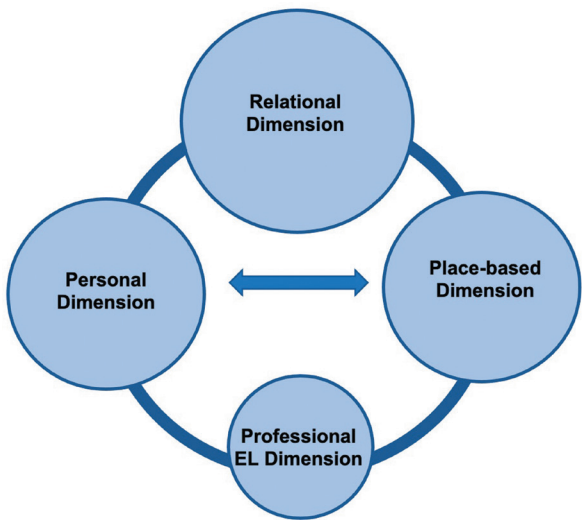


FIGURE 2.4 Dimensions of teacher knowledge for rural secondary English learners

What was crucial in these teachers' attempts to construct authentic relationships with their students was that they not only tried to learn from and about the students but also shared relevant experiences about themselves with their students. This relationship-building process transcended one-way dynamics that literature on teaching ELs has suggested in the sense 'that teachers should know their students' personal backgrounds in order to teach ELs' (Coady et al., 2011; de Jong et al., 2013). The participants' relational knowledge entailed a bidirectional relationship-building process which is central in mediating and constructing TK for secondary ELs in *this* rural community (Marichal, 2020, 2021). Participants' personal TK knowledge of bilingualism, hispanidad, and faith interacted with their deep knowledge of rurality to enable them to make sense of and enact their professional knowledge while designing instruction for ELs. The knowledge revealed by these participants underscore the need to relate with their students in a personal way as they also aligned their personal knowledges and their place-based knowledges, i.e., the strengths and challenges particular to Ivy County, with their EL instruction. The findings demonstrated that the role of the teacher in the lives of their EL students, and who the EL students are and their lived experiences, matter in teachers' work. More importantly, what these educators asserted was the central role that relational TK played as a main component of the knowledge base in their work with ELs in *this* rural community.

Empirical research has demonstrated that Hispanic teachers positively impact minority student achievement (Clewell et al., 2005; Flores & Claeys, 2019; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). The importance for bilingual and Hispanic teachers to build these personal relationships of mutual trust or *confianza* have been recognized by multiple scholars over decades of research (e.g., González & Moll, 2002; Okhremtchouk & González, 2014). A significant finding from this study demonstrated that the personal knowledge of all four teachers connected to their deep knowledge of the rural community informing the way to construct mutual caring (*con cariño*) relationships with their Hispanic ELs. While Marisol and Adela asserted that their own bilingualism and hispanidad were resources for communication with ELs, allowing them to make connections and to establish strong bonds with students to attend to the whole child, Jacqueline and Jack recognized and leveraged their ELs' hispanidad and bilingualism by bringing it into the classroom. Jack, who integrated Google translate technology to communicate bilingually with his ELs, used Spanish as self-affirmation of their ELs' culture to engage them in the relationship-building process. Valenzuela (1999) has described an authentic form of caring necessary to educate Hispanics that "emphasizes relations of reciprocity between

teachers and students” (p. 61). Similarly, Nieto (2005) has observed that *cariño* “has included not only providing affection (*cariño*) and support for students, but also developing strong interpersonal relationships with students and their families,” which included respecting and affirming their linguistic and cultural backgrounds while building on those to enhance teaching and learning (p. 32).

Scholars have recognized that religion plays a role in the personal lives of people in the United States and in teachers’ personal lives in particular (White, 2009; Woodward & Mazumdar, 2005). Noddings (2005) suggested that “who we are, to whom we are related, and how we are situated” matter to develop a relational ethic of caring in education (p. 21). Similarly, Delgado Bernal (2001) argued that spirituality plays an important role in the development of one’s identity as it is part of our cultural knowledge and incorporated into our daily practices. She found that some of the women in her study directly connected their spirituality to their educational journey, their learning, or the desire to help others. Like Marisol’s description of her “shrine” in her classroom back wall, one of Delgado Bernal’s participants described her spiritual practice of keeping a picture of the Virgen and a candle in her dorm room, “Well actually *en mi room tengo un picture de La Virgen y también tengo una veladora*” (p. 634). Adela and Marisol acknowledged that religion was a source of guidance in their work with ELs and played a significant role in building teacher-EL student relationships.

The limited literature on rural education over the last decade has emphasized the importance of the uniqueness and complexity of places by problematizing “place-as-identity” or “thisness” focusing on what happens in *this* school, *this* place as opposed to *that* one (Thomson, 2000 as cited in Green & Reid, 2014, p. 33). Researchers and educators that insist in the particularities of place acknowledge the complexity of situated practice; rather than generalizing place as a static, universal entity (Green & Reid, 2014). As John and Ford (2017) have underscored that “the place in which one engages in the educational relationship and process impacts the educational experience” and may pose “problems, issues, possibilities, and constraints that are specific to particular places” (pp. 12–13). The teachers in this study recognized the importance to embrace a sense of place or the essence of *terruño*. For instance, Jacqueline shared the need to understand where we come from, where our students are from, and the space we all occupied to best identify the nuances in enacting instruction for our EL students. As she remarked, “your first place is your place” which reminds us of Estefan’s verse, “La tierra donde naciste no la puedes olvidar” “The land where you were born cannot be forgotten,” underscoring the importance of understanding the link of ELs’ cultural, linguistic, and geographical

background in designing instruction. Thus, the data demonstrated that being aware of how place and space interact is paramount for working with rural secondary ELs in *this* Florida rural community.

All participants, aware of the inequities confronted by ELs in Ivy County, repeatedly emphasized that they felt empowered and responsible to be their voice, increase their visibility, and serve as advocates and mentor-teachers to other colleagues in their rural school. Adela, Jack, Jacqueline, and Marisol reflected on their practices, collaborated, and led others to build a stance for advocacy for their culturally and linguistically diverse students. Scholars have demonstrated the key role that rural teacher leaders play in advocating for ELs to improve their academic achievement (Ankeny et al., 2019; Bustamante et al., 2010; Coady, 2019).

15 Conclusion and Implications

What emerges from the findings of this study is that the teachers' personal knowledges informed by the knowledge of the rural community in which they work highlighted the need for building authentic relationships with their EL students in order to enact their professional EL specialized knowledge. The interconnectedness of these four dimensions constantly inform the different approaches teachers appropriate to enact their professional EL knowledge. As a result, teachers and EL students co-constructed their relationships as they engaged in *that* place. This relational process is central to understand and enact teachers' professional EL TK in *this* particular rural school community. Thus, the findings in this study suggest that *who* teachers are and *where* they come from as well as *who* their students are and *where* they come from in *this* particular rural place matter for enacting a TK for secondary ELs in Ivy County rural community. In other words, the personal experiences and knowledges of teachers mattered as much as their place-based experiences and knowledges in shaping their own professional work with secondary ELs in a rural community, blurring the lines between the teachers' personal, professional, and rural community identities.

Findings from this study add to the limited literature on secondary teachers of ELs and rurality and illuminate the complexities of TK in EL secondary rural settings in several ways. First, this study builds theory to drive practice, and proposes a new model that demonstrates the connections of teachers' personal, professional, and place-based knowledges of rural secondary teachers of ELs. The model demonstrates that teachers' personal and place-based dimensions of TK constantly inform and shape each other and highlights

the centrality of the relational dimension that transcended existing one-way dynamics suggested by the EL literature (Coady et al., 2011; de Jong et al., 2013; Gallagher & Haan, 2018). The findings in this study transcended the one-way dynamics suggested by the EL literature. Participants revealed that EL teachers need to conceptualize teacher-EL student relationships through authentic and loving pedagogy to engage EL students and families in education. Building relationships for EL teachers in this rural community was a two-way dynamic that entailed opening up their hearts in authentic dialogue with the EL students as ELs shared aspects of their lives with them. The relevance of teachers' relational knowledge is an important contribution to the EL TK field. These rural EL educators know that relationship-building with their EL students must be prioritized as teaching and learning will not prosper without authentically engaging them *con cariño* while developing strong reciprocal trusting bonds. Future longitudinal studies, in particular rural contexts, that combine interviews and observations to illuminate how teachers' and students' personal lives, backgrounds, and experiences interact in the particular place and inform their professional work in mainstream secondary rural communities are needed.

Second, a significant finding from this study revealed that place matters for the education of rural secondary ELs. As Greenwood (2013) posited, neglecting place ignores the distinctiveness and *joie de vivre* of particular rural communities. Place, rurality in this study, has a different meaning for teachers and EL students and will impact classroom dynamics. The findings from this study indicate that teachers, as they engage with the rural school community, bring with them their personal and place-based knowledges which constantly shape each other dictating the professional identities and instructional decisions in their work with ELs. Thus, the four-dimensional model derived from the findings suggest that increasing teachers' particular rural knowledge and experiences as well as providing a space for teachers' personal reflexivity as they engage in a new place is paramount in their work with rural secondary ELs in north Florida. Future research exploring teachers' thoughts and reflections on how they develop teacher-student relationships that are authentic are warranted. In addition, further studies that explore the role that religion plays in building these relationships are also suggested.

In addition to offering a theoretical contribution, findings from this study serve to raise consciousness about the educational preparation of secondary EL teachers for rural communities. The findings from this study inform and empower teacher preparation and PD programs to shift their stress from uniquely emphasizing professional instructional knowledge to a richer exploration and extension of teachers' personal and place-based knowledges. As

Eppley (2009) suggested, educators' attention must be directed to the specific culture not only of their new school, but also of the rural community itself. A place-conscious (Greenwood, 2013) or "place learning" (Eppley, 2015) approach to education that rejects decontextualized teacher education, must be embedded within rural teacher education programs and field experiences with the goal to foreground social, spatial, cultural, and historical contexts. Rural EL scholars (Ankeny et al., 2019; Marichal, 2020; Marichal et al., 2021) have demonstrated that as educators become reflective about environments that sustain inequities, place-based knowledge can transform education for rural ELs while educators become ELs' advocates in their schools.

Educators must leverage the prominent role Hispanic/bilingual teachers play in the lives of ELs and their families. While they are catalysts in building personal relationships of mutual trust or *confianza* with ELs and their families, Hispanic/bilingual educators have unique capacities in advancing the educational trajectories of their EL students (Flores & Claes, 2019; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). The ever-increasing linguistically diverse demographic shifts particularly in rural settings, the critical shortage of well-prepared bilingual educators (Flores & Claes, 2019) nationally, and the persistent academic achievement gap between native and non-native speakers of English require more granular preparation and place-based education for teachers of ELs.

Teacher educators in teacher preparation and PD programs must work towards diversifying the teacher workforce and narrowing the experiential mismatch of teachers and EL students, specifically in rural communities. To better understand the complexity and vivacity of rural places educators must understand the lived realities of students, teachers, and community members within the context of a school as the "social realities of that place determine the opportunities and constraints of schooling" (Biddle & Azano, p. 316). As the lyrics of *Mi tierra* suggest, an affective sense of *terruño* encompasses *all* the vibrant sights, sounds, tastes, scents, feelings, and lived realities experienced by all peoples living in that space. Educators need to possess an integrated vision of rural community and EL education and to support research in rural EL teacher education that builds upon the complexities of particular places.

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A Teacher's Emotional Journey in Rural Florida

From Insider to Outsider

Shuzhan Li

Abstract

Drawing from a poststructuralist perspective on emotions, this study investigates the emotional experiences of an elementary teacher who works with multilingual students and families in a rural community. As a teacher's emotions reveal what matters to her and what she cares about in her profession, this study sheds light on her teacher identity, which informs her instructional practices and relationship-building with multilingual students and her local rural community. Informed by an insider-outsider theoretical framework, this narrative inquiry study retells the stories of a veteran elementary teacher in a remote rural community in the southeastern USA. Data were collected through narrative interviews with the teacher and ethnographic observation in her classroom, school, and community. Stories in this study show how the teacher capitalized on her insider position to gain complex place-based knowledge of the sociopolitical realities of her community, advocated for the multilingual learners in her rural school in various ways, and navigated her rural community and professional life when she experienced a wide array of emotions in her work. This study, in synergy with other chapters of this book, contributes to the under-researched area of rural multilingual learner education and offers implications for rural educators and teacher educators concerning linguistic diversity, inclusion, and equitable educational opportunities for multilingual learners.

Keywords

multilingual learners – emotions – rural education – teacher identity – narrative inquiry

1 Introduction

For three years, I was fortunate to have spent time with a group of rural teachers and educators who were learning to support multilingual learners in their classrooms and schools. I observed them in their professional development (PD) coursework. I spent time in their classrooms as a tutor. I attended school events organized by these teachers and educators for their multilingual learners and families. I interpreted for bilingual families in their parent-teacher conferences. I instructed one of their courses on instructional coaching in the context of a PD program that they participated in. I shared the joy when some teachers had newborn babies and tough times when some teachers experienced problems with family life. I sat in many meetings when teachers, together with counselors and principals, had heated discussions of how they could meet the needs of their multilingual learners without breaching state policies. I also saw teachers leaving the community or the profession in those three years. These immersive experiences prompted me to reflect on the power of identity, on how influential identity is for me to stay committed to the education of multilingual learners. As I wondered about these teachers' journeys and stories, I started conceptualizing this study to better understand these teachers because at the heart of culturally relevant teaching is the idea of getting to know students and meeting their intellectual and emotional needs. I hold this principal dear to my work with teachers as well. Understanding these teachers would be the starting point of working with them on improving instruction, school inclusiveness, and local educational policies. The emphasis on recognizing and valuing teachers' personal experiences and expertise was highlighted by Marichal (2021) who found that rural teachers' personal and place-based knowledge base served as the most prominent factors shaping their work with multilingual learners. In this chapter, I focus the narrative on emotions as they reveal how teachers negotiate difficult situations in teaching multilingual learners. In addition, I use multilingual learners to refer to students who are identified as English learners (ELs) by the schooling system. EL or ELs as a label are only used in direct quotations.

Characteristic of rural schools and communities is their deep connection to place (Orr, 1992). Residents of the rural communities define their identities through their connection to their rural place (Eppley, 2015). This deep connection has led to many teachers to return to teach in the rural communities where they grew up. Instead of seeing such teachers' commitment to their local communities as a failure to leave, Eppley (2015) reminds us to see teachers' commitment to their rural communities "as an opportunity to prepare them to teach with an awareness of the importance of grounding curriculum

and instruction in their local communities" (p. 68). As residents are deeply invested in the place of rural communities, what is important in rural places are the sense of familiarity and relationships among people. Schools in rural communities tend to be the epicenter of social events, granting membership to not only students and teachers, but members of the surrounding community as well, which further consolidates the sense of familiarity and relationship of trust and cooperation. Rural schools, in many instances, serve not just as a space for instruction, but as a space for establishing collective identities and cultural continuity in rural places (Witte & Sheridan, 2011).

2 Conceptualizing Emotions

For teachers, teaching and learning with multilingual learners can be emotionally demanding. Teachers might view working with multilingual as extra workload, especially if they are un- or underprepared to work with the linguistic and cultural differences that multilingual learners from different cultural backgrounds have. Additionally, teaching is inherently a political endeavor, especially concerning language teaching; societal ideologies about the status of English and other minoritized languages shape classrooms and schools (Hamman, 2017), which affect teachers' attitudes and choices in their interaction with multilingual learners. In the context of this study, a conservative political climate existing at this time can be characterized by an anti-immigrant and xenophobic rhetoric. This rhetoric creates an intellectual, emotional, and physical challenge for immigrant, bilingual, and linguistically, racially, and culturally-minoritized students and their teachers. This climate necessitates examination of the identity positions of teachers who educate multilingual learners in schools daily (Palmer, 2019).

Teaching is by nature human work, saturated with human interaction. Exploring how teachers negotiate their identities necessitates an examination of teacher emotions as teachers experience and handle a wide array of emotions in their everyday practices. How teachers feel about and respond to everyday encounters in practice sheds light on understanding what matters to her and what she cares about in her profession, as emotions are "enmeshed with identity, agency, and power, all central in the learning and teaching of languages in today's multilingual world" (Douglas Fir Group, 2016, p. 36). Teachers experience "a heightened state of being that changes" (Lasky, 2005, p. 901) in response to teaching practices in different situations and dynamic interactions with their school, colleagues, students, and students' families. Therefore, emotions are inevitably at the epicenter of teachers' work (Nias, 1996) in that

“good teachers are not just well-oiled machines. They are emotional, passionate beings who connect with their students and all their work and their classes with pleasure, creativity, challenge and joy” (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 835). Giving attention to teachers’ emotions is important because emotions could contribute to nuanced understanding of teachers’ commitments and concerns (van Veen & Lasky, 2005) and increased awareness of the conditions in which teachers handle and negotiate the relationships between their identities and practices.

In particular, teaching and learning with multilingual learners can be emotionally-charged experiences (Richards, 2020). When teachers reflect on different emotional experiences, they gain insight into how they value their instructional practices and the relationships that they establish in their classrooms and schools, thus gaining a more nuanced self-knowledge (Zembylas, 2003). For example, Khong and Saito (2014) observed that teachers of multilingual learners who are underperforming experienced an emotional strain that is aggravated by a lack of institutional support, time, tools, and quality instructional materials. Teng (2017) demonstrated that teaching English to multilingual learners can create negative emotions for teachers. While teachers may choose to suppress their negative emotions in teaching, negative emotions they experience may also prompt them to seek further opportunities of professional growth. Teng (2017) also documented that positive emotions help teachers sustain their interest and passion in teaching. These findings resonate with Zembylas (2003) that teachers’ “emotions expand or limit possibilities in their teaching, and ... enable them to think and act differently” (p. 232).

The research question of this study is: *What is the emotional journey of a rural teacher in working with multilingual learners?* This inquiry centers on rurality (Coladarci, 2007) and, by focusing on one rural teacher’s emotional experiences, this study unveils insights that are informative to educators across rural communities.

3 Theoretical Framework

In this study, I conceptualize the role of teachers in the focal rural community through an insider and outsider framework. This framework is based on the work of Roberts (2014) and Hamm (2014) on the positionality of educators in conducting rural education research where educators and scholars negotiate their personal and professional relationship to place and space, in particular to rural schools and communities. Drawing on Harding’s (2004) feminist theories, Roberts (2014) argues for an epistemological position that approaches rural research from the standpoint of the rural. Central to this standpoint of

the rural is the rural positionality of the researcher and the researched. In other words, a rural positionality seeks to advance “an understanding *of* the rural and *for* the rural” (Roberts, 2014, p. 135). This positionality is important as it affords me as the researcher to approach this study from a standpoint that rural people and communities “really matter” (Roberts, 2014, p. 136), and that rural teachers and rural multilingual learners really matter.

This standpoint of the rural is helpful to conceptualize the positionality of teachers as they negotiate their work and emotions in a rural community. Teachers might identify as insiders of the rural community while, in other circumstances, identify as outsiders, or somewhere in between. The duality of insider/outsider is less prominent in this framework as teachers' positionality is conceptualized as dynamic and fluid. Teachers benefit from having place-based knowledge of the rural by being insiders of the community. In the meantime, being outsiders may mean that teachers traverse the complexities of rural educational spaces by identifying and reflecting on biases in a way that diverges from the norms of the rural community with which they are familiar. Being outsiders may also mean, literally, teachers move out of the rural community in which they teach. With teachers' dynamic positionality, they can be insiders and outsiders simultaneously or select their positionality as needed in order to have agency.

4 Methods

4.1 *Research Design*

This is a narrative inquiry study that aimed at gaining contextualized perspectives that are interconnected with personal, social, and institutional factors. The focal teacher, Ms. Payne, was recruited to participate in this study following a criterion-based sampling process. The sampling criteria included: (1) the teacher had to have the state ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) endorsement and had experience teaching multilingual learners; (2) the teacher had been a participant of a long-term PD project; and (3) the teacher resided in the local rural community in which the school they taught was located. Ms. Payne had been teaching in the same school for 18 years at the time of this study. Noticeably, Ms. Payne grew up in Galway and, as a child, went to the same school where she was a teacher.

4.2 *Data Collection*

The main source of data was in-depth narrative interviews that were aimed at soliciting stories from Ms. Payne about her emotional experiences with

teaching multilingual learners (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The narrative interviews focused on the teacher's emotional experiences in teaching multilingual learners and reflections and meaning-making, which gave me a sense of her teacher identity (Barkhuizen, 2016; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Additional sources of data included ethnographic observations in Ms. Payne's classroom and extensive field notes that were both descriptive and reflective. Also informing the study are the teacher's writing samples, including her *Where I am from* poem (Christensen, 2001), which corroborated interview data.

4.3 *Data Analysis*

Data analysis involved a recursive process where I configured multiple sources of data "into a coherent whole" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15). In this study, narrative elements collected from interviews did not always follow a chronological order or fall into plots that had coherent actions, events, and happenings. For example, while Ms. Payne shared her growing up experiences and early teaching career in chronological order, she recounted various encounters with students, families, and colleagues from different angles and at different times in response to interview questions that solicited her positive and negative emotions in teaching multilingual learners. Data analysis, then, involved organizing scattered narrative elements into themed stories. This process started with initial coding that generated narrative elements (character, setting, plot or conflict, and resolution). With these narrative elements, I organized them into themed stories that reflected Ms. Payne's emotions in teaching. I present this series of themed stories in chronological order in Section 5.

4.4 *Research Setting*

In the current study, the focal school district (Galway County, pseudonym) was a geographically large rural district in southeastern United States. The focal town, Galway, had an estimated population of approximately 2,700 in 2018 (U.S. Census, 2015). Driving into Galway, a visitor would first arrive on Main Street that is lined by a few churches, pharmacies, restaurants, auto repair shops, small grocery stores, and unoccupied, dilapidated buildings. There were two elementary schools serving the town. Galway Lower Elementary School (K-2) and Galway Upper Elementary School (grades 3-5) were tucked a few blocks behind Main Street, in proximity to a fire station, Popeyes, McDonalds, and a Subway fast food restaurant, a tire shop, a farm supplies store, and lush green farmland. The scenery outside the elementary school was wide open and flat, the air hot and humid. There was a county road that ran behind the school. In the prior decade, both schools had seen a growing population of multilingual



FIGURE 3.1 Rural elementary school landscape

learners, many of whose families worked in local agricultural and equine industries. Figure 3.1 showcases the landscape of Galway County schools.

5 Findings

Below, I retell Ms. Payne's stories and analyze her emotions in teaching multilingual learners and navigating her insider/outsider positions as a teacher in a rural school district.

5.1 *Becoming a Teacher: The Start of an 18-year Career*

Ms. Payne did not begin her professional career as a teacher. She got married, had a child, and started her career in a local hospital as an office clerk. She described it as "sitting in a cubical all day long." She said, "I absolutely hated it. I got in trouble all the time. I could never stay in my spot." It was her grandmother who reminded her, "you've always wanted to be a teacher, go back to school and do what you want to do. It's who you are." Ms. Payne responded to her grandmother saying, "you know what, you are right." With a two-year-old daughter, Ms. Payne quit her office job in the hospital, went back to school, and graduated *summa cum laude* in education from a local university.

Ms. Payne went back to Galway County, the place where she grew up, and applied for her first job in the district (the county and the school district were the same). "I was so nervous cause I really wanted to get a job there," said Ms. Payne. She got hired into the first-grade team, the grade level she preferred, and when

she was shown her classroom, she thought to herself, “what? This is so weird!” She had this thought because her first teaching job as a first-grade teacher was in the very classroom she was once a first grader. For her, it was the perfect job.

5.2 *Being Aware of Changing Communities and Schools*

The community of Galway was a small rural town when Ms. Payne grew up as a student and when she first started teaching. It was a place where “everybody knew everybody.” According to Ms. Payne, the community today was different. There were outsiders moving into the town; migrant workers had been settling in; people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds started moving into town because of a lower cost of living. Schools changed, too. When Ms. Payne was a student in the school, there was one office building that housed grades kindergarten to five. A media center was later added to the school. In the 1990s, the school population continued to grow, three buildings were built on campus, and a separate elementary school was built to house grades three to five. Ms. Payne’s school only housed kindergarten to second grade. “At that time, there were no English learners,” she remembered.

Despite population growth and demographic changes, there were certain aspects of Galway that remained unchanged. The town was still racially segregated between Black and White students. A railroad track divided the town into an eastside and a westside. The eastside was where the old middle school was located, but “no White people lived in Eastside.” Ms. Payne recalled walking to school when she was in elementary school, but her family suddenly stopped her from walking to school as soon as she entered middle school. According to Ms. Payne, in the community there was still an “East-West” mentality that associated children with stereotypes. This mentality was described by Ms. Payne as “simple”—“simple people in their simple beliefs that because this was the way things were, things should remain that way.” When it came to the multilingual learner population, Ms. Payne cited a strong otherizing discourse such as “we don’t want them there; they’re a nuisance to us; send them back; build the wall kind of thing.” For the families and community members referred to as “them” in such discourse, Ms. Payne realized that families of multilingual learners experienced fears for immigration checks and raids based on immigration statuses.

Our EL population, especially in this day and time, they’re probably really scared. They’re scared to come to schools. They’re scared to go out. How do they know who’s waiting around the corner from them? They don’t know. And then when you have administrators or others that haven’t been trained that don’t know what these people truly face to even get here, let alone come to a parent conference.

Her consciousness of the situation of many families of multilingual learners was inseparable from her perceptions of the community, which had the bucolic and idyllic aspects but also a “simple-mindedness” as reflected in the attitudes of some community members.

Ms. Payne gave an example of the bias that people in a socially conservative rural community had against people who were culturally different, in this case, Spanish-speaking non-White students who were learning English. People might implicitly believe that “brown kids” were not worthy of being invested with monetary resources and services.

One of the three of my little girls who are ELs, her mom signed up for a conference last week and then the day of the conference Edith comes down and says, mom wants to do a phone conference. Is that okay? Absolutely. So we did a phone conference and other people are like, why can't that mom come? Maybe mom had to work, maybe mom's scared to leave her house right now. We don't know what people were going through. Maybe there was a sick grandparent or maybe there's someone to watch the other children or maybe she's been in charge of cooking, put in charge tonight of cooking dinner. We just don't know what her situation is. And a lot of times we have a bias because they are ELs and they're different than us. And we forget to understand the cultural differences there. And it really bothers me.

Here, Ms. Payne expressed being bothered by community members and families who held the belief that some non-White Spanish-speaking families were not adequately involved in their children's schooling or did not care about their children's education because a parent had to change an in-person parent-teacher conference to a phone call. What Ms. Payne referred to as a simple mindset contrasted with her empathetic understanding that many families lived at the intersection of immigration status, language access, social class, and employment status.

5.3 *Becoming a Teacher of Multilingual Learners*

Ms. Payne was initially not endorsed to teach multilingual learners when she obtained her teaching certificate in 2001. To avoid facing a penalty for teaching out of field, which referred to teachers teaching subjects or populations of students that were not listed on their teaching certificate, Ms. Payne and three other senior teachers could not have multilingual learners until seven years prior to this study. At that time, their principal started to pressure those out of field teachers to obtain their ESOL endorsement. The four senior teachers,

including Ms. Payne, who had been friends since high school, decided to obtain their ESOL endorsement together—"Let's just do it," they agreed. After two years of online courses, they finally earned their ESOL endorsement. They celebrated at Chili's restaurant, choosing from the two-for-one menu, and Ms. Payne remembered, "I had a great time because we finally did it."

Shortly thereafter, Ms. Payne welcomed her first multilingual learner in her classroom. This was at about the 12th year of her teaching career. She recounted her feelings, saying, "I remember just being so freaked out about having an EL kid." She had a storm of questions in her mind after seeing her class roster with a multilingual learner. "Am I going to teach in Spanish or English? Am I going to having to learn Spanish? What if I can't communicate with her? What if I can't communicate with her parents?" However, all her "what-if-this-and-what-if-thats" ended up having "the sweetest child" who had basic interpersonal communicative skills in English. Having had no huge barriers with her first multilingual learner, Ms. Payne had "an amazing first experience into the world of teaching an EL student."

The following year, Ms. Payne experienced a one hundred and eighty-degree turn of events when she had a multilingual learner, Mateo, who had been retained from a previous first-grade teacher in her class. Mateo's previous-year first-grade teacher told Ms. Payne that Mateo might have a learning disability, but it was difficult to tell for the teacher. Ms. Payne described Mateo as quiet, withdrawn, and immature. "He cried, he didn't want to come to school, and it was just this constant battle for that whole first time in first grade," she recalled. With this knowledge of hard work ahead with Mateo, Ms. Payne relived the emotional experience when she expected the first multilingual learner in her career the previous year saying, "He came to me and then of course I was scared to death. I'm like, oh my gosh, what am I going to do?"

Having had an "amazing first experience" with a multilingual learner, Ms. Payne was still anxious about having a second multilingual learner in her classroom. However, the origin of her fear changed from panic to her ethical responsibilities for teaching Mateo.

Because I didn't want him to fail. I didn't want him to, first of all, he was upset that all his friends had left him and gone to second grade. I didn't want him to feel like a failure again. That was my biggest thing. I wanted the other kids to accept him, and I wanted him to walk out of my classroom at the end of the year feeling success. That was my fear. I didn't want him to feel put down and not like coming to school, not wanting to be there and crying. I didn't want that for him. And so that's why I worked so hard to make that connection with him.

The emotion of fear revealed what Ms. Payne cared deeply about—the success of her students, including those who were marginalized. The fear that Mateo could possibly fail again in first grade led Ms. Payne to actively build strong relationships with Mateo. One way for Ms. Payne to build relationships with Mateo was to position herself as a learner of Mateo's home language, Spanish.

Mateo loved sharks. That was his thing in first grade. He would try and teach me words in Spanish about sharks. On the way to buses, he would say, Ms. Payne, say whatever, you know, like fin in Spanish, shark fin in Spanish. And I would say, “well, tell me how to say it.” He would tell me, and I would try and say it back. And he would just laugh. It's like, no, no, no. He would say, “say gill in Spanish.” And he would teach me how to say it and you know, I would try and say it and he would just laugh at me.

Ms. Payne showed a genuine interest in Mateo. She learned about what Mateo was interested in and made efforts to learn from Mateo about his interests and about the Spanish language associated with his interests. Mateo spent first grade as a boy who was withdrawn and shy, but in interactions like this where Ms. Payne demonstrated learning a different language and making mistakes, Mateo taught Ms. Payne and laughed with her. This moment happened when they walked to the school bus together. She also recalled a story of getting Mateo to read and write in class with her. She allowed Mateo to choose among books in the classroom library and Mateo chose nonfiction books about sharks. She did not discourage Mateo from choosing nonfiction books which could be more difficult for first graders. Instead, Ms. Payne recalled that she gave Mateo a journal when he was reading. She encouraged Mateo to look at the pictures, diagrams, and illustrations, and instructed him, “If you have anything that you wondered about, draw me a picture and then we can talk about them.” Mateo started drawing arrows or pictures to show information in the journal, for example, when a shark was eating something. He also drew pictures and used simple oral language to ask questions. Ms. Payne remembered the progress Mateo made, “When I began to read to him about sharks and we started talking about sharks, then I would see him start trying to write to me. Then it says in his journal about sharks in English.” She also explained her approach to teaching writing in English with Mateo.

Of course, that [writing] wasn't complete. Of course, it didn't have all the components, but there was enough there for me to be able to make out of what he was talking about. So, I would write it correctly for him. I told

him, "I'm not getting into it; I just want you to see in English what it looks like." So, I would write it for him and then the next day he would rewrite it correctly.

In the process, Ms. Payne engaged Mateo to slowly start reading, writing, and learning English with her. Although it might not be considered a success story for biliteracy development, Ms. Payne's emphasis in her work with Mateo was to build a foundational relationship, upon which everything else hinged.

In the meantime, the words about Mateo possibly having a learning disability from his previous first-grade teacher resounded increasingly with Ms. Payne. She was certain that Mateo needed to be tested for possible learning disabilities. She remembered one-on-one work with Mateo, when she was excited to see him "getting it," "Yes, he's got it! He's got it! And then other times I'd be like, oh, where'd that come from?" Therefore, Ms. Payne approached school leadership with her concerns for Mateo.

I went to administration at the time, and I told him, "I don't know what we need to do, but we need to look in to having him tested for a learning disability." And they were like, "Oh, but he's ESOL." And I'm like, "yeah, but there's more to it than that." I said, "imagine being ESOL and learning disabled. I said, it's not just a language barrier with him. There are some more to it than that." I fought for him that year. We really fought for him because I knew there had to be something else. And I really pushed and I'm sure he wasn't our first learning disabled, but he might've been our school's first.

To Ms. Payne, there was an urgent need for Mateo to get tested. Although Mateo was only the second multilingual learner in Ms. Payne's teaching career and her experiences with her first multilingual learner were smooth, she relied on her professional judgment she accumulated over twelve years of teaching in elementary grades. She acknowledged that she did not know exactly what to do, but the least she and the school could do was to get Mateo tested. Her persistence was met with resistance from the school administration who conflated Mateo's potential learning disability with his developing English language proficiency. This resistance was frustrating to Ms. Payne, as her educational credentials and professional judgments were not enough to convince the school administration at that time. She said, "I really felt like there was a wall and I could not get anyone to listen to me. And I was just like, somebody's got to listen to me." Ms. Payne felt that it was imperative to have Mateo tested, because "this is a child's life." A small act by the teacher and school could have

far-reaching implications for a child's educative experiences. Another reason was the parental engagement Mateo's parents had shown. As Ms. Payne said, "Mom and dad came in and dad spoke better [English] than mom. But his mom was there for everything. Mom was there for every conference, every family night." Mateo's parents' engagement in schools made her feel even more obliged to advocate for Mateo.

5.4 *Becoming an Advocate for Multilingual Learners*

As Ms. Payne previously recounted, Mateo successfully passed first grade, the second time around, with average grades. However, Ms. Payne knew that Mateo's second-grade teacher was pregnant and would soon be on leave. Ms. Payne said that she worried that the long-term substitute teacher would be less professionally prepared to meet Mateo's needs. After Mateo was promoted to second grade, Ms. Payne continuously communicated with Mateo's family through the school's Spanish-speaking paraprofessionals, Wendy and Edith. Although she said that Mateo's parents did not know how to request tests for him, which appeared to be deficit-oriented, her active communication with Mateo's family proved to be an important source of information, support, and social networking for Mateo's family. She offered her advice to Mateo's parents based on what she knew about how to strategically get resources for Mateo. This effort, again, was met with caution that came from an ally.

And Wendy even said to me at one time, "Be careful. I don't want you to get in trouble." And I'm like, I know, because you're not supposed to suggest certain things. There's an unwritten law because you are not the parents, but if the teacher prompts the parents, then the teacher could get in trouble ... But I started pushing again from first grade to second grade, you know, and they finally at the end of the year, got into second grade year, got him tested and he had a learning disability.

When Mateo was promoted to second grade, Ms. Payne kept pushing for Mateo's testing for special needs because Mateo's second grade teacher was going to take maternity leave. Although Ms. Payne was no longer Mateo's homeroom teacher, she felt a sense of urgency to follow up with Mateo's education, stating, "I can't in good faith and good collection, let him just flounder." Ms. Payne's advocacy led Wendy, the ESOL paraprofessional to remind her not to "get in trouble," because of the unwritten rule that if you were not the child's teacher, you were not supposed to prompt certain requests.

Whether to abide by the unwritten rule that she was not supposed to prompt the parents or to follow her belief that she would not allow Mateo to fail again

in second grade was another a choice that was emotional to Ms. Payne. She decided to do what she thought was good for the child, even though it meant potentially “getting herself into trouble.” Far into Mateo’s second grade, he was finally tested and diagnosed with a learning disability. By this time, it has been almost three years since Mateo’s first first-grade teacher suspected that he might have a learning disability.

For Mateo who was Ms. Payne’s second multilingual learner in her twelve-year teaching career, Ms. Payne became an advocate in the year they worked together, and in the year after Mateo had left Ms. Payne’s classroom. As Ms. Payne advocated for Mateo to receive the educational services he needed, she felt that she hit an invisible wall in the schoolyard. The figurative wall was blocking her advocacy work for Mateo, and she felt that no one was listening to her, which caused her to feel underappreciated and frustrated. Yet, she persisted advocating for Mateo despite the “wall” and the caution from the ESOL aide.

5.5 *Becoming the Wave-Maker*

Having worked in public education for over fifteen years, Ms. Payne said, “I feel I’m a little more jaded now than I was when I first started teaching because I’ve seen the ugly side of education, the political side of education, all of the junk that comes along with trying to be a really good teacher.” According to Merriam-Wester dictionary, jaded referred to feeling exhausted by overwork or made dull, apathetic, or cynical by experience or by having or seeing too much of something. This word captured Ms. Payne’s emotional experiences as a veteran teacher—feeling exhausted and becoming cynical of “the garbage of politics and no raises ad no support in the classrooms.” Her response to these aspects of being a teacher in a rural school was, “I have become very hard to the other side.”

How am I hard? I fight for what I feel is right. I used to just go along with the masses, you know, if, if 80% of the people were doing it, I would do it because I wouldn’t want to make the wave, you know, I wouldn’t want to cause it. Now I don’t care. I will jump up and down in that pool if I have to because if it’s not right for the kids and we shouldn’t be doing it, and a lot of times I’ll find myself in trouble or getting, not condemned, but you know, what’s the word I’m looking for—passed by.

To Ms. Payne, fighting for what she felt was right was not always something she was able or willing to do. She could go with the masses, too. Being willing to voice her concerns, advocating for students, and, in her words, “making waves”

required making a choice that was aligned with who she was as a teacher, yet this choice often resulted in the consequence of Ms. Payne feeling herself marginalized. She was conscious of the cause of such consequences.

Sometimes I feel like because she's a wave maker, she's not going to go along with masses. She's not going to be a yes girl. That's what they want. They want somebody to be the yes girl, I'm not that person anymore because if it's not right for the kids, I'm not gonna do it.

One example of Ms. Payne making waves in the school was a figurative battle she was fighting at the time of this study. The district recently adopted a standards-based report card system. To generate the report cards, students had to take a reading comprehension test. Ms. Payne described the test, "It's mind-blowing and I don't know how they expect the children to pass this." It was mind-blowing to Ms. Payne because her first graders had to read four pages of printed text and answer 15 questions. The teacher was not allowed to read the questions, or the choices, or the text to students. To add to the complexity of the tasks, one text had the word "avalanche."

We live in Florida people! And these children are from Central America and South America. I mean avalanche. I mean it's so not even ... so anyway, I'm making waves currently with that because it's not right. It's not right. It's not appropriate.

Ms. Payne's emotions could be felt through the transcript, as she exclaimed, stuttered, and cut her sentences short. The newly adopted standards-based report card system was doing a disservice to her students' learning and emotional wellbeing. Ms. Payne objected to the standards-based assessment in which first graders had to read four pages of text and answer 15 questions. She called out the cultural bias in the assessment. A test given to first graders in Florida contained information about avalanche, yet most multilingual learners in Ms. Payne's classroom were from Central American countries where it hardly ever snowed. Ms. Payne explained that the way she had been "fighting this battle" included making professional connections with other school districts that had adopted the new-to-the-district system of standards-based report cards, learning about other districts' practices, and openly voicing her dissent to her own school and district for the purpose of advocating for valid instruction and assessment.

When asked her what implications being a wave-maker had for her employment, Ms. Payne explained that she was a tenured teacher in the school. "So I'm

one of those grandma teachers that I'm can still make waves," she said, "basically you do what everybody tells you or you lose your job nowadays." Teacher tenure meant job security and being able to be an outspoken teacher. To Ms. Payne, having tenure also meant that she maintained a sense of loyalty to the district. Even when she made waves, it was for the good of students. For her, having tenure enabled her to keep teaching as a profession, not just a job. For Ms. Payne, her identity as a wave-maker in the district came from her loyalty to the district, school, and community. After all, it was the community in which she grew up. It was also the same school which she went to as a student and where her daughter was teaching, too.

5.6 *Becoming Ousted*

To Ms. Payne, it was emotionally significant that keeping one or two groups of people down to elevate the others did not make the society better as a unified whole. "Instead of just keeping them down, keeping suppressing them," she said, "as a society, why aren't you helping these people?" For multilingual learners in schools, she questioned the standard-based comprehension test, "why are we trying to fail all of these children because, clearly, that's going to fail them?" For some multilingual families, she questioned the process for families to obtain legal status in the US, "why are we not expediting this process to help them?" For her students who had long left her classroom, she insisted on identifying resources for them, "this is how you fill a college application." Her deep care for the students and families led her to ask these questions. Asking such many questions exposed her to the scrutiny by the community, as she developed a reputation as a wave-maker. For example, she shared one incident in which she "got in trouble" for sharing with a parent flyers and information about a progressive political candidate upon the parent's request.

In a rural community where "everyone knows each other," words spread quickly. Being a politically active teacher, Ms. Payne was under the public scrutiny. To her, it was necessary to respond to a parent's request for information. However, in one of the socially conservative counties that voted for the Republican candidate in that particular election, proactively rooting for a democratic candidate was frowned upon, as she recounted, "because of the very conservative community in which I was teaching in, I got a lot of flak for it."

Ms. Payne saw herself as a veteran teacher in public education who knew her boundaries. She would not send unsolicited political materials to families and community members. In order not to "get in trouble," her political activism normally took place outside her professional life. "I marched in parades across the state for him. I handed out literature in my free time. I campaigned, I canvassed, I knocked on doors," she said. Yet, since her commitment to an

equitable education for all children, children of color, low-income children, multilingual children, was an essential part of her identity, her political activism was inevitably intertwined with her work as a public-school teacher.

In addition to serving on the bargaining committee for the teachers' union in the district, she was invited to serve on an educational caucus through the Democratic Party and she traveled to the state capitol to talk with state legislators about educational policy. A lot of lawmakers, Ms. Payne reflected, had no experience in K-2 classrooms, yet they made laws and requirements for teachers and students. Being a classroom teacher in public school, she was expanding her sphere of influence and making her voices heard on a larger scale by talking with state legislatures. Despite the criticism, Ms. Payne "threw her hat in the ring," because she had had the sense of urgency for change.

We cannot keep going like you're going as a state. We were the third largest state in the whole entire nation. We are the number one tourist destination in the nation, and you can't invest in education?

Since the end of the political campaign, Ms. Payne moved out of the rural town where she was living and teaching. Instead, she lived in a nearby city about half an hour away from her town. Ms. Payne had strong commitments to the school and community, as she said, "I feel like I'll never go anywhere and leave the County and the first-grade classroom because that's where I will end my career." Her activism, however, clashed with the social conservatism in the rural community where she grew up and had been teaching for the past 17 years, and pushed her out of her community. Being a teacher activist in the rural community was an emotional experience, as she said, "because I am a wave-maker, I feel the need for change. I could no longer live in the community." Since then, she moved out of her community and became an outcast of her community.

5.7 *Being the "Number One Teacher in Our Community"*

Ms. Payne's stories conclude with an interaction with a parent whose multilingual child, Alma, was in Ms. Payne's first-grade classroom the previous year. At the end of year, Alma's father came to the parent-teacher conference. Below is Ms. Payne's memory of her conversation with Alma's father.

Father: My English is a little broken, but I speak better than mom.

Payne: (nodded)

Father: I want to tell you something.

Payne: OK.

Father: I'm in the community here and the Hispanic people talk, just like you people talk.

Payne: Yes, sir.

Father: When Alma was put in your class last year, we went into the community and told them who Alma's teacher was. You were the number one teacher in our community. Everybody wants Ms. Payne. We were so grateful and so blessed and we've been so happy with you and everything that everyone in our community said about you is true.

Ms. Payne remembered this story when asked moment that made her feel good about teaching multilingual learners. Knowing how the Latinx community members described her was a strong emotional experience as she felt that her insistence and advocacy paid off. "That was a highlight that he thought enough of me to bring that story back and share it with me." She said, "I was floored that they talked about me like that in the community." We both laughed with tears when we recalled the moment.

6 Discussion

This study showed how one teacher self-identified as being from the place and having rich place-based knowledge as part of their teacher knowledge and teacher identity (Greenwood, 2013). Her place-based knowledge was reflected in a deep understanding of the realities of her rural community. As Reeves (2009) reported that teachers' individual attitudes, experiences, and personalities contributed to their work with multilingual learners, Ms. Payne's insider position granted her privilege and knowledge of the community culture and norms. Such privilege and knowledge empowered her to expand her sphere of influence beyond her classroom, to having her voice heard in the school and community. Her insider position allowed her to understand the bucolic aspects of their rural community, the closeness of human relations, and the community's consolidation around the schools. In the meantime, her insider position allowed her to observe firsthand how Hispanic migrant workers contributed to the local businesses and how immigrants revitalized the local communities. Similar to rural teachers' acute awareness of inequities faced by rural multilingual learners as reported in Marichal (2021), Ms. Payne's insider position was also reflected in her understanding of the undercurrents of bias and racism in her community. It was with such complex place-based knowledge of the sociopolitical realities of her community that Ms. Payne was able to advocate on behalf of her multilingual learners in various ways.

At the personal level, school level, and the district level, the rural place was not only the backdrop, but also the basic fabric of Ms. Payne's lived experiences. Her emotions in teaching multilingual learners were intimately related to the rural community and changes that took place there. Being an insider of the rural community in which she was teaching gave her an insider perspective of the social and historical processes of Galway. For example, Ms. Payne contrasted the changing demographics and unchanging social climate dominated by groups with linguistic, racial, and political privileges. She rejected deficit assumptions about her students as a teacher. She refused to accept what was detrimental to her students' learning and development. Educational practices that were "not right for the kids" often disturbed her deeply. These emotions in her work as a teacher with multilingual learners led to actions on her part, for example, pushing for Mateo's test for special education services after Mateo had left her classroom. Although these actions brought criticism, Ms. Payne persevered in her stance as an advocate for multilingual learners in her school community. In this process, emotions Ms. Payne experienced served as a catalyst for her becoming of an advocate, which resonate with previous research that documented teachers' emotions as productive for their professional growth (Golombek & Doran, 2014; Nguyen, 2018).

Research has shown that being insiders of a community allowed the educator to feel a sense of agency with which they could take concrete actions toward social change (Morgan, 2016; Yazan, 2019). Being an insider brought a sense of ownership and agency to Ms. Payne. Being an effective veteran teacher with tenure protected her job security as she became a "wavemaker." She combated the conservative social climate through her political activism. She saw the need to do so because she witnessed demographic changes first-hand as a teacher. She knew the history of bias and she felt emotionally propelled to bring change to the community for the good of her students. In the meantime, her insider position to some degree protected her from the backlash from her advocacy for minoritized students. She eventually left her community and chose to live in a town 30-minutes away, thus becoming an outsider to her native community. However, she continued teaching in the community and remained to be recognized as the "number-one" teacher by the Hispanic community.

With teachers' roles conceptualized as dynamic and fluid in an insider/outsider framework, research has shown that how educators position themselves intentionally in terms of their relationships with students, their school and communities could facilitate or hinder their ability to advocate for students (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Hammerness et al., 2005; Sfard & Prusak, 2005). Ms. Payne's positionality was simultaneously helpful for her as a teacher as well as challenging for her as an advocate for multilingual learners and families. With

her nuanced knowledge of her rural community, she was able to navigate her relationships with students, families, and the school community, and negotiate her own emotional experiences and remain committed to her work. In her journey as a rural teacher, as she continuously moved back and forth between being an insider and outsider of the community, she drew on her positionality as an insider and outsider strategically to have agency.

By telling the stories of one teacher who has deep place-based knowledge and complex emotional experiences as a teacher and advocate for multilingual learners in a rural community, this study offered a deep dive into what it means to teach and advocate for multilingual learners in rural places. Ms. Payne's stories reflect, like those in Marichal (2021) that she saw herself as a professional who had strong relationships with students. Moreover, they show that she was deeply invested in the communities and place, a key component of how she humanized her work with multilingual learners.

7 Conclusion and Implications

With scholars recognizing that rural multilingual learner education has been an under-researched area (Coady, 2019; Coady et al., 2017; Hansen-Thomas, 2018; Marichal, 2021), this study provides implications for rural educators and teacher educators concerning linguistic diversity, inclusion, and equitable educational opportunities for multilingual learners. As rural educators collectively contend with questions of power in rural spaces, asking critical questions such as "Who has it? Who doesn't? Who benefits from these dynamics?" (Gallagher et al., 2021, p. 9), this study reminds teachers and educators that there are inequities in rural multilingual learner education and that it is imperative for teachers and educators to take a collaborative approach to address such inequities. This study also shows that teacher education programs cannot approach rural multilingual education in a decontextualized way without recognizing and capitalizing on the place-consciousness of rurality (Greenwood, 2013; Marichal, 2021). Additionally, this study highlights the necessity to address emotions in teacher education and professional development.

As a teacher educator working closely with pre- and in-service teachers in an area surrounded by rural schools, I cherish the relationships built from conducting this research. These relationships remind me to embrace an approach to teaching and research that is grounded in relationships with current and future teachers and to focus on the "identity work" (De Costa & Norton, 2017, p. 8) for them to become responsive and transformative educators for multilingual learners.

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Bilingual Paraeducators' Navigation of Narrow Identity Spaces in a Rural Elementary School

Jenelle Reeves

Abstract

Demographic shift in the Great Plains, primarily as a result of agri-industries pulling Latinx workers to rural spaces, has diversified the student enrollment in rural schools. Athens Elementary School, for example, was one of its state's first majority minority schools, shifting from predominantly White, English-speaking learners to mostly Latinx learners over the course of the 1990s to 2020s. Many Latinx newcomer families speak Spanish or indigenous languages, arriving in Athens with little or no English. Meanwhile, Athens' school personnel has remained overwhelmingly White, of European descent, and English-speaking, creating a mismatch between those who attend and those who teach school. In this divide stands the bilingual paraeducator. Through the detailed narratives of Juana and Manuela, two bilingual paraeducators, this chapter describes how paras not only provide linguistic and cultural brokering but also how they navigate a narrow identity space as non-certified school staff, critical knowledge holders, and educators of children, newcomer families, teachers and administrators. Implications include the need for rural, multilingual schools to reckon with the language and culture ideologies that restrict not only bilingual paraeducators but also their linguistically minoritized learners.

Keywords

bilingual paraeducators – teacher identity – linguistic and cultural brokering – multilingual families

...

Even sometimes they said 'Oh, we are the teachers, we are the ones that went to college. You guys don't know anything.' And, like, I agree, you have more college than we have, but that doesn't mean that we don't know what we're talking about.

MANUELA



1 Introduction

Bilingual paraeducators, like Manuela, are essential to the functioning of many rural, Midwestern schools where community demographics have becoming increasingly multilingual and multicultural; yet schooling and school personnel remain largely monolingual (in English) and monocultural (White and of European-descent) (Gray, 2021; Ventura, 2020; Wenger et al., 2004). Much of the demographic shift in these rural, agricultural towns has resulted from agri-businesses pulling immigrants from Mexico and Central America (Champlin & Hakes, 2006; Gouveia & Saenz, 2000), as the bilingual paraeducators' families of this study were pulled to the rural community of Athens. Manuela, who came to the U.S. from Mexico as the young wife of a newly hired meat packing worker, and Juana, who arrived in the U.S. from El Salvador to enroll in American high school after her parents were recruited to work in a U.S. meat processing plant, were two of the many immigrants to rural America in the 1990s and early 2000s. Today, Manuela and Juana work as bilingual paraeducators; they are linguistic and cultural brokers serving as metaphorical bridges between immigrant families and their rural American schools. Without bilingual paraeducators, the mostly White, English-speaking school personnel would struggle to communicate with newly arrived, mostly Spanish-speaking families. At the same time that their work is essential, paras' work is also 'non-certified,' low paying, and less powerful compared to other school personnel. In rural schools, bilingual paraeducators' work is further complicated by the ongoing colonial project in rural America, where agribusinesses, which are settled on the land of displaced and disposed indigenous people, recruit immigrant laborers for dangerous, dirty, and demanding (3D) work cast as 'national development and simultaneously cast them [laborers] out as inassimilable aliens through discourses of deficit, deviance, and danger' (Chatterjee, 2019, p. 647). In this chapter, I explore how two Spanish-English bilingual paraeducators, Juana and Manuela, navigated the narrow identity space in the elementary school of a rural, agribusiness company town.

2 Theoretical Framing

The identity negotiation of bilingual paraeducators will be explored in this study through the use of positioning theory, which invites analysis of paras' identities through the claiming, assigning, and contesting of identity positions (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). Positioning theory has mostly been utilized, to date, to analyze interpersonal discourse between individuals, although some recent work expands this to look at interaction between a person and institutions (Kayi-Aydar, 2018). To augment the mainly inter/intrapersonal heuristic of positioning theory, theoretical work on neocolonialism is also utilized in this chapter to help make visible the social and institutional power dynamics that limit bilingual paraeducators' identity space from the outset. Thus, a critical and socially-expanded framing is added to positioning theory, allowing for analysis not only of the inter/intrapersonal psychology of identity positioning but also analysis of the ways the continuing colonial project in American rural spaces plays a key role in bilingual paraeducators' identity work.

2.1 *Positioning Theory*

Positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1991; Harré & van Langenhove, 1999) focuses in on the identity choices people make, try to make, or have thrust upon them, and offers a framework for exploring and explaining the identity struggles and conflicts often reported by people in complex interactional spaces, such as schools (Frankel, 2017; Kayi-Aydar, 2018; Kayi-Aydar & Miller, 2018). Positioning theory "aims to understand how positions and actions shape social structures as interlocutors engage in interaction" (Kayi-Aydar & Miller, 2018, p. 3), and the theory is premised on people having some agency over their identities, "that individuals have some measure of choice as to which rules and norms they follow in relation to the projects they have in hand and what they *take* the social and physical environment to be" (Harré & Moghaddam, 2011, p. 129). Identity positions within this theory are "presentations of self in communicative events" (Kayi-Aydar, 2018, p. 4), and positions are characterized as dynamic rather than static, multiple rather than singular. That is, a person's identity positions may change, and they may also hold multiple, even seemingly contradictory, identity positions at once.

Positioning is the act of claiming or assigning a position; it "relates to situating oneself or others with particular rights and obligations through conversation" (Kayi-Aydar, 2018, p. 5). There are two general types of positionings: interactive and reflexive. Interactive is the positioning of others (i.e. assigning a position to another person), and reflexive is positioning oneself (i.e. claiming an identity position as one's own).

The idea of positioning is above all characterized by understanding positions as relational processes, which are founded upon interaction and negotiation with other people. Positionings are somewhat like the fine threads that weave the lattice of social interaction. They are the warp of our interactive situations. (Tirado & Gálvez, 2008, p. 232)

When identity positions claimed by a person differ from identity positions assigned to that person by others, negotiation and possibly conflict are likely to ensue. Such identity negotiation has provided fertile ground for educational research.

Positioning theory mainly views identity negotiation through interpersonal relationships and intrapersonal processes. While the theory does not rule out positionings between an individual and groups of people, institutions, or non-human entities, there is little work on positioning theory beyond the inter/intrapersonal realm. Yet, the influence of such things as language ideologies, which are key to identity positionings in this study, are not limited to interpersonal communication. In order to account for the positioning power of contextual factors as language ideologies and cultural power differentials and their involvement in identity work a wider, critical perspective on American's ongoing colonial project supplements the theoretical power of positioning theory.

2.2 *The New Colonial Project*

Decolonizing scholarship posits that the largely European colonial project that settled White immigrants on indigenous peoples' land throughout the United States continues today (Chatterjee, 2019; Kashyap, 2019, 2021). However, today's colonized subjects include those recruited to the White settler's domain to do undesirable dangerous, dirty, and demanding (3D) work, such as meatpacking, for the economic benefit of the owners and shareholders of agribusiness conglomerates. These mostly Latinx and Asian immigrants of today working in agri-industries do not receive the settler's bargain of yore: full inclusion for their hard work. It is important to note that this settler's bargain was (and remains) problematic as the bargain is made at the expense of indigenous people dispossessed of their lands (Chatterjee, 2019). 3D immigrant workers are often excluded through immigration and labor policies favorable to big business. Such policies (e.g. making too few agribusiness visas available) pull workers to U.S. jobs through often undocumented channels as agribusinesses look the other way and offer 3D workers few work-place protections (e.g. minimal or absent safety equipment and protocols; limited or no unemployment insurance) (Champlin & Hakes, 2006). These policies "provide the meatpacking industry with a plentiful supply of labor working at the most dangerous jobs

in the US for low pay, few benefits, and no job security” (p. 50). Agribusiness workers, then, are likely to be the subject of an ongoing settler colonial project in which the *immigrant* is now exploited for their hard work and excluded from full participation in society or even settlement.

The modern colonial project is also concerned with language, and colonial language ideologies are infused with linguisticism, the belief that some language are superior or more appropriate than others (Pennycook, 2000; Rosa & Nelson, 2017). An English monoglossic language ideology, in which English monolingualism is the norm and most desirable state (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Wiley & Lukes, 1996), signals a continuation of the colonial project even today. This English-only ideology pervades much of U.S. schooling, even where student populations are largely multilingual and where one would expect a heteroglossic ideology to be ascendant (Hinton, 2016). This monoglossic language ideology forms the foundation of English-only school language policies and even in some bilingual education programs that de-emphasize the legitimacy of Spanish and indigenous languages. Language ideologies are evident, then, not only in interpersonal interactions but also in interactions between individuals and institutions, including schools.

3 Context of the Study

The community of Athens and its schools are examined in turn below, with particular emphasis given to the ways in which language ideologies and cultural power circulate as ongoing colonial logics in these rural, multilingual, and multicultural spaces, opening and restricting identity spaces for bilingual paraeducators.

3.1 *Demographic Change on the Great Plains*

The meat industry in the 1980s, in a move to unyolk itself from the demands of powerful workers' unions, shifted their business model from shipping livestock to their large urban meatpacking plants (e.g. Chicago, Kansas City) to opening more numerous and smaller processing plants within the rural communities where livestock were raised (Champlin & Hakes, 2006; Gouveia & Saenz, 2000). This shift had a tremendous impact on the mostly White, rural communities who found themselves with a new processing plant, new jobs, new money, and new neighbors. The plants' dangerous, dirty, and demanding (3D) work drew immigrant and refugee populations attracted by wages much higher than they could earn in Latin America. As a result, communities dotting the Midwest, Great Plains, and mountain states became more culturally and linguistically diverse, and this change in rural community demographics also

meant a change in who attended rural community schools. Athens, a town of 6,500 on the Great Plains, is one such community.

A national meat processing corporation runs one of the world's largest pork processing plants (Honig, 2020) just outside of Athens, employing more than 2,200 people. Additionally, two pet food producers, employing a total of 500+ people, are also located in or nearby Athens. These three agribusinesses draw workers to the Athens area from far afield; workers in these plants are from Mexico, Guatemala, and numerous other central American countries. Karen and Vietnamese refugees also make up a slice of this workforce. Entry level, production line jobs for Athens' meatpacking plant posted on Indeed.com in March 2021 advertised a starting wage of \$16.40 an hour with \$2500 in relocation assistance and a \$2500 retention bonus.

Worker recruitment by these agribusinesses has shifted the demographics of Athens. Today, 45.2% of Athenians report that they are Hispanic (as per the language used by the U.S. Census) and 41.7% report speaking a language other than English at home (U.S. Census, 2021). In 1990, the county in which Athens was incorporated, a mere 74 (0.01%) citizens reported being of Hispanic background, compared to 3,789 (26.6%) in 2019. Similarly, the Hispanic population of Athens grew 205% from the 2000 to the 2010 U.S. Census counts. These shifts in the general population of the area shifted the school population. In academic year 2020–2021, Athens Community Schools was a 'major-minority' district, one of only a handful in the state, with 61% students identified as Hispanic/Latino (State Education Profile, 2021). Twenty-seven percent of K-12 learners were identified as English-learners in 2019–2020.

3.2 *Athens Schools*

While Athens experienced a dramatic population shift over the last 30 years, it is important to note that by 2021, having a significantly Latinx and Spanish-speaking population was no longer a new phenomenon. By 2021, Athens school had been majority Latinx for nearly a decade, and the schools had run English learner programs for more than 25 years. Juana, one of the paraeducator participants of this study, had arrived in Athens in the mid 2000s, graduated from Athens High School, and worked for 10 years as a para by 2021, indicating that this new Latinx diaspora town was, in reality, no longer 'new' (Hamann & Harklau, 2021). Unlike the majority of rural towns featured in educational research on rural, receiving communities (Coady, 2020), Athens could no longer claim to be a 'new' receiving community. With more than three decades of demographic shift behind them, Athens schools were long-time Latinx and English-learner serving institutions. Therefore, Athens' Latinx population consisted of second and third generations while there remained a steady pace of newcomer Latinx families continually arriving in Athens to work in the local agri-industries.

Despite decades of experience educating English-learning Latinx students, many of the challenges observed in new rural receiving community schools persisted in Athens. English learner academic achievement rates lagged behind non-English learner rates, and Hispanic academic achievement rates lagged behind White rates (State Education Profile, 2021). Academic achievement was measured almost exclusively through English, and state-wide standardized tests were offered only in English. Athens schools provided English-only instruction, with the exceptions of Spanish as a world and heritage language in secondary school.

3.3 *A New Kind of Company Town*

Athens' transition from a largely homogenous Czech settlement community, established just after the U.S. Civil War, to a multicultural, multilingual immigrant receiving community by the turn of the 21st century is a study in America's continuing colonial project, and emblematic of what Champlin and Hakes (2006) call the 'new company town' (p. 49). White, European settlers displaced the indigenous Pawnee, Kansas, and Oto tribes throughout the 19th century from the land that Athens now incorporates. Today the colonial project in rural America continues as immigrant agribusiness workers, the new colonized subject, relocate to the White settler's community where corporate meatpackers require "a large pool of easily replaceable labor that has no control over the pace work on of the shop floor" (Champlin & Hakes, 2006, p. 49). The new company town in rural, meatpacking communities typically hosts a large processing plant (as in Athens) and has a large population of low-skill worker immigrants, hired by the agribusiness(es). Additionally, the majority of the new company workers are not seasonal workers; they do not move with the crops like other agribusiness workers throughout the U.S. The new company town, then, is often bifurcated with a well-established White settler population and a more recently arrived (immigrant but not seasonally migrant) agribusiness worker population (e.g. immigrants of color doing 3D work). Athens fits this profile neatly. Unlike in generations past, however, today's workers in the new company town are often excluded from a full welcome and equal opportunity (Chatterjee, 2019; Kashyap, 2021); they are not offered, as noted above, the full *settler's bargain*. Many immigrant meatpacking workers are undocumented, and these workers are at constant threat of deportation. And those with documentation are mostly unskilled with limited education and little knowledge of workers' rights. Meatpacking remains an industry with a high workplace accident rate, a continuing, troubling number of unaddressed safety violations, the attention of policy-making politicians, and a firm resistance to worker unionization (Champlin & Hake, 2006; Ramos et al., 2020).

Despite the exploitation and exclusion cycle observed in agribusiness immigrant worker populations in new company towns (Champlin & Hake, 2006; Chatterjee, 2019), some 3D workers and their families have made Athens their home. And, by many accounts, the cultural and linguistic groups in Athens generally coexist in harmony. Antojitos Mejicanos snack shop and the Super Latina grocery now find space on the town's main street alongside storied local taverns and a long-running Czech restaurant. Some of the immigrants drawn to work in Athens' agribusinesses in the 1990s and 2000s put down roots and stayed (having somehow navigated or skirted U.S. immigration policies) and raised Athens-born U.S. citizen children, even grandchildren. Athens' identity as a multicultural town has been a reality for more than two decades.

Yet, disharmony broke the surface on occasion, hinting at disquieting undercurrents between White settlers and more recently arrived residents of color. Local and national elections routinely stir anti-immigrant sentiment as politicians try to push fearful voters to the polls or, mostly recently, when the exploitation of immigrant meatpacking workers came to the fore during the COVID-19 pandemic. Children and grandchildren of Athenian agribusiness workers banded together in spring 2020 as "The Children of [Athenian Meatpacking Company]" to protest the company's failure to provide safe working conditions and their threat to fire workers if they did not show up to work despite skyrocketing COVID cases at the plant. National media attention and weeks of protests eventually brought some small relief in the form of additional personal protective equipment (Honig, 2020). However, resentment of the exploitation of their elders simmered throughout the protests led by Athens' 3D workers' children and grandchildren ('My parents are more important than meat' read protest signs), and the grudging, insufficient response by agribusiness owners did little to quell that resentment, instead spawning advocacy efforts within the local and wider Latinx and immigrant community.

It is within this setting, of a new, multicultural, multilingual company town experiencing at least occasional spasms of disharmony, that Athens schools welcomed Latinx children along with a dwindling number of white children, and where bilingual paraeducators worked to bridge linguistic and cultural, home-to-school gaps.

4 The Study

This study aimed to explore the identity work of bilingual paraeducators in a rural school district on the Great Plains in the U.S., and, in particular, the paraeducators' negotiation of identities within the narrow identity space as

non-certified, Spanish-English bilingual, school personnel situated in an agribusiness company town. The linguistic and cultural knowledge of bilingual paraeducators has previously been observed to be critical to the functioning of schools (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2000; Coady, 2019; English, 2009; Ernst-Slavit et al., 2021; Ernst-Slavit & Wenger, 2006; Gray, 2021; Ventura, 2020); yet we still know little of the identity work of bilingual paraeducators who occupy this space, particularly in rural schools.

In early 2020, I proposed a study of bilingual paraeducators at rural schools, a study that would have included rounds of observation of the paras in their classrooms and multiple face-to-face interviews. This plan was scaled back as the target schools (and nearly all U.S. schools) shifted to remote only instruction in March and April of 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. After putting the study on hold, I revised and scaled back the study plan in fall 2020, reduced the schools to one (Athens Elementary School), limited participation to three paraeducator participants (two of whom are featured here), and shifted data collection to video conference interviews and email. Unfortunately, classroom observations could not be arranged during the 2020–2021 school year; school visitors were prohibited, and joining classes remotely was not feasible in elementary classrooms whose personnel were already strained to keep masks on young faces, young learners socially distanced, and a contagious virus at bay.

Inquiry into identity development lends itself to the building of profiles or cases, and I utilized a case study approach in this study. The case here is *the identity work of a bilingual paraeducator in a rural elementary school setting*, and I present two cases: Juana and Manuela. As per Stake's (2005) advice, I deeply contextualize Juana and Manuela's cases by detailing rich description of the context of their work as paraeducators and by providing as much of participants' own words as feasible in this write up. In this way, trustworthiness in the researcher is built and readers can check my interpretation through that data.

4.1 *Data Collection and Analysis*

Data collection included two Zoom (videoconference) interviews with each participant. The first of these interviews for each participant was structured and followed an interview guide (Appendix A). The second interview followed up on participants' answers from the first interview after initial analysis. Interviews lasted between 35 and 50 minutes and were video recorded and later transcribed (by the researcher). Additional data were emails to answer clarifying and follow up questions (7 emails to Juana with 6 responses; 4 emails to Manuela with 4 responses). And, finally, in order to understand the linguistic landscape of the school (as observations by the researcher were not allowed

during the ongoing pandemic), I also emailed questions about language policy and use to two teachers (who were my former students) and an administrator.

Transcripts from the interviews and emails were analyzed for participants' identity positioning statements; these often included reflexive positionings in which paras claimed identity positions for themselves, but they also included paras' positionings of others (e.g. teachers, Latinx parents, etc.) and paras' counter-positioning against identities assigned to them that they did not accept. This type of analysis, in which paraeducators' (in this case) discourse is analyzed for assertions and rejections of identity positions aligns with positioning theory's focus on how individuals negotiate their identities. Data were read and reread in search of position statements, which took the following forms.

- *Aligning self with a group or similar others*: These statements were often identified through the use of collective pronouns (we and our). An example from Manuela was: "We [Latinxs] always make everything homemade so we don't buy like frozen food. We don't put things in the microwave." Here Manuela is aligning herself with Latinx families in the school community. These positioning statements could also be in opposition to groups and/or dissimilar others (e.g. 'we are not like them').
- *Asserting unique personal traits/identities*: These statements were often identified through the use of first-person singular signifiers (e.g. 'I' and 'my') and were either overt statements of 'who I am' or descriptions of past personal experiences/enactment of identity. Juana's recounting of her determination to learn English in order to be self-sufficient (below) is an example of this kind of positioning statement.
- *Framing others as a way to frame oneself*: Participants' narration of conversations or experiences with others were indicative of this type of positioning statement. An example was Juana and Manuela's framing of teachers as outsiders to Latinx culture. This positioning of teachers served as a foil to the paras' own insider status.
- *Responding to others' framing of self*: These statements also typically came from paras' retelling of interactions or experiences with teachers, parents, and other paras. An example was Manuela's tart response (and reframing) in the opening quote of this chapter to how teachers framed her as unknowing because they held a college degree and Manuela did not.

Once positioning statements were identified within the data, I analyzed the statements for meaning by, for example, answering the question, what is the nature of the identity assigned or claimed by paras (or implicated others) in this statement. Positioning statements were then grouped into categories of

identity positions. Identity position categories included: para as caring/maternal adult; para as proud bilingual; para as cultural insider. Categories with multiple verifying positioning statements were used to create identity profiles of the paras, which I shared with them (via email) to member check my analysis.

Importantly, data for discourse analysis in this study came solely from participants themselves (via interviews and emails). Within this data set, paras often reported on interactions with others, such as teachers and parents. The retellings of these interactions from the paras' perspective were rich in identity-positioning statements. Establishing the veracity of the retelling (e.g. an objective verification of what paras reported against what actually happened) could have provided interesting counterpoints to the paras' perspectives, however, this kind of verification was not gathered. But, such verification was not necessary to reveal insight into paraeducators' identity work. The paras' identity positionings (how they claimed, assigned, and rejected identity positions) revealed their internal identity work, and these positionings are the data set used in this analysis. Future exploration of bilingual paraeducator work could expand data to include others' perspectives, such as teachers, administrators, parents, and students.

4.2 *Researcher Positionality*

My researcher positionality is that of a White, female, English-speaking teacher educator and educational researcher. I had previously spent 18 months in Athens Schools collecting data for a research project with English as a second language (ESL) teachers in 2008–2009. My interest in paraeducators' identities was sparked by my observation of the several local schools' reliance on their paraeducators' linguistic and cultural knowledge. Additionally, in my work as a teacher educator, I prepare K-12 general education teachers to teach with multilingual learners, and this, I believe, includes learning to working well with bilingual paraeducators who may be present in schools.

Having myself grown up on a small farm in rural Iowa, where the nearest community was about 1,200 people and five miles away, I feel at home in rural communities and spaces. From my farmer's daughter's perspective, Athens, with its multiple stoplights and a Walmart, was a fairly large 'small' town, but its strong connection to agriculture and agricultural work was immediately (visually and culturally) apparent.

4.3 *Participants*

Ten bilingual paraeducators teaching at Athens Elementary School were invited via email to participate in the study. Three paras agreed, and two of those paraeducator participants are featured in this report: Juana and Manuela. Detailed profiles for each are presented below.

5 Findings

In this section findings from the analysis of Juana and Manuela's identity negotiations as paras at Athens Elementary School are presented. In-depth profiles of each para are followed by analysis of the paras' identity work via synergistic and conflicting identity positioning.

5.1 *Paraeducator Profile: Juana*

Coming from El Salvador to Athens as a fifteen-year-old, Juana was herself an English learner in Athens Community Schools. Juana joined her two older brothers at Athens High School in the mid 2000s, where she enrolled as a 9th grader with very little English proficiency and a lot of determination to succeed.

I think the hardest, like you said, was that change, and then learn the language ... you couldn't understand anything, and it was hard because I don't understand anything. And, I don't want to be asking. I think that made me learn because I was like, 'I don't want to be asking what he said? What they say? Can you translate for me?' So, I said, I don't want to be saying those words. I want to learn it. And I know I can. Why would I be asking to translate what they say if I can learn it fast? So, that's how I learned.

Juana did learn English and graduated within four years. Upon her graduation she enrolled in a local community college to pursue a degree as a medical assistant. In her first year of studies she searched for part time employment to keep financially afloat while attending classes. She heard that Athens Elementary School, Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) through grade 2 school, was seeking bilingual paraeducators, she applied and was offered the position on a full-time basis. After some consideration, she decided to put her medical assistant's degree on hold to see if she might enjoy working with young bilingual learners instead. Today, almost eleven years later, Juana continues to work as a bilingual paraeducator at Athens Elementary. Her years have mostly been spent in the four- and five-year old, Pre-K classroom, but she has also held placements in Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2 during those years.

Juana found her work as a bilingual paraeducator in the Pre-K classroom to be rewarding, particularly when she could see that her work helped a struggling student.

I think it's great the way, when you see a kid learn what you taught them. And especially the kid who has struggled learning their letters, numbers, or how to write their name. And, when you finally see that they know

how to write their name because you've taught them, and they're good at, they just write it and go for it, it's like, wow. It's great.

The satisfaction Juana felt from being a bilingual paraeducator motivated her to return to community college, where she began taking courses toward an associate's degree in pre-education. Juana was enrolled in this degree program during the course of the study. Upon completion of her two-year degree she intended to pursue a degree in elementary special education in order to become a full-time certified teacher.

In addition to translating language, Juana felt she was also a cultural translator, and she felt some teachers needed to understand Latinx families better. In particular, Juana thought that teachers could be more sensitive to newly arrived Latinx parents with low literacy in Spanish resulting from limited schooling experience in their countries of origin or because they were speakers of indigenous languages and Spanish was the family's second and English their third language.

When I did the parent conferences, yeah, I had some experience with some of it. I think like they [teachers] need to understand better why kids struggle or why he's not getting help at home. They [teachers] wonder, why the parents don't help him, or why is he having a hard time. And I try to explain to the teacher because some parents they tell me, when I'm translating they tell me, like, 'Oh, I'm sorry I'm not able to teach my kids this way.' So when I'm translating, I try to tell, explain the teachers. Some of them, they look that they understand the parents, but not all of them, you know. Some think parents don't care about school.

Juana understood her job as a para to include cultural translation and tried to serve as a linguistic and cultural bridge between Latinx families and the school.

Juana was proud of how quickly her students learned English, but she also wanted them to maintain their Spanish. As the mother of a young son herself, Juana realized her son, who attended pre-school at Athens Elementary, was becoming English dominant and preferred to speak in English even at home. This concerned Juana as she worried about the possible rupture this would have between her son and his grandparents and their extended family in El Salvador. Juana began to question the English-only approach, which she had taken for granted as a learner. "I learned [English] in a couple of years, but you know, Spanish was my language, my main language. I talk with him in Spanish but he wants English, like he speaks in school."

Juana was reluctant to dwell on downsides to her work as a paraeducator, but she did indicate that occasionally the relationship between herself as a paraeducator and the classroom teacher was unequal.

Just treat them [paraeducators] the same way, treat them equal. And I think just, the connection between the teacher and the para, they should talk to each other and help each other. Don't just rely on the para or on the teacher, you know? Just be there as a team, and help each other. And talk about what's wrong and what's right. Just be kind and nice to each other, that's the best thing. Just have that good connection, try to resolve a problem, too.

5.2 *Paraeducator Profile: Manuela*

Manuela arrived in Athens at age 25, a young wife following her husband who worked in the Athens meatpacking plant. In her first years in Athens, she was a stay-at-home mom with two daughters. When her children were older and in school, Manuela took advantage of Athens Schools' English as a second language program for parents and guardians. Eventually she also took a test preparation course and received her GED. With both daughters well into their K-12 school careers, Manuela decided to apply for a bilingual paraeducator job with Athens Elementary School, and she was hired. She was in her tenth year as a para in 2021 and worked mainly in the Pre-K classrooms with three- and four-year olds, though she had also assisted in Kindergarten and grades 1 and 2 as needed. Manuela's daughters graduated from high school, and, during the time of the study, one served in the U.S. military while the other was enrolled in a teacher education program at a local university.

Working with children whom others describe as 'difficult' was a favorite part of Manuela's job, and she was told she was particularly good with these children. Manuela noted with pride, "Sometimes they [teachers] tell me, Manuela, we have another one for you," when a child struggling with appropriate classroom behavior was identified. "I think with them [children] more than nothing else you have to have choices for them. That way they kind of feel important, like, you're making them important and teaching them to make decisions." Manuela felt strongly that patience, flexibility, and good humor were key to working with young children. At times, though, Manuela was partnered with teachers with a different approach, and this caused friction. Manuela reported that a partner teacher once told her, "you have to be strict with them, and it is what it is. They don't have a choice," which frustrated Manuela. This incident and other similar ones chipped away at Manuela's satisfaction with her job.

Manuela was proud of her own and her daughters' bilingualism, and she claimed an identity position as a knowledgeable, experienced language learner. From this position, she encouraged her Latinx young learners and their families to maintain Spanish while they learned English. Additionally, Manuela observed that, "a couple years ago we kind of start notice that, that if we help them [children] get like a super-super solid base in Spanish, the transition from Spanish to English is super fast, so they learn faster that way." Manuela was a keen observer of language learning and through her years of experience, she had developed experience-informed pedagogical beliefs.

Manuela felt the power differential between herself and some of her partner teachers keenly, particularly when friction arose around cross-cultural issues. Manuela wished teachers were more understanding and accepting of Latinx families and cultural norms.

I think the main thing is, you have to know that the cultures are different, and then you never, never have to compare if there's, if you're not agreeing with something. Just give suggestions, but never trying to judge. Honestly, this is something that hurts my feelings so much. Teachers should be respectful of us and treat everybody as the same. Many teachers, they don't like some things just because we have, we have different ways to do stuff. And, I think that is one of the main things that every teacher has to have in their minds: different is okay.

One such cultural difference was around food preparation and consumption. Manuela recounted her young Latinx learners' dislike of some school foods and teachers' irritated reaction.

We [Latinxs] always make everything homemade so we don't buy like frozen food. We don't put things in the microwave so when our kids come to school...They don't eat absolutely nothing when they're like, 'this doesn't look good, this is not good.' So we [paras] don't push them to do it, but they [teachers] some of them get too mad about it, like, 'oh these kids and they're throwing the food away' like being wasteful. I said, 'It's just different, you have to respect that. You need to understand that we eat different.' Like especially when we have frozen vegetables, or like frozen strawberries, because you know when they are frozen, they're kind of mushy, not round and beautiful, fresh. Like, we eat a lot of *fresh* fruits.

The framing of Latinx children by teachers as ungrateful and wasteful, Manuela felt, did not take into consideration the children's cultural norms around food

preparation and consumption. Manuela attempted to explain such differences to teachers, but that kind of explanation was not always welcomed.

As a paraeducator, Manuela's contributions and initiative within the classroom were subject to overrule or rejection by teachers. When her knowledge—particularly her cultural knowledge—was dismissed, Manuela felt disrespected.

I always say it's everything about respect. I always let them [teachers] know about Hispanic culture, but sometimes they get, sometimes they take it. Sometimes they don't. Even sometimes they said 'Oh, we are the teachers, we are the ones that went to college. You guys don't know anything.' And, like, I agree, you have more college than we have, but that doesn't mean that we don't know what we're talking about. Like, they are living in a silo. So, yeah, but I think it's mainly about respect.

After nearly ten years and many partner teachers, Manuela was frustrated that her claimed expertise in language, culture, and teaching young learners was not always recognized nor respected.

5.3 *Paraeducators' Identity Negotiation*

Paraeducators are generally low on the power hierarchies in schools; they are mostly non-certified, lower-paid staff who serve as assistants to certified teachers. While the old-fashioned title of "teacher's aide" is largely no longer used, the framing of paras' work remains the same: to help with any and all tasks as directed by the classroom teacher. In fact, according to the official job description, Athens' schools paraeducator tasks include "Assist classroom teachers in a variety of capacities such as preparing lesson materials, bulletin board displays, sanitizing the room, etc." (Athens Community Schools, 2021). As within any powered relationship where people work closely together, the paraeducator-teacher relationship can become fraught. When it does, more power invariably resides with the teacher.

Paraeducators' work, though, is also often described as essential (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2000; Coady, 2019; English, 2009), particularly in the case of bilingual paras in multilingual classrooms headed by English-monolingual teachers. The smooth functioning of schools and classrooms depends on bilingual paras' linguistic and cultural knowledge. Therefore, the identity space of bilingual paraeducators is full of complexity. Juana and Manuela's identities as bilingual paraeducators at Athens' Elementary School were marked by both identity synergies and identity struggles. Synergistically, multiple identity positionings sometimes converged and supported one another. Yet, there was also struggle, when identity positionings from various sources conflicted.

6 Synergistic Identity Positionings

Being loving and caring paraeducators was an identity positioning shared by Juana and Manuela. In both of their cases, they claimed this identity position themselves and were assigned it by others. Manuela, for example, was praised by school administration for her love and care of ‘difficult’ children. Additionally, there was institutional support for this identity position; a 2021 advertisement for paraeducators at Athens Elementary School noted applicants should “care for and work well with children” (Athens Community Schools, 2021), codifying care for children as a desirable trait in paraeducators.

Another example of a synergistic identity positioning was Juana’s identity as a future special education teacher. Juana envisioned herself as a classroom teacher one day, and that she would not forever be a bilingual paraeducator. She reported receiving encouragement from her partner teachers and the school principal for her pursuit of her teaching certification, which validated her imagined identity. Changing her identity to classroom teacher would also move Juana up the school power hierarchy. As she envisioned herself in a more powerful identity within the same workplace, she may not have felt the sting of her limited power in her paraeducator role in the same way Manuela did.

Manuela and Juana’s bilingual paraeducators identities experienced differing levels of synergy, where their claimed identity positions were accepted and/or supported, within the institution of Athens Elementary School and with those around them. In part this was due to Juana and Manuela claiming differing identity positions, or claiming those positions more or less strongly. In general, Juana’s claimed identity positions aligned more often with those imposed or assumed by those she worked with and by the school institution. Manuela, however, often claimed identity positions more strongly, and when her claimed identities were not well supported, she felt that friction keenly.

7 Identity Struggles

The bilingual paraeducators experienced some conflicts between the identity positions they wanted to claim and those assigned to them by other people and the institution of Athens Elementary school. These struggles centered around the role of Spanish at school and cultural differences between Latinx families and the dominant White cultural norms of school.

7.1 *Language Use at School*

The role of Spanish at Athens Elementary school was that of a transitional language. Spanish was necessary as a means to transition young learners to

English, which was to be accomplished as quickly as possible. According to the para participants, Administrator A, Teacher A, and Teacher B, Spanish language use was increasingly discouraged as children moved up grade levels. Even from the beginning of the school year to the end, the paras and teachers reported that Spanish use diminished as students were transitioned to English. In fact, Manuela noted that her daughters transitioned from primarily Spanish speakers to English-only learners within their preschool year at Athens Elementary school. The teachers and paras, though, also reported that Spanish was occasionally used by learners (and some teachers) and that Spanish was allowed to be freely spoken at recess and meals.

8 (Un)Official School Language Policy

There was no official language policy around Spanish and English use at Athens Schools, and in that policy vacuum, teachers created their own language policies. In her preschool classroom, Manuela reported that instruction was “100% English,” and she translated the teacher’s English instruction into Spanish only as needed for the preschoolers to understand the teacher’s words. Both paras were directed to step Spanish-speaking children away from Spanish and into English. Over and again, evidence made clear that Spanish was widely viewed as a transitional language at Athens Elementary School.

Spanish was not a legitimate language for instruction or assessment at Athens Elementary, and speakers of the language were similarly positioned as deficient or in need of supplemental assistance until they acquired the legitimate language of the classroom, English. The positioning of Spanish and Spanish speakers in this way extended beyond Athens Schools. All K-12 learners in the state were required to show what they learned each year through English-only statewide standardized tests. The positioning of Spanish as lesser was multi-institution and pervasive, and it was generally uncontested by Athens Schools administration, teachers, and families. The para participants, too, did not directly contest the positioning of Spanish as less legitimate as a school language than English, understanding through their own and their children’s experiences that English was the key to academic success.

9 Spanish as a Transitional Language

The school-wide view on Spanish as a transitional language had identity implications for the bilingual paraeducators. As staff who were hired specifically for their proficiency in Spanish, Juana and Manuela’s para identities were

intricately intertwined with speaking Spanish. Both were proud Spanish speakers, and both envisioned futures where their own children and grandchildren would be (bilingual) Spanish speakers. As language workers, though, their job was explicitly to reduce their Spanish use to the bare minimum, and success in their language work was defined as eliminating their own (and the learners') use of Spanish at school. Therefore, bilingual paras were positioned as essential language workers, but also as transitional language workers who were to make their language—and by extension a large part of their identity—invisible at school.

Both Juan and Manuela lived as bilinguals and advocated bilingualism for their learners and for their own children. But both worked in a space where English was viewed as a more useful, powerful, and legitimate language than Spanish. Manuela, in particular, chafed at the positioning of Spanish as a lesser language, especially when that positioning carried over into her own or other Latino families' home life.

One of them my biggest advice that I can do, tell to everybody is like keep reading to their kids in their own languages...If you read it in your language you're going to communicate to learn, to listen, to have comprehension plus you're going to keep having your home language, whatever it is.

Neither paraeducator directly contested the pervasive institutional positioning of English as the most (if not only) legitimate language of academic success, yet both claimed bilingual identities where Spanish language use was central in their lives and identities.

10 Cultural Translation

The bilingual paraeducators were not only language translators but also cultural translators, and they successfully drew on their linguistic, family, and cultural capital in ways observed in other research with bilingual paras (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007; Ashbaker & Morgan, 2000; English, 2009; Ernst-Slavit et al., 2021). The Athens Latinx community was not a monolith and comprised countries of origins including Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and the U.S. This made the paras' cultural translation work complex.

11 Paras as Advocates for Latinx Families

Both participant paras claimed identity positions as advocates for low literacy, newcomer Latinx families, and both played the role of advocates for those

families during school-family communication events such as parent-teacher conferences. Juana and Manuela viewed the attitudes that some Athens' Elementary teachers held toward these families as ill-informed and not as caring as they ought to be. As translators (and Latinx community members themselves) they heard the struggles of newcomer families, the parents' feelings of financial and educational inadequacy to help their children. Both paras reported acting on their advocacy positions and getting mixed results with partner teachers.

I think like they [teachers] need to understand better why kids struggle or why he's not getting help at home. They [teachers] wonder, why the parents don't help him, or why is he having a hard time. And I try to explain to the teacher because some parents they tell me, when I'm translating they tell me, like, 'Oh, I'm sorry I'm not able to teach my kids this way.' So when I'm translating, I try to tell, explain the teachers. Some of them, they look that they understand the parents, but not all of them, you know. Some think parents don't care about school. (Juana)

The paraeducators enacted identity positions as advocates for Latinx families, but this was not consistently heard and/or accepted by teachers. And, the paras did not have "the power to impose reception" (Peirce, 1995, p. 24) on teachers.

12 Paras in Service to the New Colonial Project

As Spanish-speaking children were required to transition to English-predominant learners, they were similarly expected to adopt the dominant culture norms of Athens Schools. Statistically, Latinx students were in the majority at Athens Elementary, making the school a so-called 'majority minority' school. Yet, the administration and teachers remained decidedly White, and school cultural norms were also mainly White, European-background norms. Even after nearly three decades of serving Latinx families, certified school personnel had shifted very little in terms of ethnicity with only one Latina teacher, one mixed race teacher, and 34 White teachers in 2020–2021 (State Educational Profile, 2021). The paras observed and negotiated instances of cultural clash where Latinx cultural norms were subordinated to school norms. These included issues around food consumption, personal space, displays of affection, and time.

During incidents of cultural misunderstanding or difference, Juana and Manuela were often positioned by their employer as enforcers of White cultural norms. Typically, this meant correcting Latinx children's behavior so that

they were more aligned with the White cultural norms of the school. One such incident occurred when Manuela was asked by a teacher to explain to young Latinx learners that they should respect the teacher's personal space instead of crowding and hugging her. Manuela felt the teacher was being insensitive to Latinx cultural norms.

We [Latinxs] never say 'hi' without like hugging everybody, so they [teachers] don't like that sometimes. Teachers are like, 'oh don't touch me ... just give me my space' and that's the real words from many of them. But, you have to be open, because many of these kids have a really hard time at home. In my opinion, many teachers are kind of not very patient and say, like, 'this is my bubble.' And, I'm like, well, for us it is not a bubble. My bubble is to be beside my friend.

In instances of cultural difference, the paraeducators were positioned as cultural translators, but that translation was one way: from the school's cultural (White, European-centric) norms to the Latinx learners. The paras did not have the power to make the school and teachers listen to cultural translation in the other direction.

13 Discussion

The long shadow of the continuing colonial project in rural America reached into Athens schools and narrowed the identity spaces of the paraeducators Juana and Manuela in multiple ways: in their language use and choices, in their access to power in the school, and in their cultural advocacy.

13.1 *Narrow Identity Spaces*

The role of paraeducator in the Athens Elementary School hierarchy of jobs constrained Juana and Manuela's ability to enact or fully enact some of their claimed identities because their identity positions could be dismissed or rejected by those in more powerful roles (e.g. teachers and administrators). The paras claimed identity positions as advocates for bilingualism and Latinx families, but they were at times stymied in enacting those positions. Juana and Manuela were required, by job duty, to do as their partner teachers directed and to translate to Latinx students and families. Such translation drew on the paras' linguistic and cultural knowledge. Yet, that translation was often one way; teachers were not required to hear paraeducators' attempts to translate

from the Latinx students and families. Ultimately, Juana and Manuela's efforts to position themselves was limited by their (in)audibility (Miller, 2003), their inability to make themselves heard by those more powerful.

The bilingual paraeducators' identity space was further narrowed by the colonial language ideologies that permeated Athens schools, the region, and the U.S. writ large. At Athens Elementary School, Spanish was not a fully legitimate language for learning, and paras' use of Spanish was sanctioned only as a means to transition learners to English-only instruction. This conflicted with Juana and Manuela's claimed identity position of proud bilinguals and advocates for bilingualism in their Latinx learners. The monoglossic language ideology restricted paras' agency to enact full bilingual identities at school, and the paras' agency was curbed by "sedimented social knowledge" (Flores & Rosa, 2019, p. 146). Such 'sediment' speaks to the colonial logic that framed Athenian residents of color and speakers of languages other than English as lesser, as people who have less power or legitimacy to enact their desired identity positions than White, English-speaking Athenians.

14 Counter Stories in Identity Negotiation

The paras continually worked at enlarging their narrow identity spaces, and one way they did this was by engaging in counter-storytelling (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Counter-storytelling "challenges the majoritarian story" (p. 475) particularly around framings of minoritized people, and counter-stories seek to make space for the stories of those on the racial and linguistic margins. Juana, for example, engaged in counter-storytelling when Latinx parents were positioned as uncaring or uninterested in their children's education during parent-teacher conferences. She, instead, positioned them as hardworking newcomers doing their best to support their children in an unfamiliar educational space. Counter-stories, though, also require a listener. The bilingual paras struggled to gain audibility for their counter-stories; partner teachers were not obligated to listen to paras in the same way paras were obligated, by their job parameters and power positions, to listen to teachers. Such inaudibility correlates to the exclusion of Spanish-speaking and Latinx community members from the settler's bargain. Flores and Rosa (2019) noted that such audibility issues are common for linguistically and racially minoritized and recommend that "efforts to affirm the language practices of racialized students must be situated within broader political struggles that can lead to new institutional listening positions for teachers to inhabit that will afford more possibilities for normalizing bilingualism" (p. 149).

15 Leaving the Paraeducator Identity

Neither Juana nor Manuela imagined their long-term future identities as paraeducators because to be a bilingual para at Athens Elementary School was to be a marginal member of the school community. As noted previously, Juana did see herself continuing in the field of education but as a certified elementary teacher of special needs children. She endured the identity struggles and problematic positionings within her paraeducational work because she viewed being a para as a stepping stone to becoming a teacher.

Manuela, however, stung by the marginal status of bilingual paras, imagined a future outside of education all together. Despite her love for children and the joy—and success—she found working with ‘difficult’ young learners, Manuela thought she was likely to leave her job as a paraeducator within a year or two to help her fiancé run his small business in Athens. She attributed part of her reluctance to remain a paraeducator to her disappointment with some of her partner teachers.

I just know, I am just kind of a little bit, like I said, disappointed with some of the teachers and that kind of made me now thinking different than how I was thinking before, so I just don’t know if I keep working for the school and keep going. Or just, yeah, just do something different, just like my family’s business. But let me tell you, I really love to work with the kids.

The space for Manuela to negotiate her desired identity as a bilingual paraeducator was narrow, and her limited ability to enact her identity positions around bilingualism and the legitimacy of Latinx culture at school while fending off assigned, undesirable identity positions discouraged Manuela.

16 Conclusion: Enlarging Bilingual Paraeducators’ Identity Spaces

Multilingual and multicultural schools in new company towns in rural America, like Athens, rely on bilingual paraeducators for the very functioning of their schools, yet the bilingual paraeducator identity space was narrow, disallowing paras the ability to claim and enact identity positions in which they were heavily invested. These desired identities were rooted in the paras’ desire for a more linguistically and culturally relevant classroom for their Latinx students, and the restrictions on paraeducators’ identity spaces in at Athens Elementary School had root in the colonial logic that pervaded the wider context

of Athens. Juana and Manuela's working conditions were not the 3D work conditions of the local meatpacking plant, but their work and identity spaces were constrained by some of the same colonial ideologies: an English monoglossic hegemony and a deficit, dismissive view of non-European, non-White culture as not fully American.

Enlarging bilingual paraeducators' identity spaces at Athens school, therefore, would require more than slightly increased power in their position or tweaks in the school language policy. If Athens and other such rural community schools are to escape the colonial shadow, the inequitable conditions in labor, education, and residence for Latinx and other immigrants of color must come into the larger community's consciousness and find a willingness within that wider community to be addressed. New colonial "[p]atterns are already established to reproduce inequity and will default to repeating themselves unless they are actively resisted and rearranged" (Motha, 2014, p. 33). Juana and Manuela's identity restrictions were based not only in school-based dysfunction but rather based in the tenets of neocolonialism and its patterns, and this means that enlarging paras' identity spaces implicates all Athenians. Making these patterns of inequity visible and recognizing them as unacceptable is essential to seeking solutions. Recognition of the colonial shadow still at work in Athens could start with an examination of the subordinate positioning of the Spanish language (and other home languages) and the lack of Latinx cultural representation in the school culture. Bilingual paraeducators, like Juana and Manuela, have evidence to show and stories to tell—if their voices were audible to those in more powerful positions.

Some of the surface-level dysfunction of Athens Elementary School, its bureaucracy, and its policies, could be altered to make the work of its bilingual paraeducators less difficult and more satisfying. For example, expectations for paras' work could be codified school-wide (rather than classroom-by-classroom), planning time could be offered to teacher-para pairs (Wenger et al., 2004), and pay could be more competitive. However, the narrow identity spaces Juana and Manuela encountered were mostly reflective of wider social issues and would require more expansive solutions. A few rural districts around Athens have begun exploring such solutions.

Some rural schools within the same state as Athens have made progress by confronting the hegemony of English-only instruction and a monolingual ideology. A handful of rural districts, for example, offer dual language programs where Spanish is a legitimate language for learning and assessment in all content areas, and bilingual Spanish-English (Latinx and otherwise) teachers are the norm (State Department of Education, 2021). Bilingual teacher shortages and funding would require careful and long-term planning to make dual

language a reality in rural spaces, but a number rural districts have been successful and can serve as examples (Collier & Thomas, 2014). White citizens and community leaders in towns like Athens, which are no longer ‘new’ Latinx diaspora towns and whose school population is mostly multilingual and majority non-White, cannot continue to view Latinx residents as temporary newcomers. The community of Athens has been significantly Latinx for more than two decades, and its school language and culture ought to reflect that.

In addition to dual language programs, some rural school districts in the state have partnered with university teacher education programs to ‘grow your own’ teachers by recruiting current bilingual paraeducators (mostly Latinx) and covering their tuition and fees as they pursue teacher certification. Such programs center the legitimacy of languages other than English and cultures in addition to a White, European norm. Additionally, grow-your-own programs offer rural communities like Athens place-based education where “the education of citizens might have some direct bearing on the well-being of the social and ecological places people actually inhabit” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 3). Bilingual paraeducators like Juana and Manuela are invested and knowledgeable community members of Athens, and as school personnel, they also know the school landscape of Athens Elementary and have views on how they would like to see it improved.

The narrow identity spaces for bilingual paraeducators in Athens Elementary School reflect monoglossic, monocultural norms that simply no longer described multilingual, multicultural Athens and other similar rural communities. Bilingual paraeducators, like Juana and Manuela, in rural spaces could be instrumental to opening insight into these patterns because, as this study illustrated, the paras ran up against restrictions and inaudibility frequently in their work. Enlarging bilingual paraeducators’ identity spaces could keep essential educators in rural schools and help to make a break with the colonial project that keeps broad educational inequities in place.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. Tell me how you became a paraeducator.
Follow up: how long have you been a paraeducator?
2. What is a typical day for you in your current position?
Follow up: give me a timeline for your day
3. Tell me about your own experiences as a student in primary and secondary schools.
4. What do you think is your main task as a paraeducator?
Follow up: what additional tasks do you perform as a paraeducator?
Follow up: about what percentage of time does each task take up in your daily schedule?
5. What do you think teachers most need to know about the bilingual families/students you work with?
6. What is your advice to your bilingual students for being successful at school?
What is your advice to your bilingual students' families?
7. Tell me about a time you felt you were particularly successful in your job as a paraeducator.
8. Tell me about a time you felt you were not able to be particularly successful as a paraeducator.
9. What could the administration or teachers do to help you in your job as a paraeducator?
10. Tell me about your future. Will you continue to be a paraeducator. What do you think you'll be doing in 5 years/10 years?

Centering the Voices of Rural Immigrant Paraeducators

Stephanie Oudghiri

Abstract

This study is based on a year-long narrative inquiry that sought to make meaning of how paraeducators describe their work with rural, Latinx students and their families. The author draws from Greenwood's (2019) theoretical framework of a critical pedagogy of place which is a conscious blend of "critical pedagogy" and "place-based education." In this study, the term *immigrant paraeducators* is employed when discussing the experiences of my participants. Specific terminology employed by scholars' is used when discussing the literature. Throughout the chapter, participants self-identify as immigrant paraeducators because of their ability to cross national and cultural boundaries (McDevitt, 2021) and their pedagogy of teaching (Gross, 2018; Monzó & Rueda, 2003). This study adds to the literature on rural education by illuminating the unique voices of immigrant paraeducators' in one rural midwestern community. Specifically, this chapter highlights paraeducators' knowledge of the community and discusses the value they place on linguistic and familial capital, which honors the multiple languages, communication skills, and cultural knowledges of Latinx students and families.

Keywords

rural education – critical place-based education – funds of knowledge – immigrant paraeducators – Latinx students

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Fall has finally arrived. After weeks of heat and humidity, the evening air has shifted. Alone in my kitchen, I place my laptop and a stack of books on the round, wooden table, and make my way to the large window. As I push the windowpane up, a rush of cool air sweeps over me. Outside, the branches of the *Acer rubrum* gently sway in the wind, its leaves have deepened to a majestic crimson. Before I begin my work, I walk towards

the front door and step out onto the porch. After ten years of teaching at five different schools in three different states, I feel at peace in my new home. While I have lived in several rural communities, I recall the old saying “when you know one rural community, you know one rural community.” As a “newcomer” to Ririe, Indiana,¹ I have grown to develop an awareness of and appreciation for the land. Surrounded by corn and wheat fields, on this particular evening, a multitude of sounds and smells overtake my *senses*—the “whirring” of a combine as it sweeps across the fields, the sweet smell of freshly cut corn. Down the road, I see a semi-truck as it approaches the two-way stop sign. I wonder to which farm the driver is headed.

For a brief moment, I recall an Indiana² history project that I completed as a fourth grader. Long before westward expansion and the forceful removal of the First Peoples, the Bodéwadmik (Potawatomi), Lenape (Delaware), Myaamia (Miami), and Shawnee Peoples were the original Indigenous caretakers of this land. As I stand on my porch, gazing out across the flat landscape, it is hard to imagine that at one point in time, this land was filled with dense hardwood forests. In the 1840s, Shelton County was founded by a U.S. Senator who was a champion of westward expansion. By the 1900s, white settlers cleared land for farming, fuel, and lumber, leaving behind less than 5% of forests.³

As I turn to go back inside the house, off in the distance, the sun begins to sink beyond the clouds. Just above the tops of the corn, I see the bright white lights of the dairy farm illuminating the night sky like stars. As an emerging qualitative researcher, who is interested in how rural educators⁴ lived experiences facilitate their work with Latinx students, I am suddenly confronted by a multitude of curiosities and contradictions of this place. As I come to know and make meaning of my participants’ experiences, I am mindful that “place matters” (Azano et al., 2021; Greenwood, 2019; Reagan et al., 2019) and I wonder: who am I in this place?, how do the histories of this rural community impact what is currently happening?, and what does the future hold for this place?

1 Introduction

Like many rural midwestern towns, for decades Ririe, Indiana had experienced a steady economic decline due to a lack of industry (e.g., manufacturing, retail) and loss of population. However, over the past decade “newcomers” from Latin America have added to the cultural and linguistic diversity of this

rural, farming community. The rural town of Ririe, Indiana has a population of nearly 800 residents and is nestled within the corn, bean, and wheat fields. According to Data USA (2019), in terms of diversity, approximately 75% of the population of Ririe identify as white and 15% identify as Hispanic, originating from Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Puerto Rico, and Mexico. Within the last five years, the number of foreign-born residents has steadily increased to approximately 5% of the total population.

The most common employment sectors in Ririe include manufacturing, educational services, and agriculture, and approximately 30% of Ririe's population live below the poverty line. The Indiana State Department of Agriculture (2022) reports that Indiana has 56,649 farms in operation, 96% of which are family-owned or operated. In terms of livestock, there are more than 4.2 million hogs and an estimated 187,000 dairy cows. In the last decade, livestock farming has increased in Shelton County with the establishment of local dairies and hog farms that employ undocumented workers, many of whom live in Ririe and the surrounding towns. The Center for American Progress reports that rural populations are experiencing a resurgence in economic opportunities (e.g., in the farming and meat-processing industries) as well as population growth as immigrant (foreign-born) communities shift from seasonal farm work to settling in rural areas (Mathema et al., 2018). As communities experience a shift in demographics, so do the local schools.

Out of the nearly 8.1 million educators currently employed in the nation's PK-12 schools, educators (teachers and paraeducators) who have migrated to the United States make up less than 10% of the teacher workforce and are underrepresented in non-postsecondary teaching positions (Furuya et al., 2019). The cultural and linguistic background of those educators is varied as they could be bilingual, immigrant, U.S citizens, or a combination of these attributes. Ririe Elementary, the focal school district of this chapter, has similarly experienced the mismatch between the increasing numbers of Latinx students and its largely white teaching population. To address this mismatch, the school has employed two paraeducators to address the linguistic and cultural needs of its Latinx students.

Currently, the U.S. Department of Labor (2022) estimates that schools employ approximately 1.3 million paraeducators. School districts rely greatly on paraeducators to support students with disabilities (Barrio & Hollingshead, 2017) and burgeoning communities that serve the needs of culturally-linguistically diverse students (Johnson & Lehner, 2021). Bilingual educators are key educational resources because "teachers of the same ethnicity who can empathize, model, and inspire children and young people to persevere in their education" (Bonner et al., 2011, p. 213).

Within educational research, the literature on the personal and professional histories of paraeducators who have migrated to the United States is quite limited. This research often focuses on their journey from paraeducator to teacher (Amos 2013; Johnson & Lehner, 2021) rather than documenting the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of paraeducators whose attributes vary from being bilingual, multilingual, immigrant, or U.S. citizens. Within the literature, the term “immigrant” is used broadly and conceptualized in a multitude of ways to describe educators: *racial minority teachers* (Carr, 1996), *ethnocultural minority teachers* (Schmidt & Block, 2010), *foreign-born teachers* (Furuya et al., 2019), and *immigrant paraeducators* (Gross, 2018). Additionally, when centering on the linguistic characteristics and experiences of “immigrant” educators who work with multilingual students, scholars utilize terminology such as *bilingual educators* (Sánchez & Ek, 2009), *immigrant bilingual teachers* (Alsup, 2019), and *bilingual/bicultural paraprofessionals* (Díaz et al., 2022).

In this study, I employ the term *immigrant paraeducators* when discussing the experiences of my participants. Specific terminology employed by scholars is used when discussing the literature. Throughout the chapter, participants self-identify as immigrant paraeducators because of their ability to cross national and cultural boundaries (McDevitt, 2021) and their pedagogy of teaching (Gross, 2018; Monzó & Rueda, 2003). This study adds to the literature on rural education by illuminating the unique voices of immigrant paraeducators in one rural midwestern community. Specifically, this chapter highlights paraeducators’ knowledge of the community and discusses the value they place on linguistic and familial capital, which honors the multiple languages, communication skills, and cultural knowledges of Latinx students and families.

2 Immigrant Paraeducators: Low Status but Crucial Role

Researchers interested in making meaning of the experiences of paraeducators use a variety of terms (i.e., classroom aide; educational assistant; family advocates; family resource developers; instructional assistant; one-to-one; paraprofessional; school liaisons; teacher’s aide; teaching assistant; tutor) to describe school employees in the United States (Rusch et al., 2019). In their study of bilingual paraprofessionals in secondary schools, Wenger et al. (2004) used the term “hidden teachers” because of their unique linguistic abilities and cultural knowledge, which the authors found lacking in the majority of classroom teachers.

Interested in the intersectionality between teachers’ funds of knowledge and immigrant paraeducators, Monzó and Rueda (2003) sought to move Moll

et al.'s (1992) concept of "funds of knowledge" from a student focus to how teachers' experiences translate into beliefs about teaching. Using life narratives and ethnographic methods, Monzó and Rueda (2003) found that teachers whose funds of knowledge were grounded in sociocultural experiences served as "a foundation for discussing students' immediate concerns, including their developing identities, language ideologies, adjustment to a new society, intercultural relations, and economic disparities" (p. 75). They further posited that although paraeducators lacked pedagogical experiences, they served as a cultural resource for teachers. Paraeducators served as important advocates in overcoming how

the debilitating effects of marginalization on students' self-concept and identity are the understanding that others like them also have endured these experiences, that marginalization is a systemic problem, and that many have progressed beyond the expectations of others while maintaining their identity, language, and values. (Monzó & Rueda, 2003, p. 83)

Although identity has been explored across several disciplines, within teaching and teacher education literature the constructs that make up identity are multifaceted. Olsen (2008) argued that knowledge, which is holistic, situated, and continuous, is derived from the multiple facets of identity. In exploring the various definitions of identity, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) found a commonality of identity being dynamic, shifting over time, and being influenced by personal, internal, and external factors. These multiple layers of identity include what Sachs (2005) described as "'how to be,' 'how to act' and 'how to understand'" (p. 15). The identity of immigrant paraeducators encompasses one's practices, beliefs, and knowledge, and impacts how they interact with the immigrant students and their families. Thus, their daily decisions as educators became a series of negotiations between the personal and professional self.

For immigrant educators (e.g., paraeducators and certified teachers) their past experiences served as motivation for working with multilingual students and families. Expanding upon funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), Esteban-Guirart and Moll (2014) developed a theory of human identity termed "funds of identity", which they described as "historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for a person's self-definition, self-expression, and self-understanding" (p. 31). In defining identity, Esteban-Guirart and Moll (2014) posited four cultural components: (1) identity is comprised of a person's acquired skills, knowledge, practices, and resources; (2) artifacts are both internalized and externalized; (3) engagement in social activities and observing others' reactions help inform identity

development; and (4) identity is social in origin. Grounding their work in the Vygotskian perspective, Esteban-Guirart and Moll (2014) highlighted that historical-cultural factors, such as social institutions, artifacts (tools or cultural concepts), and beliefs became woven into identity construction. The authors included funds of knowledge as one example of an artifact, arguing that it was impossible to separate humans from their social worlds. Esteban-Guirart and Moll (2014) argued that

Learning takes place when participants, supported and guided by others, are involved in activities that enact connections between prior knowledge and experiences (incrusted in their identities) and new information. In that regard, funds of identity act as a lens through which we view and absorb new information and new identities. It is a dynamic composite of who we are and who we are becoming, based on what we have learned (and we are learning) from both our academic and everyday experiences. (p. 44)

However, for communities that are experiencing an increase in Spanish-speaking student populations, bilingual paraeducators often find themselves in situations where they are “wanted and used” (Amos, 2016). In their study on rural, bilingual paraeducators in the Pacific Northwest, Amos (2016) found that working conditions were harsh. Often paraeducators felt alienated and marginalized by white teachers due to an imbalance in power relations. Amos (2016) posited that to support educators of color, stakeholders need to question and address inequities related to “power, status, and autonomy” within the educational system.

Similarly, Ventura (2020) observed that bilingual support staff were willing to go “above and beyond” their required duties to support students. Although paraeducators described experiences of operating in the margins, often feeling a lack of support from school administration, they were instrumental in nourishing the lives of Latinx students. To support students who did not feel welcome in their school environment, bilingual support staff organized and advised after-school Latinx student clubs. By creating borderlands spaces, the bilingual support staff “were intentional in positioning students as leaders and centering their ways of knowing as valuable” (p. 655). Drawing from their own experiences, bilingual support staff enacted “pedagogies of *acompañamiento*”⁵ that were foundational to building authentic relationships with Latinx students and families. The bilingual support staff was able to demonstrate care or “nourishment work” by acting as a bridge between students’ school and home lives. Findings from Ventura’s (2020) study revealed the importance of

bilingual support staff's expertise and knowledge that extended beyond the classroom. While paraeducators are often overlooked due to their low status in schools, their contributions are numerous. In addition to supporting the academic and social-emotional needs of students in the classroom, paraeducators serve as a cultural and linguistic bridge between multilingual students and classroom teachers.

3 Place and Teacher Identity

One area of teacher identity that has received little attention is immigrant teachers' experiences in terms of "place." Expanding on the work of Connelly and Clandinin's (1999) "borders of space and time," Elbaz-Luwisch (2004) examined the intersection of place and teacher identity, arguing that this phenomenon was rare within the literature due to general assumptions that teachers represented the culture in which they taught. Findings from the study revealed four emergent themes: "holding on and holding together, feeling like a fake, learning how to behave, and conflict with the system" (p. 395). Immigrants who experience "holding" themselves together often experience tension due to constant negotiations of exposing their true selves. The authors continue that, "thus, an immigrant can tell only part of his or her story in the new place. The unstoried parts of one's life remain in the background, subtly influencing the story that is lived and told" (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004, p. 396). Immigrant teachers often feel inadequate when compared to other staff due to differences in language, culture, or education level. These "misunderstandings" often lead to immigrant teachers "learning the codes of behavior of the school culture" (p. 397), and in some instances, these teachers rely on multilingual students who experience similar feelings of inadequacy as a source of strength in navigating school culture. The study by Elbaz-Luwisch (2004) found that

The theme of 'feeling like a fake' reflects the need of the teachers to find a way to belong as functioning members of the new society without losing completely their previous identity. Telling the story of feeling like a fake is itself a way of navigating the transition to a new identity. (p. 402)

Due to the fluidity of the personal and professional self, participants found meaningful relations between their past and present. As they transitioned into their new roles within society, immigrant teachers spoke of navigating their identities, often apologizing for language or cultural faux pas. Finally, negotiating occurred in learning to adapt to new cultural norms and values.

4 Theoretical Framework

To make meaning of how paraeducators facilitate their work with Latinx students in a rural community, I draw from Greenwood's (2019) theoretical framework of a critical pedagogy of place which is a conscious blend of "critical pedagogy" and "place-based education." Greenwood's (2019) critical pedagogy of place challenges "learners to confront the long history of colonialism in all its modern and postmodern guises, and to reinvent their ideological and material relationship to place" (p. 363). Centering on the idea that "place" matters, "place" is positioned as a pedagogical construct grounded in decolonization and reinhabitation. According to Greenwood (2019), decolonization "depends on human beings who know who and where they are, who and where they come from, and how to negotiate the interplay between the soul and the polis" (p. 368). Additionally, decolonization is the recognition and naming of historical injustice and damage to marginalized peoples, places, and the land. Learning to undo and heal promotes a shift towards reconciliation. Reinhabitation encourages humans to not only learn to live well in a place with humans and non-humans but encourages engagement with internal and external landscapes.

This *place-conscious* (Greenwood, 2019; Gruenewald, 2003) approach to education emphasizes the importance of engaging in the "inner work" (Greenwood, 2019, p. 359). Inner work is central to making meaning of politics of place. Cultivating inner work requires developing a deeper sense of the interconnectedness of "the outer work of politics with the inner work of being and becoming" (Greenwood, 2019, p. 373). He theorizes that the inner work (soul) begins by reflecting on the question, "how to be here?" to examine the complexities and contractions that come from knowing, caring, and becoming part of a community. Greenwood (2019) presents the following critical questions: (1) what happened here? (2) what is happening here now, and what is the impact and trajectory? and (3) what should happen here? "Soul work" (Greenwood, 2019, p. 359) is crucial to the politics of place and while it may be challenging for place-conscious educators, he argues that this essential work is the most profound aspect of decolonization. Drawing from the ideas of *reading the world* (Freire, 1993) and *reading the landscape* (Leopold, 1999), Greenwood (2019) posits that the construct of place invites "conversations about culture, racism, identity, and social justice, and conversations about environment, land, and sustainability" (p. 361). Leaning into the powerful metaphors of "reading the world" and "reading the landscape" Greenwood (2019) argues that:

the salient point of problematizing decolonization and critical pedagogies of place is to deepen our personal and collective engagement with

the legacies of colonialism in our own biographies and our own inhabitation of place and land Decolonization, therefore, needs to be seen not only as a political goal, but also as a learning process. (p. 369)

This theoretical framework guides my understanding as I make meaning of the complex role paraeducators engage in as they work to meet the academic, socio-emotional, and linguistic needs of Latinx students in one rural, midwestern community.

5 Methodology

This study is based on a year-long narrative inquiry that sought to make meaning of how paraeducators describe their work with rural, Latinx students and their families. Grounded in Dewey's (1938) work on experience (i.e., interaction, continuity, and situation/place), a narrative inquiry embodies a "multiplicity of voices" which span the entangled dimensions of "time, place, the personal, and the social" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63). As a newcomer to Ririe, it was important to immerse myself in making sense of "life as lived" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 78) as I came to know the inhabitants of one rural, midwestern community. Specifically, I chose narrative inquiry because it illuminates the significance of relationships. Through formal and informal conversations with my participants, as well as classroom observations, narratives turned inward, focusing on their unique experiences and parallels with the Latinx students and families of Ririe, Indiana. Additionally, as I began to situate experiences of the school community within a larger context, narratives turned outward and revealed emerging tensions related to navigating the linguistic and cultural complexities of this rural place. Staying true to narrative form, this chapter is grounded in a particular wonder and addresses the following question: How do paraeducators' lived experiences facilitate their work with Latinx students in a rural community?

5.1 *Ririe Elementary School*

Over the past decade, Shelton County School District has experienced a steady increase in the enrollment of Hispanic⁶ students, with the majority of the population attending Ririe Elementary School. With that said, Shelton County School District relies heavily on bilingual aides to serve as support for Latinx students because the district does not have an English as a Second Language (ESL) program. I specifically chose Ririe Elementary School because, at the time of my study, the Hispanic population⁷ was approximately 30%, with 18%

of students identifying as English Language Learners (ELLs). The teaching staff was 100% white and monolingual, with 30% of staff members having 0–5 years of teaching experience.

5.2 *Participants*

In the spring of 2019, I began recruiting participants for an exploratory research study. Using purposeful sampling, three factors served as the criteria for this site: location, demographics, and snowball sampling. Shelton County School District is a member of the Indiana Small and Rural Schools Association. The state of Indiana classifies the Shelton County School District as a remote, rural location, situated more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and 10 miles from an urban cluster.

Initially, I recruited five participants for the research study: the principal, two teachers, and two paraeducators. The principal and teachers identified as white, female, and monolingual, while the paraeducators identified as female, Hispanic, and bilingual educators. For this chapter, I focus on the lived experiences of the paraeducators, Daniela and Emilia. Born to Mexican immigrants, Daniela and Emilia, who are sisters, are both legal U.S. citizens. During their formative years, Daniela and Emilia traveled with their immigrant parents as seasonal laborers, working in agriculture in Michigan, Indiana, and the state of Washington. During the initial interview, Daniela and Emilia described their identity as bilingual, Latina paraeducators.

At the time of my initial study, Daniela had been working as a non-certified ESL paraeducator at Ririe Elementary School for 10 years. In the fall of 2018, Emilia was hired as a non-certified, part-time ESL paraeducator to work with Daniela. Both women were hired to specifically work with the school's Latinx student population, which included undocumented students from Honduras and Guatemala.

5.3 *Data Sources*

In May 2019, I conducted three semi-structured interviews and three classroom observations. The first interview took place after school in an area designated by the principal called Para(dise). This space is where the paraeducators worked with students one-on-one or in small groups. Daniela and Emilia asked to be interviewed together, and I was happy to oblige their request. The interview was conducted in English. Initially, I was interested in the connection between their personal and professional identities; therefore, questions from interview one focused on their past schooling experiences, history with the school and community, and experiences working with Latinx students. Throughout the first interview, Daniela would whisper, worried that someone

might overhear our conversation. And the end of the first interview, I asked them if they would like to change locations for the second and third interviews. Daniela and Emilia requested to be interviewed at a local Mexican restaurant and we agreed upon a specific day and time roughly two weeks after the initial interview. The restaurant provided the women with a sense of safety even though it was a public space. During the first interview, Daniela and Emilia were nervous and conscious of the audio recorder that I had placed in front of them. The second interview was more akin to a conversation with old friends. We each shared personal stories while we shared salsa fresca and empanadas. After the interview, I listened to the audio recording and developed the second set of interview questions.

For the second and third interviews, we met at the restaurant at 3:30 p.m. Although I was slightly apprehensive about interviewing participants at a restaurant, the dinner crowd had not yet arrived, so we had the place to ourselves. The second set of questions focused on Daniela and Emilia's experiences working as paraeducators. Specifically, I was curious about the daily tasks. Daniela and Emilia also spoke candidly about their relationships with their colleagues (e.g., staff, teachers, and administrators). I left additional time for them to discuss anything that had come up between the first and second interviews. That evening, I listened to the audio recording and made plans for the final interview. The questions focused on relationships with the Latinx students. Once I had transcribed each interview, I printed out a hard copy of each transcript and read and reread the transcribed data several times. Through a lens of care, I began to code my field texts narratively by identifying significant words and phrases (e.g., compassion, empathy, caring *for* and *with*) that were gleaned from each interview. I also identified words and phrases that described beliefs, attitudes, and interactions with Latinx students using an asset-based pedagogy. For example, on multiple occasions, Daniela described students as capable, motivated, and eager learners. As I immersed myself in each conversation, I felt closer to my participants and how rurality impacted their experiences.

The main goal of the exploratory research study was to familiarize myself with the school community. Following narrative protocols, I recorded detailed notes during the observations. These field notes were important in developing follow-up interview questions, as well as beneficial to informing my understanding of my participants' experiences. Observations served as a way of recording and contextualizing specific incidents and behaviors, thus providing a reference point for interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the observations, detailed field notes included the physical setting, informal and formal student-paraeducator interactions, paraeducator behaviors, and dialogue

between student-paraeducator and paraeducator-teachers. Following observations, field notes, researcher journals, and researcher memos served as a way of reflecting upon my time in the field, as well as making meaning of how my participants conceptualized their experiences. The total corpus of data collected included (1) three authentic texts (including transcripts of audio-recorded interviews), (2) field notes from three classroom observations, and (3) artifacts (e.g., individualized lesson plans, translated classroom/school newsletters).

Analysis of the data began during the process of collecting data by reviewing field notes from observations and transcribed interviews. Researcher memos served as a way of helping me think through the possible connections between the interview transcripts and field observations. Before coding, field notes and interviews were transcribed verbatim, including pauses and other verbal utterances. Data were coded using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the first round of initial coding, I focused on emerging ideas and subsequent emerging themes. Once themes had been categorized, decisions were made regarding whether these themes presented an “accurate representation” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83) of the data. After specific themes were defined and refined (Braun & Clarke, 2006), a detailed analysis was written.

6 Findings

This narrative inquiry focused on how paraeducators’ lived experiences facilitate their work with Latinx students in a rural community. Throughout this detailed analysis, you will come to know Daniela and Emilia, as they describe their students, classroom environments, and the community of Ririe, Indiana through their personal and professional experiences. To make meaning of the paraeducators’ experiences, Greenwood’s (2019) critical questions: (1) what happened here? (2) what is happening here now, and what is the impact and trajectory? and (3) what should happen here? guided my analysis. Findings revealed that paraeducators’ knowing existed within two worlds. Based on their experiences as migrant students, the paraeducators understood firsthand the complexities of navigating a new environment when one’s cultural and linguistic heritage differed from the dominant school culture. This shared knowledge informed their pedagogical practices both inside and outside the classroom. As paraeducators, they went above and beyond their required duties, relying on community knowledge to inform the academic and social-emotional support they provided to multilingual learners in the classroom. Using a holistic approach, the paraeducators sought to cultivate an inclusive environment in which the multilingual learners were seen, valued, and heard. Findings from

this study showcase a nuanced understanding of students' academic, social, linguistic, and cultural needs as well as awareness of the complexities of the historical, social, and economic contexts of this rural community.

6.1 *Navigating Two Worlds as English Language Learners (ELLs)*

Daniela and Emilia were intimately familiar with life as migratory children and discussed the challenges that relocation had on the discontinuity in their K-12 education. Moving from place to place, they expressed feelings of anxiety and vulnerability as they adjusted to life in each new school environment.

We migrated. Our dad would always bring us here, to the north, to do fieldwork. We were in and out of school. We started as migrants. The reason I ended up being born in Michigan was because my parents were migrant farm workers. Raised in Texas. My husband and I met that year we migrated to Washington state. His family was there. We worked in the fields during the day and went to school at night so that we could get our credits to graduate. But then we moved back here [Indiana]. (Daniela)

Throughout their K-12 education, Daniela and Emilia attended schools that lacked support for English Language Learners (ELLs). At home they spoke Spanish but recognized that the absence of adequate bilingual education left them at a disadvantage. They were grateful to a handful of teachers who showed empathy as they navigated the linguistic and cultural landscape of the rural schools they attended.

And back then, there was nobody to help us, so good thing we knew a little bit of English. When we were kids, I think we were blessed to have teachers. I remember the ones in Michigan, they were compassionate. They were white teachers that just happened to be caring, good teachers. In some way, I always felt included. I felt like they gave me an opportunity to see how well I got along in the classroom. I appreciate that they gave me the opportunity because when you're young, you can pick up a lot. (Daniela)

This phenomenon of navigating two worlds extended beyond their experiences as migrant children. After years of moving from state to state, due to better economic opportunities, Daniela and Emilia's families established permanent residence in Ririe in the mid-1990s. Now in their mid-fifties and grandmothers, they reflected on their experiences raising children in rural Indiana.

Emilia: My three kids went to Ririe [Elementary]. They are bilingual. They learned their Spanish at home and their English in school. My daughter said the kids used to laugh at her and make fun of her accent. Back then, she had a teacher who would go get help with her English. Now that she's an adult, she tells me that she wishes she hadn't taken that to heart because she would be more fluent in Spanish. Though, the workplace has helped my kids. Now that there are a lot more Spanish-speaking people here. All three of my kids, have to communicate with Spanish speakers. So, that has helped them a lot. They have an accent, but they do understand it and speak it because of all the people who are here that are Hispanic.

I think about my daughter. Now that she's older, she remembers. She said that she felt like, that something was maybe wrong with her and I tell her now, you just needed that extra help – to encourage her English or to get more fluent in English. But she says she remembers feeling a bit, I can't even find the word that she used.

Daniela: Less than.

Emilia: [nodding her head in agreement] And it doesn't mean that they're less than.

Unlike her sister, Daniela was not able to converse with her four children in Spanish. Filled with regret, she was concerned that her grandchildren would never learn the family's heritage language.

If I knew then what I know now, I would never have allowed my kids to forget their Spanish. I guess I didn't know they'd forget it. When my two oldest started coming to school at Ririe when they would get home, they'd just speak English to their younger brothers. But if I'd known they would have forgotten the language, I would have had them practice Spanish at home and English in school. (Daniela)

Daniela and Emilia had lived in Indiana for twenty years and developed strong insider knowledge of how the community functioned. As community members, they were aware that the local dairies and hog farms employed undocumented workers, many of whom were emerging ELLs. As the children of migrants, Daniela and Emilia were required to attend public schools and knew that state law required undocumented students to attend school as well. Both women were knowledgeable about the harsh conditions that caretakers often faced (e.g., extended working hours, limited access to healthcare) and understood the impact these realities had on their children.

- Emilia: I know I can relate to a lot of them [undocumented students] because we were there when we were young. We had to come to school. Most of the migrants would go back to Texas because that is where most of them came from. They would do the fieldwork and when it was over and they'd leave. Just a few would stay, like us. When my parents would stay for the summer until the farm work was over, dad would sometimes get a job at the seed company, where they gave him a few more months to work. There was one year that we stayed until December. We had to be in school and I remember how it feels. You're afraid, you're shy. So, that has helped me because I know what they've been through. It makes me feel more compassionate because I remember the feeling, also.
- Daniela: When I was in school, you're being taught English but when you're doing your conversational, outside playing at the playground with your friends, it's back to Spanish. In this community, most of the kids can still speak Spanish. It's because they have parents that don't speak any English so, they're left with no choice. They have to learn the language to communicate with their parents.

As they reflected on their past, Daniela and Emilia expressed the privilege of being bilingual in schools that placed value on an “English-only curriculum.” Recognizing the role linguistic capital played in their schooling informed their future roles as paraeducators. While both women worked directly with the PK-6 Latinx population of Ririe Elementary, they were especially dedicated to Ririe's ELL student population. Through shared histories, the sisters recognized the similarities between their experiences as migrant students and undocumented students. Due to a personal understanding of the linguistic and cultural context facing migrant students in rural schools, Daniela and Emilia could relate to the challenges that undocumented students faced daily.

6.2 *Navigating Two Worlds as Paraeducators of ELLs*

As the only non-certified ESL paraeducator at Ririe Elementary, Daniela found it challenging to meet the needs of the Latinx students as the population grew. After nine years, the school district hired her sister Emilia as a part-time paraeducator. As the two worked closely together, the workload increased and at the time of our interviews, Daniela was frustrated by the overall working conditions. During both formal and informal conversations, the women shared personal experiences of being “othered” by staff members. While Daniela and Emilia were viewed as an asset to the school due to their linguistic abilities,

they still experienced power imbalances because they were not certified teachers and therefore, were not viewed as equitable partners by the teachers and administration. Thus, despite their low status, the paraeducators were considered the experts within the school, providing classroom teachers and ESL students with much-needed support.

Some of the paras [paraeducators] are prejudiced. Once we were told to stop speaking Spanish. But when we are together and speak English, it's not us. Not that it's not us, we grew up together, she's my sister but our first language was Spanish. It's just easier to communicate. (Daniela)

In addition to daily microaggressions, Daniela discussed experiences of marginalization by several colleagues. With little to no guidance from teachers, throughout the semester, Daniela designed curricula and provided instruction for all the Latinx students in preschool through 6th grade. Weekly tasks included translating classroom and school newsletters and personal communication between teachers and parents. She also served as an interpreter during parent/teacher conferences, fielded phone calls in Spanish, and met with guardians when they dropped off or picked up students.

I am doing a certified teacher job. Any little notes that need to go home. If they [teachers] remembered, they'd have me translate. Oh, we're going on a field trip, can you translate this? Oh, we're having this tonight, can you translate this for me? Our hands are tied because we're not certified teachers. I'm not a certified teacher. You might think I'm an expert because we [Daniela and Emilia] know the language but if we could just get a little help from teachers, help with planning. Just tell me what to teach and I'll do it. You know what I mean, but they leave it up to me. Then along came the Spanish-speaking kids, no English, from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Puerto Rico. I just tried to go with the basics, like picture cards. If the parents needed a translator, I would translate. So, the parents, let's say for lunch money, [would ask me] how much they owed for lunch. And Tuesday folders, everything goes in Tuesday folders, and if there was a field trip, some teachers, not a lot of them, would have me translate the permission form, but not everybody. And there are times when a parent would say, I got this paper in English and I don't know what it is. So, I would have to stop working with my group [of students] or give the group to Emilia so that I could call a parent and explain what that paper was. I used to travel to different schools and translate. I would get stretched all over the place. (Daniela)

When Daniela began working at Ririe Elementary School, most of the students identified as ELLs were multilingual learners. However, as more undocumented families began settling into the area, the population of emerging ELLs increased. While a handful of teachers used Google Translate to try and communicate with their students, emerging ELLs were sent to Daniela the majority of the time for one-on-one or small group support.

- Daniela: I've always worked with ESL students. The other ESL students knew English a little bit, so it wasn't so hard for the teachers. But the Hondurans, and kids from other places, they don't know English.
- Emilia: And the last group of the day is first grade. And that is hard because we have three completely non-English, and we have the bilingual kids. And even in the bilingual [group of students], there are six, seven [students] and then you have the low bilingual and the high bilingual.
- Daniela: That was a challenge. So, we had three different groups there and we did what we could. Teachers don't want to deal with them [undocumented, Spanish-speaking students]. There were times when they [students] didn't want to go to school. Before they learned the routine, and how things worked, they didn't want to leave our room. And because here recently, the kids from Honduras, their situation is a little bit different. Still, they're children, you have to have some, you know, you have to have some empathy. Some teachers totally ignore them, especially, with these new kids, the non-English speaking ones. By law, they can't be with me because I'm not a certified teacher. They can't spend all day with me, so I'm only allowed to pull them out for 30 minutes at a time, 20 minutes at a time. But then I have to make out a schedule because teachers will complain. They will say, you're not pulling out so and so. My student needs help and you're not pulling him out.

Daniela's house was one of the first stops made by Latinx families as they settled into the community. She assisted families with school enrollment, obtaining immunization records, and navigating bus schedules. In addition to serving as liaisons between the school and the families, Daniela and Emilia attended religious services (e.g., baptisms, weddings, funerals), birthdays (including quinceañeras), graduations, and community events. Especially for Daniela who lived in Ririe, she became the bridge between the school and the Latinx community.

Daniela and Emilia's social capital supported students' social-emotional needs both inside and outside the classroom. Undocumented students, many of whom had experienced trauma as they journeyed from Latin America to the United States, felt comfortable sharing glimpses of their personal lives with the paraeducators. Ririe Elementary did not provide mental health support for students; therefore, Daniela and Emilia felt compelled to provide a safe and caring environment for the Latinx students. By developing authentic relationships, Daniela and Emilia began to embody an ethic of care by actively listening and developing activities that supported learning.

Daniela: They [undocumented students] tell us their stories, except sometimes we are limited in time. I would tell them, let's get back to learning, and then you can tell me about your story. I'll give you time to tell your story because I do want to hear your story. Sometimes I tell them to catch me outside at recess and please finish telling me your story. With Nico, it was little things that triggered his memory, but they use terms that they only use in Honduras. The majority of the time we could understand them but there are words [in Spanish] that we learned meant something different in Honduras. And I would ask them, how do you say this in Honduras? The words that I did catch were cartel. When they were held up, he said he didn't like the cartel. Emilia and I were trying to figure out what he was saying, he was either talking about the Marines or the Coast Guard or maybe the Border Patrol. But he said, them I like. They were nice but he said the cartel people were mean. He lost his dad, and he missed his mom terribly. But they're [undocumented families] afraid to bring a lot of the women because they're afraid of what they'll go through. If I would start asking, he wouldn't [talk], but every once in a while, something would trigger his memory and he would mention things. He said he went three days without eating on his way to the U.S. They've been through a lot.

Emilia: Melina is another case. She came in kindergarten. Coming to the U.S., the way they got here, her and her mom went through a lot. All kinds of trauma, very traumatizing. And Niko. Some things would spark his mind. I remember after school, they would be eating those cheese crackers, you know, the fish, and he said, my dad doesn't like those anymore because that's all we ate traveling this way. And he said I like it, but daddy doesn't anymore. In Spanish, of course.

Daniela: Now that I think about it, I feel guilty because I really couldn't, I didn't pay attention to Carlo because I was so busy. Now I feel guilty, I might just go by there [Carlo's house] and tell him OK, show me what you were trying to show me.

Emilia: [smiling] They [Latinx families] have our phone number.

Both Daniela and Emilia's intimate knowledge of the students and families they served influenced their beliefs and practices. Counter to the dominant school culture, they supported Latinx students through an asset pedagogy.

6.3 *Hoping for a Holistic ELL Pedagogy*

Like many rural school districts, resources to support multilingual learners are limited (Ruecker, 2021). To support Ririe Elementary's growing emerging ELL student population, Daniela and Emilia worked with students in one-on-one and small pull-out groups. Additionally, they scheduled extra time with the undocumented, ELL students. These informal lessons focused on Spanish for heritage learners.

Although there was little communication between the classroom teachers and the paraeducators, the expectation was that ELLs were to receive instruction focused on English language acquisition to assimilate into the dominant school culture. Despite their newcomer status, the community's willingness to change and adapt did not occur. Often when these students were not working directly with Daniela or Emilia, the emerging ELLs were placed on Chromebooks while their classmates received grade-appropriate content based on the Indiana State standards.

You know what I'd like to see. For every teacher that has a couple of those students [undocumented, Spanish-speaking students], it would help if they had a Spanish-speaking adult in their [classroom] but I think in our case there isn't enough money to hire one for each. It used to be that we would work with the bilingual ones, the ones that are born here, but those parents are first-generation, so the kids needed extra help with some of the vocabulary and comprehension, things like that. But, here lately, we're having to try and teach those that don't speak any English so, we have the completely non-English and the bilingual ones. Some are at a higher level than others. (Daniela)

While Daniela enjoyed working with the emerging ELLs during small group instruction, she recognized the importance of her students being in the

classroom and learning from their grade-level teachers. Daniela was frustrated because while she embraced an asset-based pedagogy, the classroom teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and practices regarding undocumented, emerging ELLs showcased a deficit perspective.

They will learn. The teachers just need to give them the opportunity. Because for some of the undocumented students now, that wasn't the case. They do need to be in school. The teachers need to not take out their frustration on them because it's not their [students'] fault. You remember, Alaia, don't you? That young lady came from Honduras, just like all of the others, speaking no English. She was raised by her grandma. Not only did she go to school, but at home, she was taught to do dishes and clean. The girl can cook and take care of little kids, her little brothers, and sisters. But when she first came here, she started in first grade, and we were almost done for the school year. I think that's what helped her a lot; learn the language and pick it up. She caught up to some of our newer Honduran kids and is doing better than some of our older ones because she loves to read. She's a good example of, if you get the right teacher or someone gives you the chance to learn, you can learn. They can learn. (Daniela)

In terms of language, at Ririe Elementary, two categories of ESL students existed a) multilingual students who also speak English and b) emerging ELLs, many of whom were undocumented and communicated in their heritage language. In addition to academic separation due to language barriers, Daniela discussed examples in which emerging ELLs were physically and socially isolated from both their white and Latinx peers.

One thing we were noticing last week, when we had field trips, they put all of the [Latinx] students with us. And I told Emilia, what I would like to see the students spread out so they can learn English. That's how they learn. Communicating with the other kids. They learn a lot of their English by playing with their English-speaking friends. (Daniela)

Despite the many challenges that Latinx students experienced at Ririe Elementary, Daniela and Emilia remained hopeful. For each student, Daniela created a specific set of goals (e.g., literacy, writing, oral proficiency, mathematics). Her mission was to cultivate a supportive learning environment while holding students to high standards.

I remember when they [school] had tested them and I don't know what it [the test] was. They tested them and they said that all of our kids had passed, that they had gotten a 100%, which felt good because sometimes I felt like, we weren't doing enough when they struggled. When they did well, it made us feel like we were doing something right. (Daniela)

It was important for Daniela to celebrate her students' successes, but she also understood the reality of her position within the school. As a paraeducator, her support was limited because she was not a certified educator. For her students to excel academically, Daniela knew that the classroom teachers had to adopt a holistic pedagogy that valued and honored the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Latinx students. For Daniela, this holistic approach began with the students in the classroom but extended to their families who lived in the community.

They [teachers] don't build a lot of relationships with the parents. They deal with English-speaking kids. They don't try to build relationships and that's so important. You know, so they can grow up and be productive. Why do you not want them to succeed in school? (Daniela)

7 Discussion

The findings revealed that Daniela and Emilia recognized the role of place in their work as bilingual paraeducators working with Latinx students in their rural district. They demonstrated their insider knowledge and awareness of community functioning by how they navigated local practices on behalf of their ELLs. Greenwood's (2019) critical aims for place-conscious learning explore the mysteries of place by "learning to see, undo, and heal from patterns of historical injustice" (p. 364). The participants' reflections facilitated by the study's interview sessions allowed Daniela and Emilia to address the critical historical (What happened here?), socio ecological (What is happening here?), and ethical (What should happen here?) questions guiding the study. Daniela and Emilia's past experiences as migrant students, although experienced in a different place, informed their work with Ririe Elementary's Latinx population, especially undocumented students. Additionally, their knowledge of this place enabled them to link their past experiences as students to their current work as paraeducators. As a community member, Daniela was aware that the agriculture industry in Shelton County had shifted from seasonal, migrant work to establishing permanent residency for farm workers. As "newcomers"

from Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Puerto Rico began settling in Ririe, Daniela and Emilia were cognizant of the unique linguistic, cultural, and social-emotional circumstances that Latinx families would have to navigate based on what they experienced as students themselves and as paraeducators.

Navigating “how to be” as paraeducators in their rural community opened Daniela and Emilia up to “exploring the politics of place” (Greenwood, 2019, p. 365). As former migrant students, Daniela and Emilia’s past schooling experiences had a profound impact on their future roles as paraeducators and active community members. While living in Michigan, Daniela and Emilia were grateful to teachers who overcame language barriers to create an inclusive classroom environment. As adults, they settled in rural Indiana and over time, became more knowledgeable about the unique immigration issues facing students in the schools and families. Historically, Ririe had welcomed migrant families to perform seasonal work, and in the 1970s, local churches hosted summer school programs for migrant children. Beginning in the 2000s, as the agricultural needs of the community shifted from seasonal work to more permanent positions, Latinx families began to establish roots. Daniela and Emilia were aware of the unique challenges that students and families faced in Ririe, Indiana.

Within the community, there existed tensions between the business owners who employed undocumented workers and community members who supported Trump Era policies (e.g., deportation, secure borders, and the termination of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). Serving as “bridges” between the school and homes, Daniela and Emilia welcomed families to the school community, answered questions, and offered guidance. As Latinx families settled into the community, Daniela was often the first point of contact. Daniela’s knowledge of the community on a personal level was beneficial in supporting students’ social-emotional needs in the classroom. Additionally, Daniela met with administrators and the superintendent to advocate for undocumented Latinx students. Ventura (2020) contends that paraeducators’ own lived experiences inform their nourishment work with Latinx students. Ventura (2020) posits that paraeducators, “acted as ‘nepantleras,’ or bridging actors between schools and students, showing that ‘to bridge is an act of will, an act of love, an attempt’” (as cited in Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 4). They empathized with students and families due to their shared linguistic and cultural experiences, and thus they understood firsthand the challenges of navigating two worlds.

As place-conscious educators, “being present in, with, and to a place” (Greenwood, 2019, p. 365) illuminated the need to cultivate authentic relationships with students and families in this rural community. Although they received little guidance from the classroom teachers in this place, they drew on

past experiences as students, remembering the care they received from white, monolingual teachers when they were migrants in Michigan. Their personal, professional, and place-based knowledge informed how these paraeducators cultivated relationships with Latinx learners that were bidirectional, caring, and authentic (Marichal, 2021). Daniela and Emilia tried to address the subtractive schooling practices that “divest these youth of important social and cultural resources, leaving them progressively vulnerable to academic failure” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 3). They primarily did this by working one-on-one and in small groups, encouraging them to speak their heritage language.

The paraeducators, because of their lived experiences as students and their knowledge of the lack of cultural and linguistic resources in this rural school community, were positioned to serve as advocates for the students, families, and the greater Latinx community. Although they felt limited in their impact due to their low status in the school, they cared deeply for the emotional, social, and academic well-being of their students, especially the undocumented students. In small, but meaningful ways, the paraeducators saw themselves as a community. When students faced adversity, they focused their energy on making sure that Latinx students were seen, valued, and heard. As students reached personal goals (e.g., academic, athletic, social-emotional), Daniela and Emilia rejoiced with their students. The paraeducators also reported meeting with classroom teachers and administration on the behalf of families. They amplified the voices of their community by identifying deficit practices that “othered” Latinx students from their classmates. The findings thus align with research that has shown that educators and paraeducators serve as advocates due to their strong connections with students and families, as well as their linguistic and cultural competencies (Gist et al., 2021; Marichal, 2021; Villegas & Clewell, 1998).

Daniela and Emilia engaged in the complexities of “inner work” as they examined their “own interior worlds” (Greenwood, 2019, p. 359). This “inner work” began by reflecting on their past experiences as migrant students to inform their work as paraeducators. As parents of bilingual children, Daniela and Emilia would discuss their work as paraeducators with their adult children who were now raising children of their own. Often family discussions focused on the links between language and identity. For Emilia, it was important for her children to maintain both Spanish and English but for Daniela, whose adult children did not speak Spanish, she did not realize the significance that an “English-only” curricula had on her children until much later in life. Now, as a grandmother and paraeducator, Daniela’s “inner work” centered on supporting ELLs in the classroom but also being explicit about highlighting

the importance of students' heritage language. From Daniela's "inner work" around language and identity, throughout the school day, she provided opportunities for Latinx students to practice their heritage language in multiple settings (e.g., the classroom, playground, cafeteria). In addition to the time they spent together as paraeducators, their bond as sisters provided a safe space in which to reflect on their lived experiences. By questioning who they are and where they are, who and where they came from, they were able to negotiate the interplay between the soul and the rural community they served. As bilingual speakers, Daniela and Emilia knew first-hand the significance of linguistic diversity and as they developed an individualized curriculum, they strived to provide meaningful, practical content that showcased the academic strengths of each student.

Cenoz and Gorter (2011) argue that adopting a holistic lens to multicultural education "takes into account all of the languages in the learner's repertoire" (p. 339) and challenges deficit ways of thinking about students whose heritage language is not English. As advocates, Daniela and Emilia understood that in order, "to know a place, to care for a place and become part of its community, we must know and care for ourselves in our complexity and contradictions" (Greenwood, 2019, p. 360). The paraeducators' unique skill of navigating two worlds allowed them to support students as learners in the classroom while protecting and preserving their families' linguistic and cultural heritage.

This study revealed that place-based knowledge was crucial as the paraeducators advocated for Latinx students in the classroom. While Daniela and Emilia's experiences of working with Latinx students and families are unique to Ririe, Indiana, their narratives highlight the importance of preparing future educators for "somewhere versus anywhere" (Reagan et al., 2019, p. 84). In the literature, paraeducators are often viewed as cultural and linguistic experts because they recognize the strengths and challenges of Latinx students in schools (Ventura, 2020; Wenger et al., 2004).

Daniela and Emilia felt a tremendous amount of responsibility, for supporting Latinx students as they navigated the unfamiliar school environment. Specifically, they were empathetic towards undocumented students because they had faced similar linguistic, cultural, and social-emotional challenges as migrant students. However, Daniela and Emilia did not view themselves as experts. Daniela was particularly frustrated by the classroom teachers' lack of compassion for Latinx students and families. While she valued her relationship with her students and saw herself as a caregiver, she desperately wanted the teachers, staff, and administration to find ways of knowing the Latinx students. Daniela and Emilia were concerned with how teachers' beliefs and attitudes

impacted their relationships with Latinx students. Instead of seeking out ways of working with emerging ELLs, classroom teachers were quite removed from their students' experiences and left the social, emotional, and academic care to the immigrant paraeducators, and, in many instances, to other multilingual students. Often teachers viewed undocumented students and families as "illegal" and questioned their legitimacy for residing in Ririe, Indiana (Oudghiri, 2022). Likewise, teachers who had been lifelong residents of Ririe conceptualized the community in a more "traditional" manner – white Christians of European descent. Daniela and Emilia both stressed the significance of teachers building social capital. By "decolonizing the mind" (Greenwood, 2019) teachers might begin to identify and overcome bias and stereotypes, thus working towards a shift in mindset that acknowledged and valued the uniqueness that Latinx families brought to the community.

8 Conclusion

During our first interview, Daniela was curious about why I was interested in the experiences of Latinx students in rural communities. As I described my work with preservice teachers, the majority of whom were white, female, and monolingual, I stressed the importance of preparing the next generation of teachers for diverse classrooms grounded in an ethic of care. Daniela stopped me and asked, "Can you teach empathy?" Smiling I said, "I hope so. That's why I want to learn from you. If you could speak to my preservice teachers, what would you say?" On the basis of my formal and informal discussions with these paraeducators, I offer the following list of recommendations for educators in rural school settings:

1. Paraeducators are allies. Treat paraeducators with dignity and mutual respect. Develop and foster collaborative relationships as colleagues.
2. Communication is essential. Invite paraeducators to the table when discussing students' academic, linguistic, and social-emotional needs.
3. Nurture inclusive classrooms. Students, especially "newcomers" should be included in all activities. As you come to know students' linguistic and cultural assets, incorporate their heritage into the classroom culture.
4. Families care about their children's education. Utilize paraeducators as cultural and linguistic bridges to begin to develop and cultivate authentic relationships with families.
5. Promote hope. Be mindful of the historical, social, economic, and cultural context of your students. Learning with and from our students is fundamental for educators.

These immigrant educators' narratives reveal how developing a critical pedagogy of place means challenging each other to read the texts of our own lives and to ask constantly what needs to be transformed and what needs to be conserved (Gruenewald, 2003, pp. 10–11). As educators, it is not enough to live within a community rather, as active community stakeholders, we must ask ourselves: How can we transform ourselves to best support the needs of our communities? The paraeducators' lived experiences facilitating their work with Latinx students highlight an important issue in preparing preservice teachers to work with diverse populations in rural communities. My experiences with these immigrant educators as a researcher and teacher educator emphasize how reenvisioning rural teacher education begins by centering place. Reflecting on "What happened here? What is happening here now? What should happen here? How to be here?" (Greenwood, 2019, p. 364) requires the "inner work" of decolonization and reinhabitation.

Notes

- 1 All names of people and places are pseudonyms.
- 2 In 1903, Cyrus W. Hodgin's article, "The Naming of Indiana" appeared in the *Wayne County, Indiana Historical Society*. Hodgin (1903) states that Indiana means "Land of the Indians" or "Indian Land."
- 3 As cited in the Indiana Climate Change Impacts Assessment (2018) report, "Indiana's Future Forests: A Report from the Indiana Climate Change Impacts Assessment."
- 4 For the purposes of this chapter, participants are categorized as rural educators, which includes the paraeducators and certified teachers of Ririe Elementary School.
- 5 Sepúlveda III (2011) used the term "pedagogy of acompañamiento" refers to educators who work *with* (accompany) transmigrant students through the liminal spaces of schooling in a holistic manner.
- 6 The Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) identifies students as Hispanics based on the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) classification of the Hispanic population and its origin. Throughout this chapter, "Latinx" will be used as an inclusive, alternative to denote a person of Latin American origin or descent.
- 7 The countries of origin for Ririe's Hispanic students include Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Puerto Rico, and Mexico.

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Preparing Regular Classroom Teachers to Work with Frequently Invisible, Woefully Misunderstood American Indian English Language Learners

Jioanna Carjuzaa

Abstract

The Montana Teachers of English Language Learners (MontTELLs) project emerged as a professional development response to the deficit thinking surrounding Indian education and the longstanding achievement gap between Native and non-Native students. In Montana, the majority of English Language Learners (ELLs) are American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students who are not necessarily heritage language speakers and are often invisible and routinely underserved because they do not fit the traditional ELL portrait. The MontTELLs project focused on preparing regular classroom teachers to identify and support these AI/AN ELLs. The creation of the MontTELLs model blended three initiatives: the state's constitutional mandate to integrate Indian Education for All (IEFA) across the curriculum, Indigenous language instruction, and academic literacy skills in English. To understand why the MontTELLS project was developed, this chapter highlights the distinct rural geography and history of Montana, the legacy of Indian education policies and language loss that contribute to Montana American Indians being classified as ELLs, and educational attempts to redress these policies. In addition, the development and goals of the MontTELLS project are addressed and the challenges and successes are highlighted through the voices of participating teachers.

Keywords

American Indians – English language learners – Indian Education for All – Indigenous languages – professional development – culturally and linguistically diverse education certificate

1 Introduction

Before I describe the Montana Teachers of English Language Learners (MontTELLs) project, I want to paint a picture of our context so you can visualize the geographic and socio-economic reality of our rural state. Although I live and work in Bozeman, to conduct the outreach I do, I travel thousands of miles monthly to visit schools throughout Indian country and in small, isolated communities across Montana. The backroads are often absent of fellow travelers, many are unpaved, some are impassible because of snowpack. The frequent, long distances I travel have earned me the accolade of *road warrior*.

Since European immigrants arrived on the shores of the Eastern Seaboard of what would become the United States, all other locations were referred to as ‘the West’ at some time in the past. Today, despite being in the northern United States, Montana embodies ‘the West’ as depicted in American folklore (Johnson, n.d.). Affectionately known as the last best place, Montana conjures up an image of wide-open spaces, majestic mountains, cattle ranches, bison herds, pro rodeos, and mineral mining (National Geographic, n.d.).

Montana, a word derived from the Spanish term for mountainous, accurately describes the rugged Rocky Mountains in the western part of the state, but this vast and varied land area also boasts canyons, river valleys, forests, Great Plains, and grasslands. Montana covers more than 147,000 square miles. Traversing the state can take a day since it is about 559 miles from east to west and about 321 miles from north to south and direct routes are for the most part nonexistent (Montana, n.d.).

Montana is officially known as the Treasure State which highlights the important role the mining industry has played in the state’s economy and the expansive gold, silver, copper, zinc and lead mineral wealth found here. Nonetheless, Montana is also known by several other nicknames, the favored being “Big Sky Country” (Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development, 2020). There is abundant public land in Montana totaling nearly 28 million acres. Like other Western states, the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service are the biggest landowners, but Montana is also home to large tracts of tribal and state property (Tobin, 2013). The public land has remained relatively pristine, so Montana has the reputation of being a paradise for outdoor enthusiasts and wildlife lovers alike.

Montana is bordered by Idaho to the west, Wyoming to the south, North and South Dakota to the east and to the north it shares a 545-mile international border with three Canadian Provinces, British Colombia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan (Montana, n.d.). Only three states, Alaska, Texas, and California, are larger and only Alaska and Wyoming have fewer inhabitants than Montana.

Although it is the fourth largest state geographically, Montana is not just defined as a rural state, but it is classified as a *frontier state* based on its low population density since 46 of its 56 counties have fewer than six people per square mile (National Rural Health Association Policy Brief, 2016). In fact, it was not until 2012 that the Montana total state population surpassed the million mark for the first time (World Population Review, 2016). Billings, with a population of 109,000, is the only community in Montana that is classified as an urban center and only four other locations, Missoula, Great Falls, Bozeman, and Butte Silver Bow have 40,000+ inhabitants. Conversely, in the eastern portion of the state, you will find millions of grazing cattle and sheep, but evidence of human habitation is scarce.

Furthermore, the population is scattered, and most Montanan rural towns are located more than 150 miles from medical services or retail centers. Those living in these geographically isolated communities have to cope with limited economic opportunities, poor infrastructure, lack of public transportation, restricted access to quality healthcare, and food insecurity. Actually, half of the state's counties qualify as *food deserts* because residents travel a minimum of 10 miles to a grocery store or market and often cannot find quality, fresh, affordable food in those locations (Montana Food Bank Network, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded access to quality food and according to Feeding America, one in ten adults and one in six children in Montana suffer from food insecurity (Feeding America, 2020). These rates are even higher in counties with high populations of American Indians (Solórzano & Switalski, 2020).

Although there are many positive reasons to choose to reside in Montana, there are other aspects that can be challenging. Montana's weather conditions can be severe with harsh winters and scorching summers. In fact, comedian Jeff Foxworthy has cleverly captured the extreme Montana weather by claiming that you might be a Montanan if you relate to the following: "if you know the four seasons as: almost winter, winter, still winter, and road construction; if you design your kid's Halloween costume to fit over a snowsuit; and if you often switch from 'heat' to 'air conditioning' in the same day and back again" (Montana Associated Technology Roundtables, 2010).

Since the transition to online teaching and learning in March 2020 due to the global pandemic, the digital divide throughout the state has become even more glaring. Participating in Zoom school, working from home, and accessing telehealth services has been challenging for many individuals where the access to broadband internet is either spotty or nonexistent. It is unlikely that this inequity will be eliminated soon since building and maintaining an infrastructure network in low-density communities is cost prohibitive (Pfohl, 2020).

Even with its breathtaking landscapes, there is a darker side to this ‘Wild West’ wonderland as demonstrated by the alarming, extremely high suicide rate per capita. Unfortunately, for the past thirty years, Montana has ranked in the top five states for the highest suicide rates for all age groups (Rosston, 2021). Extreme isolation, an abundance of firearms, and depression combatted with alcohol and drugs, when mixed with a *cowboy mentality* or *frontiersman bravado* results in a refusal to ask for help when needed. Consequently, suicide is the second leading cause of death for Montanans between the ages of 10 and 34 and between 2009–2018, American Indians made up the highest suicide rate in the state (Moseman, 2019; Rosston, 2021).

Unquestionably, the first inhabitants were American Indians and today, 12 tribal groups comprising 8 sovereign nations call Montana home: Assiniboiné, Blackfeet, Chippewa, Cree, Crow, Gros Ventre, Kootenai, Little Shell, Northern Cheyenne, Pend d’Oreille, Salish, and Sioux. Currently, the Montana American Indian population at 7% is substantially greater than the national average (NIEA, 2015). Montana’s seven Indian reservations include: Flathead, Blackfeet, Rocky Boy, Ft. Belknap, Ft. Peck, Northern Cheyenne, and Crow. In addition, in December 2019, the estimated 4,500 Little Shell Band of Chippewa Indians who reside in northern and central Montana became the 574th tribe to be federally recognized. Each reservation is home to a Tribal College, making the land grant institution total in Montana eight including Montana State University (MSU), more than any other state (OPI, 2018). Montana also remains the only state today with a constitutional provision to recognize the cultural heritages of American Indians and incorporate Indian education at all grade levels in all curricula. Even with all these exceptional circumstances and resources, Native students are often not successful in our schools.

1.1 *Legacy of Indian Policies*

1.1.1 Experiment in Forced Assimilation: The Indian Boarding School Era

Since you cannot change what you do not acknowledge, it is important to recognize that the intergenerational trauma experienced by countless American Indians today can be directly traced back to Indian Boarding Schools which operated between 1860 and 1978 (Hopkins, 2020; McCarty & Lee, 2014). These schools were established to address the ‘Indian problem’ by eradicating Native cultures and languages and ‘civilizing’ and ‘Christianizing’ American Indians who were thought to be culturally and intellectually inferior (Child, 2018).

Children were forcibly taken from their homes and placed in government and church-related boarding schools great distances away from their families and communities. Several generations and more than 100,000 Native children

were commanded to attend these schools over the nearly 100 years they were in operation (Reyhner, 2018). The first and best known of these schools, the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania, was founded in 1879 and run by army officer Henry Pratt with very strict military-style regimentation. Pratt's mantra, "Kill the Indian, Save the Man," summarizes the intention of these off-reservation schools (Child, 2014; Reyhner, 2018). Students had their hair cut short; they were given English names; they were denied their spiritual practices; and they were forbidden to speak their heritage languages. Every aspect of the students' lives was controlled. They wore military uniforms and were expected to respond to bells and whistles. Discipline was harsh; punishments were severe. In these schools, students often suffered a myriad of physical, verbal/emotional, sexual, mental/psychological, and cultural/identity abuse (NIEA, 2016; Reyhner, 2018).

Even though these institutions were schools, the students spent only three hours per day on rudimentary Western academics, and the rest of their time was consumed by vocational training. After all, the girls and boys served as labor for the schools performing farm tasks and housework. Even back in the mid-1920s, the Meriam report revealed how ineffective and harmful the assimilation policies were and the researchers recommended integrating the curricula with Native traditions, histories, and languages and limiting the four-hour workday young children were forced to endure. But little changed and forty years later when the Kennedy Report was released in 1969 it detailed, "... low quality of virtually every aspect of Indian Education ..." (NIEA, 2016, p. 14).

When boarding school survivors completed their education or were released from their schools and returned home, they often encountered disheartened strangers they no longer knew and were unable to communicate with. Now being English-dominant, many were unable to speak their heritage languages which had been beaten out of them. As Crawley (2020) pointed out, often children once separated from their parents, had few, if any opportunities to return home or to have their parents visit them at the boarding school until they completed their education. Even after spending years away at school, only a mere 20% graduated (Public Broadcasting Service, 2009). Further, they never used books beyond the third primer (Crawley, 2020). This resulted in a deficient foundation in academic literacy skills which contributes to the high numbers of American Indian English Language Learners (ELLs) today (Carjuzaa, 2017; Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2016; Leap, 1993).

1.1.2 The Cost of 'Talking Indian' and Language Loss

In order to comprehend the far-reaching impact the brutal and destructive educational practices in the boarding schools had on students, it is important

to explore the effects language oppression had and continue to have on tribal members today. Since students at boarding schools were punished for speaking their languages, with numerous accounts of various forms of humiliation and abuse, the children lost the ability to communicate in their mother tongues and were brainwashed into being ashamed of their heritage languages. Even today, many elders share this confounded dilemma.

Aaniiih elder, Na Gya Tha (Lenore A. Stiffarm) shares her story as a second-generation boarding school survivor and describes how the trauma her grandparents and parents suffered because they were forbidden to speak their ancestral language, impacts her. The contemptuous irony of this traumatic loss is captured in her description of her father's experience,

My late father, Ah Hock Nak (The Rock), told me that he did not want me to learn the language because as a child the language was beaten out of him. He said, the white man is Hok Ats (crazy). When I was taken to the St. Paul's Mission School in Hays, MT the language was beat out of me by the Catholic nuns—beating my fingers each time I spoke the language. I had no other way to talk with my younger brothers and sister who were crying. I tried to comfort them in the only language that I knew. ... My brothers and sister were still crying so I tried to speak with them through sign language. The Catholic nuns beat me again. ... Then, my late father would hold his hands up where his fingers were deformed because the Catholic nuns beat the language out of him. ... He then stated, today, the crazy white man wants to pay me \$100.00 to go into the schools to teach my grandchildren how to speak our language. The tobacco is still here on the table. I am not sure whether I should teach our language. What if the white man gets crazy again and beats the language out of my grandchildren? (Stiffarm & Stiffarm, 2017)

1.1.3 Indian Education: Looking Back in Order to Move Forward

Since many non-Natives who reside in Montana, recent transplants as well as those born and raised here, have not befriended tribal members nor spent time in reservation communities, it is of paramount importance that educators understand how tension and distrust have qualified the relationship American Indian tribes have experienced in their dealings with the U.S. government and how this misgiving has carried over to the education of Native students (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Reyhner, 2018; Zinth, 2013). Exploring power, authority, and governance by overlapping federal Indian law and policy with historical events elucidates the injustices and highlights the effects of white encroachment. Throughout the years, the

colonized education of Indigenous children and adolescents has consistently been deficient in terms of academic programming, inequitable in terms of resources, brutal in terms of disciplinary procedures, and incongruent with cultural knowledges and ways of knowing (United States Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, & Subcommittee on Indian Education, 1969).

1.2 *Montana's Indian Education for All*

The Montana Indian Education for All (IEFA) Act addresses the historical and contemporary oppressions of Indigenous peoples by transforming educational policy, curriculum, and pedagogy (Carjuzaa, Jetty, Munson, & Veltkamp, 2010). In fact, IEFA has served as a model for educators dedicated to embracing American ideals of social justice and educational equity as well as expanding the dominant political orthodoxy. It is an unprecedented reform effort 49+ years in the making. The expectation is that all educators in Montana know the intention and goals of IEFA, which stated simply are to: 1) reduce bias against Indigenous peoples resulting from a lack of knowledge and understanding, 2) enrich instruction by enhancing cultural relevance, and 3) (re)instill pride in cultural identity (Carjuzaa et al., 2010).

In 1972, the Constitutional Convention met in Montana's capitol to revise the state's constitution. Courageous Dakota high school students from the Ft. Peck Reservation, Mavis Scott and Diana Leuppe, inspired the delegates congregating in Helena, all non-Indian, with their moving testimony. As delegate Dorothy Eck of Bozeman recalls,

They came asking what...the Convention could do to assure them that they would have the opportunity...to study their own culture, perhaps their own language, and to develop a real feeling of pride in themselves for their own heritage and culture, and also a hope that other students all over Montana would recognize the importance and the real dignity of American Indians in the life of Montana. (Juneau & Smoker Broadus, 2006, p. 193)

The delegates responded formally by adding language to the state's constitution in Article X, Section 1 (2), pledging, "The state recognizes the distinct and unique cultural heritage of American Indians and is committed in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity" (Mont. Const., art. X, §1). Early efforts to implement the requirement, though too numerous to include here, were not robust.

It was not until 1999, 27 years after the initial amendment to the Montana Constitution, that Article X was codified when the Legislature passed House

Bill 528 into law, MCA 20-1-501, which became known as IEFA. Then in 2006, Montana's constitutional commitment to the preservation of the cultural heritages of American Indians became a funded reality when this audacious legislation incorporated the teaching of American Indian cultures and histories in the statutory definition of a quality education (Carjuzaa et al., 2010). To date, no other state has adopted a comparable constitutional commitment, although many states have designed a similar framework based on the Essential Understandings and created inclusive history curricula. In Montana, we have anecdotal evidence that this far-reaching initiative to integrate IEFA across the curriculum has instilled cultural pride and promoted cultural sensitivity, but it has not resulted in the narrowing of the achievement gap we hoped.

2 The Montana Context

2.1 *Montana's Teachers, Our Students, and Our Schools*

In 2018, the K-12 public school staff and paraprofessionals in Montana totaled nearly 16,000; yet, fewer than 4% of the teaching corps was American Indian (Montana Department of Commerce, 2019) and the state total student enrollment was just over 149,000 (OPI, 2018). The pre-K-12 American Indian student population at 14% was more than 10 times the national average for American Indian students attending public elementary and secondary schools (OPI, 2018). Approximately 45% of American Indian students attend a school on the reservation and the remaining 55% attend schools located outside a reservation boundary in Montana (OPI, 2018).

There are 826 public schools which comprise the 403 school districts in the state, two-thirds, of which are small rural districts with fewer than 100 students (OPI, 2020a). In the early 20th century, one-room schoolhouses were very popular across the United States. Today, Montana still has 63 one-room schools operating, the greatest number in the nation. Some one-room schools are K-6 and others are K-8, but the defining element is that they are taught by one teacher.

Now that I have described our context, summarized a key Indian Education policy, recapped the promises of Indian Education for All (IEFA), and highlighted our theoretical orientation, in this chapter, I describe our ELLs, reflect on the inception of the MontTELLs project and share the challenges we encountered and successes we celebrated along our journey to prepare classroom teachers in Montana to meet the needs of ELLs, the majority of whom are American Indian.

2.2 *ELLs in Montana*

In 2017, ELLs comprised 10% of America's five million student corps across the nation (NCES, 2020). Although there is tremendous linguistic diversity among ELLs, it is estimated that more than 80% of ELLs in the United States speak Spanish as their first language. This is not the case in Montana, where most ELLs are American Indians. In 2016, when the OELA published the Fast Facts listing of the highest percentages of AI/AN ELLs, Montana was identified as the state with the highest percentage, 75.3%, of ELLs who are AI/AN (OELA Fast Facts, 2016). These students whose academic English proficiency affects their opportunity to compete with their English-speaking counterparts, obtain content mastery, and graduate from high school do not necessarily speak their tribal language but grow up in households and communities where Standard English is not the mode of communication, and an Indigenous language is identified as the language of impact (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2016). Unfortunately, AI/AN ELLs are often invisible and routinely underserved because they do not fit the traditional ELL portrait (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2016).

There are two main, distinct groups of AI/AN ELLs. The smaller percentage of AI/AN students whose first language is an Indigenous language and who are learning English as a second language are easier to identify as ELLs than AI/AN students who do not speak a heritage language but have not acquired the foundation in academic English literacy to thrive academically. This unique group of ELLs have their English acquisition framed by parents, grandparents or guardians who were products of the Indian boarding schools, are ELLs who did not have the opportunity to acquire Standard English themselves, and currently speak and model a non-standard or non-academically proficient variety of English (Bilagody, 2014; Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2016; Hollbrook, 2011). Although American Indian boarding school students were required to speak English, they did not have access to an adequate model of academic Standard English since much of their education consisted of limited, basic language lessons. Notably, even in cases when speakers are not fluent in their ancestral language, they are influenced by the grammar rules and discourse associated with ancestral language traditions.

AI/AN Students who are identified as ELLs should be provided language assistance programs to improve their reading comprehension and foundational English language proficiency and meet the academic content and achievement standards that all students are expected to fulfill (NCES, 2015; OPI, 2020c; WIDA, 2020). It is important to point out that AI/AN students are eligible for such assistance and classroom accommodations which recognize that they are operating from a heritage language of influence, regardless of

whether they speak the language or not (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2016; Holbrook, 2011; Leap, 1993; McCarty, 2014; OELA, 2020).

In 2014, the Office of Public Instruction (OPI) reported that of the identified 3,443 ELLs in Montana; the American Indian percentage was 75.9% in alignment with what the OELA had reported for Montana (OPI, 2014). In 2015, OPI reported a decline in the overall number of ELLs even though The National Education Association reported that Montana is one of just three states that experienced a more than 50 percent increase in ELL student enrollment over the past ten years (ESLteacherEDU.org, 2021). Unfortunately, two years later, the OPI reported once again that the AI/AN ELL percentage dropped, this time to 69%. Even though AI/AN students are still reported as the majority of ELLs in Montana, OPI most recently reported for 2019–2020 that the percentage had fallen to 59% (OPI, 2020c). Educators across the state are skeptical that this continuous decline does not accurately reflect the number of ELLs in our classrooms, but rather points to the challenges in identifying American Indian ELLs (Personal Communication with school district Title III administrator, 2020).

2.3 *Teaching AI/AN ELLs*

Montana does not have large numbers of ELLs in any one school; consequently, because of this low incidence, few school districts across the state employ ESL specialists. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare all regular classroom teachers to integrate content and linguistic objectives so ELLs can achieve academically while simultaneously improving their academic English (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2016). Higher level language proficiency is required for comprehension of classroom instructional content which is measured on standardized achievement tests. In order to gain access to the benefits of formal education, acquisition of academic language and especially the underlying components of academic literacy is essential (NEA Education Policy & Practice Department, 2008).

Students need to become fluent readers of academic English if they are to decode and comprehend content and be successful in school. Many American Indian ELLs are already speakers of the English language, but they need an adapted curriculum that addresses their unique needs and supports them in the four domains of speaking, listening, reading, and writing in Standard English (Bilagody, 2014; OELA, 2020). These students may not speak another language other than English, but the lack of family/community literacy in Standard English can negatively impact an AI/AN student's English proficiency due to parents' and caretakers' capacity to provide support at home (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2016; Zinth, 2013). This is not only the case in Montana but extends

to AI/AN communities throughout the nation and Indigenous communities around the globe who face the same challenges.

2.4 *The Achievement Gap*

In testing conducted every two years across the nation, students in some school districts are randomly selected to take the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). In Montana, the most recent NAEP tests were administered during 2016–2017 to 4th grade and 8th grade students in mathematics and reading. What remains consistent among students in these grades and across both subjects is the large achievement gap between the Native and non-Native student subgroups (OPI, 2020a).

In Montana we are focused on closing this longstanding achievement gap by uncovering what instructional practices work best to effectively improve learning outcomes for AI/AN students (Demmert, 2001). In support of this goal, since 2007, the state legislature has appropriated \$3 million dollars yearly to address this achievement gap (OPI, 2018).

Sadly, the past decade has not seen an improvement in AI/AN student performance. When analyzing a series of Montana American Indian Student Achievement Data Reports from 2010–2020 a persistent gap in achievement between AI/AN students and their White counterparts has been reported (OPI, 2018). The state Criterion Referenced Test (CRT) results from 2006–2010 indicate that on average the percentage of White students with reading scores in the *proficient and advanced range* was 84% compared to 54% for AI/AN students (OPI, 2020a). In 2015, with the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), Montana changed from CRT tests to “Smarter Balanced” tests. From 2015–2020 there is a consistent 30 percentage point difference in the percentage of children achieving *proficiency or better* in reading averaging 23.3% of AI/AN students compared to 55.2% of White students reaching that level.

We need to accurately identify AI/AN ELLs and provide them with the necessary literacy instruction to be academically successful. Under both state and federal law, school districts are responsible to identify and provide services for students who are eligible for language assistance (Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2016). While exploring and analyzing student achievement data from the yearly ACCESS tests, WIDA’s suite of English proficiency assessments for ELLs, it became evident that the Board of Public Education in Montana needed to establish a continuous statewide school improvement plan to address the ELLs’ pervasive challenges (OPI, 2020c; WIDA, 2020). In 2016, of the 10,560 K-12 teachers in Montana, only 53 of them had earned an ESL endorsement (Personal Communication with former OPI Title III Director, 2016). This points to the need for

regular classroom teachers to be ESL certified and/or at least to receive some professional development to better serve ELLs.

3 Inception of the MontTELLs Grant Project

3.1 *Purpose*

The MontTELLs grant project was designed to provide professional development to core-curriculum, secondary regular classroom teachers in hopes of raising the academic achievement of ELLs in Montana and narrowing the achievement gap between Native and non-Native students. The grant enabled the Center for Bilingual and Multicultural Education (CBME) to recruit and educate middle school and high school teachers from across the state with significant proportions of American Indians and others identified as ELLs in their schools in one of two programs in one of three project cohorts. The participating teachers received professional development, graduate coursework, one-on-one coaching/mentoring, and opportunities to nurture community engagement as designated for each program.

4 American Indian Students in Montana and Our School Improvement Initiative

Because our initial recruiting efforts for the MontTELLs grant project were met with misinterpretation and resistance we looked at re-messaging our recruitment strategy. We did this to assure parents, students, teachers, and other stakeholders that our quest to improve the academic English literacy skills of AI/AN ELLs was not in competition with our Indigenous language preservation efforts or our IEFA implementation. Since there have been concerted efforts to wipe out Indigenous peoples' languages, cultures, and identities, we knew that ELL identification and labeling had to be broached with sensitivity and humility. Therefore, as in all the projects at the CBME, we promoted heritage language instruction designed to support the teaching and learning of Indigenous languages, while embracing the goal of increasing English language proficiency for all students in a culturally responsive manner.

The identification of and support for ELLs in Montana's K-12 classrooms has been haphazard at best and inadequate to nonexistent all too often. The MontTELLs project was significant because no consistent comprehensive training for teachers working with culturally and linguistically diverse students was available and the graduation rate for Native students in Montana

remained far below the graduation rate for their non-Native counterparts. We believed that increasing the academic literacy skills of American Indian ELLs could address this issue. During the past two decades, a few colleges and universities from time-to-time had offered linguistic-focused Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) coursework for individuals interested in teaching English abroad. Nonetheless, in a state with 17 institutions of higher education with teacher preparation programs, none have offered consistent, comprehensive coursework towards an English as-a-second language (ESL) endorsement focused on the knowledge, skills, and dispositions K-12 licensed teachers need to design lesson plans that promote English language literacy skills and content mastery simultaneously in a culturally responsive manner.

Accordingly, we identified schools on or near reservations across the state with the highest numbers of American Indian and other ELLs. We consulted with the OPI and determined that our greatest concentration of identified at-risk ELLs was in our middle and secondary schools. We established Consortium Agreements with these partner school districts and recruited participants to join in one of two programs across the three cohorts; all participants from a specific school received the program randomly selected for that school.

We were content to focus on secondary teachers since our MontTELLs grant project key team members each had middle and/or high school discipline-specific pedagogical training in addition to secondary classroom experience.

4.1 *Program I: The Office of Public Instruction Teaching Learning Hub Course*

Program I focused on the professional development opportunity for in-service teachers to meet licensure renewal requirements that was in place in 2015 in Montana. Among the learning opportunities for teachers to earn renewal units, the OPI was offering an online five-week course titled *Teaching and Assessing English Learners* on their Teacher Learning Hub.

Since this was the only statewide coursework offered for teachers to learn about ELLs in Montana and how best to meet their needs when we wrote our OELA proposal, we decided to evaluate the course's effectiveness by actively recruiting secondary teachers to enroll in the course and track their progress. We covered the costs of the course materials as well as provided the teachers with additional incentives. The feedback we received from the teachers enrolled in this course was that it was quite challenging, and consequently, few teachers completed the course and earned a passing grade.

After the first cohort's complaints, the OPI Title III personnel revised the ELL Hub course, extended the course to six weeks and required a series of step-assignments leading to the final project; still completion rates remained

very low. Offering the course during the summer also proved disappointing as did other modifications. Limited enrollment and difficulty in locating qualified instructors resulted in cancelled courses. Through these numerous challenges, we did support the 20+ teachers who we recruited for the Hub ELL courses during the span of the three cohorts.

4.2 *Program II: The MontTELLs Grant Project CLDE Certificate Program*

I designed and proposed a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education (CLDE) graduate certificate program at MSU because of the urgent need to provide support for K-12 regular classroom teachers across Montana so that they could meet the needs of the students in their content classes who struggle with academic English literacy and therefore, content mastery. I conversed with the directors and key personnel at the following organizations: Western Educational Equity Assistance Center (WEEAC) in Denver, CO, the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northwest in Portland, OR and the Bueno Center for Multicultural Education (Bueno) in Boulder, CO to review the coursework and professional development they offered to in-service K-12 teachers to prepare them to meet the needs of ELLs. I made trips to consult with my contacts in person and reviewed their curricula and materials.

Based on the curriculum evaluations I conducted, I designed four, three-credit graduate courses for our CLDE certificate program: 1). Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse K-12 Students, 2). Literacy Development for Culturally & Linguistically Diverse K-12 Students, 3). Assessment of English Language Learners, and 4). Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Practice. The CLDE graduate certificate program was approved by the Montana Board of Regents during the spring of 2016. Subsequently, I submitted a proposal for the OELA Professional Development Grant proposing to offer this curriculum to in-service teachers for the MontTELLs grant project.

Therefore, Program II of the grant project, was a newly developed professional development initiative designed for in-service teachers which consisted of four three-credit graduate courses towards a CLDE certificate described here, one-on-one coaching with a faculty member from higher education with expertise in implementing the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) approach, and professional development in relationality, i.e., building and nurturing relationships by embracing the Family Education Model (FEM) for community engagement opportunities.

4.2.1 The CLDE Coursework

The courses for the CLDE certificate were offered over two summers with a focus on designing sheltered instruction lesson plans which integrated the IEFA

approach in a culturally responsive manner. The coursework was designed to count towards the requirements for an ESL endorsement in multiple states should the participants choose to pursue this endorsement in the future. The four sequential graduate courses are described below.

The first two courses were designed to be taken as corequisites during the initial summer. During the second summer, teachers in Program II of the MontTELLs grant project were expected to complete the third and fourth courses. The final course, *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Practice*, consisted of an in-depth analysis of the theory and practice of cultural diversity in educational contexts with an emphasis on linguistic diversity and how best to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students in the regular classrooms in Montana in a culturally responsive manner. Techniques and instructional strategies designed to create an IEFA sheltered lesson plan by exploring a variety of activities that cover the components and features of the SIOP methodology were explored.

4.2.2 One-on-One Coaching for Participants in Program II

In Program II of the MontTELLs grant project, one-on-one coaching was provided during the two academic years after each summer's coursework. In addition to everything the teachers learned about the theoretical and practical application of SIOP as well as how best to blend this methodology with the intentions of IEFA, and the efforts to support heritage language preservation, it was determined that the teachers would need backing and extensive feedback once they returned to their classrooms if they were to integrate what they had learned. The Instructional Coaches were partnered with teachers, and they utilized face-to-face meetings and video-conferencing to help the participants implement the 8 Components and 30 Features of the SIOP method to make their content comprehensible in conjunction with meeting the instructional commitment to create and deliver IEFA lesson plans in a culturally responsive manner.

4.2.3 Recruiting Teachers and Instructional Coaches

Recruitment for Program II involved inviting core curriculum (English/Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies/History) secondary teachers from schools in our consortium partner school districts on or near reservations with high percentages of American Indian and other ELLs to participate in the MontTELLs grant project. Teachers from schools on all seven reservations, the Billings schools—our largest, most diverse school district, our local school district—the Bozeman secondary schools, in addition to teachers from other small and medium-sized rural school districts across the state were invited to participate in the grant project.

Although we recruited nearly 100 participants, 48 were completers of the two-year CLDE certificate program across the three cohorts. When they were recruited, 51% of the teachers held a bachelor's degree and 49% had completed their master's. The teachers ranged in age from 25–60+ and they had a vast array of teaching experience which ranged from 3 to 37 years with an average teaching experience of 8 years. Most of the teachers were high school English/Language Arts Teachers (21). Eight teachers taught Social Studies/History, five taught Math, and three were Science teachers. The other four participants were Indigenous Language and Culture Teachers.

The majority of the teachers taught in public schools. Nine of the teachers taught in the St. Labre Catholic Schools on the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Reservations. In fact, Half of our teachers taught in schools where 90+ percent of the students were American Indian. A third of our teachers were American Indian themselves and several of them identified as ELLs.

In a state where an ESL endorsement on a K-12 license is not offered, where teacher preparation programs in institutions of higher education fall short of adequately preparing pre-service teachers to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students, where few teachers hold an ESL endorsement and where professional development opportunities for in-service teachers who teach ELLs are limited to non-existent, hiring Instructional Coaches for this professional development project proved to be quite challenging. Nonetheless, we were very selective in choosing our Instructional Coaches so they would be able to offer job-embedded, practical support for our teachers in Program II.

The eight Instructional Coaches we hired all had an advanced graduate-level related academic degree, or they were actively pursuing graduate studies. Having obtained SIOP and/or ESL certification, they had the knowledge of second language acquisition theories and sheltered instructional strategies. They also had had bilingual/multilingual life experiences in language contexts other than English. They had a combination of K-12 content teaching experience, ESL/EFL teaching experience, as well as coaching experience or had served as teacher education faculty. What was lacking was a familiarity with Indian Country and knowledge of the requirements of the IEFA constitutional mandate. None of the Instructional Coaches had ever traveled to reservations or spent time in border towns across the state. They were seasoned educators who were exceptional communicators, team players who possessed strong critical thinking skills, but they needed professional development opportunities to work successfully in Montana's reservation schools.

The instructional coaches received training on the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observation protocol through Teachstone, a tool that measures the quality of interactions between teachers and students; they

also were provided training through Pearson Education so they could earn advanced certifications in the SIOP. They also completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Program's Research Ethics and Compliance Training on Human Subjects Social and Behavioral Research as well as being introduced to our family engagement model.

Our Instructional Coaches were paired with the 50+ coachees; consideration for geographical locales was taken. The coaching cycle consisted of three important steps: the pre-lesson discussion, the recording-viewing-editing of a lesson, and the post-lesson conference. The coaches visited the teachers each semester to observe them teaching, review the SIOP model components and features, and collect CLASS and SIOP data. During each of the four semesters the coaches worked with their coachees, they covered two of the eight SIOP components.

It was important for the instructional coaches to build collaborative partnerships with their coachees and listen, ask good questions, provide encouragement, and feedback, and help their coachees view their instruction from a different perspective. The Instructional Coaches highlighted how important it is to create a collaborative exchange with the ultimate goal being that the coachees improve their instructional practices. Consequently, of all the aspects that support relationships: trust, respect and reciprocal responsibility were consistently referenced by the coaches.

4.2.4 Introducing the Family Education Model (FEM)

In addition, participants in Program II of the MontTELLs grant project were also introduced to a community engagement model designed to build trust among parents, caretakers, community members, school administrators, teachers, and students that has proved advantageous in Indigenous communities, in hopes of improving teacher-student relationships and supporting academic achievement. In 1997, to address the high rate of attrition that AI/AN students experience in higher education, American Indian educators, social work professionals, and academic advisors from five institutions of higher education in Montana, developed a culturally attuned program which has become known as the FEM (Heavy Runner & DeCelles, 2002). By focusing on factors that contribute to students' educational persistence, the FEM promotes empowerment, family and community support, and strong cultural ties to enhance resilience. It was the first program of its kind in higher education but many of the aspects are applicable to K-12 school environments. Heavy Runner and DeCelles (2002) found that if we replicate the extended family structure students are familiar with in their reservation communities within the educational context, it enhances the Native students' sense of belonging and leads to

higher retention and graduation rates. The sense of belonging that results, promotes a strong, deep sense of commitment to the group and an appreciation for the unique group members' personalities, their individual experiences, and their leadership skills which is captured in the following quote, "As determined in traditional family structures, the desire to help others by sharing knowledge emerged from Plains Indian philosophy to become a vital theme for dynamic leadership in the FEM" (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002, p. 33). Introducing our teachers and Instructional Coaches to the FEM helped us to support family engagement.

The professional development provided for the teachers, Instructional Coaches, and MontTELLs grant project team members included meetings on campus and in reservation schools, 'feeds' in reservation communities and shared meals in Bozeman, conversations with key school personnel on reservations, participation in CLDE coursework, and workshops and conference presentations. These opportunities focused on the legacy of the Boarding Schools, contemporary issues in Indian education, American Indian ELLs, the integration of IEFA across the curriculum in all subjects at all grade levels as a model for culturally responsive pedagogy in practice, and the importance of nurturing relationality.

5 Outcomes from the Project

5.1 *Participant Voices*

We amassed copious data over the duration of the MontTELLs grant project from the secondary teachers enrolled in each of the three cohorts in Program 11 and from the Instructional Coaches who worked with them. We selected numerous vehicles to collect and triangulate our data, including formal course evaluations, feedback from focus groups and interviews, CLASS and SIOP checklists, and online surveys. Data from these sources were analyzed to identify common themes about the teachers' and Instructional Coaches' experiences. Through the open-ended questions to which they responded, the teachers and Instructional Coaches shared that the professional development initiatives: 1) emphasized the importance of relationality in Indian Country, 2) demonstrated the key role culture plays in the teaching-learning process and 3) highlighted the need for all K-12 classroom teachers in Montana to receive training to work effectively with American Indian and other ELLs. The comments contributed by the teachers and the Instructional Coaches were uniformly reflective and predominantly complimentary; I share representative,

anonymous quotes from the teachers and Instructional Coaches for each of the three themes here.

5.1.1 The Importance of Relationality

The teachers in Program 11 pointed out how important relationality was in Indian country. They commented on how building relationships on all levels is beneficial. They shared how they were practicing “Maslow before Bloom” by valuing their students cultural backgrounds and validating their diverse perspectives and experiences before introducing content. They remarked on the sense of belonging they strive to nurture and its importance for their students and for themselves.

Relationship is important—you need to know your students; who they are; their strengths and their weaknesses. Establishing relationships is super important, because you’re not going to get anywhere with your material if you don’t have that.

Well, I think if you don’t get the kids to connect with you as a human, and to see that you care about them and establish those relationships in whatever you teach isn’t going to be, well I might think it’s relevant to them, they might not think that is relevant at all so that relationship piece is super important. And especially, just trying to establish yourself as a go to contact person for somebody. I teach high school. So, you know, there if you’re new to an area and new to Indian country it’s just nice to have somebody that you can say, I don’t understand this, or where do I go for that so that that different cultural connection piece and establishing relationships is super important, because you’re not going to get anywhere with your material, if you don’t have that.

My participation in the MontTELLs grant project helped me become a better and more effective teacher (for all students, Native and non-Native—not only ELs). I developed friendships through the classes that we took in the summer. Because I did not graduate from MSU this program helped me develop academic connections with other teachers who work across the state. By taking classes with other teachers across Montana, I truly feel like I am connected with the teaching community here.

In a focus group discussion in late March of the final year of the grant project, Instructional Coaches shared comments on the importance for them to

make connections. “I had never been on the rez before. Because you [reference to the PI and Co-PI] were so well known in the community and having you go to Browning with me and introduce me and sit in the classrooms to observe with me, it made all the difference. I was immediately accepted.” Another Instructional Coach shared, “Being the only person of color in all of my own schooling in Bozeman, I felt such relief, like I belonged, when you took us to Crow Agency to meet with tribal members and I felt right at home, just another Brown person.” Another Instructional Coach talked about visiting classrooms on a reservation on her own for the first time, “At first I was really nervous about driving to the Ft. Belknap Reservation along the highline. Having help planning the trip, knowing where to stay, who to meet with, having you set up introductions for me with the school superintendent and planning meals to bring all of our participants together made all the difference.” An Instructional Coach who had not had the opportunity to join in on the group field trips shared, “I joined the Instructional Coaches in the second year of the grant and visited Pryor on my own. I felt comfortable on my first reservation visit because of the workshops and training I was provided.”

5.1.2 Valuing American Indian Students’ Cultures and Validating Their Life Experiences

Recognizing that students do not enter school with a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, resulting in an absence of cultural ways of knowing and heritage languages allows teachers to embrace the various aspects of cultural diversity which are at the core of implementing the IEFA mandate. Teachers shared how important it is to make education relevant by integrating the students’ cultures and languages in their teaching-learning.

I learned that it was, it is crucial to the success of a learner that we as educators, honor their cultural heritage and validate their cultural experience. The way that they and their family and their history guides them through the world, that needs to be present in their learning every day in order to ensure the best possible outcome for their education. And that when that validation of really their identity is absent from all areas of their learning or is made to be separated from everything else that they’re doing, they’re being shortchanged we’re all being shortchanged.

Crows are ELLs. We Crows kept our language; the language is in our blood. Even if the young kids can’t speak it; they start using Crow in the Head Start program and even if they don’t use it, at home, they are learning it. We say they start school 70% Crow/30% American English and at

the end of school it is 30% Crow and 70% American English. I am proud to use both languages in my teaching.

Focusing on academic English literacy skills supports Native Language preservation and revitalization. Learning and having a strong understanding of one language can help you in all your learning as well as when learning another language. It will give my students a better understanding of language and help them in learning their heritage language.

5.1.3 Preparing Regular Classroom Teachers to Meet the Needs of American Indian ELLs

Many of the teachers commented on the value they perceived from the professional development focusing on SIOP and IEFA and how the coursework and their interactions with their coaches prepared them to be better teachers for their students. The following three comments highlight the teachers' appreciation of how sheltered instruction and culturally responsive pedagogy support the creation of a welcoming classroom climate where all students have the chance to succeed.

All students benefit from better instruction in academic literacy and Indian Education for All. Good teaching and cultural relevance are great for improving student learning across the board. My greatest take-aways ... are to keep trying to make the SIOP lesson plan work, even if it is hard to write the language objectives. The students' best interests are in mind, and after much practice, you will get better at doing the SIOP lesson plans. ... Relationships are key! Knowing your stuff (IEFA) is important too.

My participation in the MontTELLs grant project helped me be more cognizant of the supports for English/academic language for students which are beneficial for the Indian ELLs as well as all of the students. ... by giving me practical training in how to teach. My previous teacher education coursework was primarily theory and not what I would call useful. MontTELLs was the inverse of that: primarily useful supported by some theory. I benefited immensely from the courses.

The MontTELLs grant project helped me become a better teacher, make the students I teach better students, gave me a thorough knowledge of SIOP and IEFA, and helped me implement it in the classroom. I understand, more clearly, the nature of underachievement principles of Native children in the western classroom. MontTELLs exposed the historic

facets of the diametrically opposed value systems of Indian and Non-Indian peoples.

Teachers who participated in Program 11 of the MontTELLs grant project have become spokespersons for this professional development initiative. They are the trailblazers in their respective schools and communities cheerleading for the integration of the SIOP model and the IEFA approach.

The MontTELLs program, in my estimation, should be mandatory for those educators who have the privilege of teaching in a predominantly Native school. The instruction I gained during this coursework allowed me to further advance the Native educational initiatives that our tribal students and parents need to function competitively in the Eurocentric academic environment that is the Montana public school system. Much more work is needed in this area of Montana Indian Education.

Everyone has stand-out classes from their college experience—these courses are among the most important I have ever taken. If every student teacher were required to take this program, we could improve education in Montana exponentially. I really missed being with my cohort in person this year because it's very inspiring to be in a room with that many people who are all committed to improving Indian education, people who all work with students just like mine.

Working with the MontTELLs grant project is one that I am happy that I got to experience. The need for people who are knowledgeable in working with EL students is great (especially in Montana) and I am grateful that I got to participate. This program made me aware of the biases that I held/hold and was not aware of and is helping me acknowledge how they impacted my behavior toward students. It has also helped me understand the academic behavior of students who lack academic language and how to use that behavior in a way to bring about positive results with student learning.

6 Conclusion and Future Directions

To teach in a culturally responsive manner, it is important to know your context and value your students' cultural heritages and validate their live experiences.

In Montana where most ELLs are American Indian, educators must learn about federal policies and local legislation that has had and continues to have an impact on tribal members since the government's schizophrenic attempts to eradicate Native languages frame current efforts to support language preservation while simultaneously promoting English language academic literacy skills.

In 2016 the CBME at MSU was awarded an OELA grant to recruit and educate middle and high school teachers from schools across Montana with significant proportions of American Indian and other ELLs in hopes of raising the academic achievement of these students. Sharing our model by requiring the CLDE certification for in-service teachers, integrating IEFA and sheltered instruction in pre-service teacher preparation programs, and exploring the revelations American Indian educators who identified as ELLs themselves once introduced to the concept, are areas for further exploration.

As we have widened the circle, we will continue to educate teachers and administrators across the state on what academic language proficiency entails and promote awareness of how American Indian ELLs qualify for academic literacy support. We hope to provide this much needed professional development to in-service elementary and secondary teachers, school administrators and para-professionals and all school staff throughout Montana and across the United States. We plan to continue to dialogue with the OPI, teacher preparation programs, graduate schools of education and tribal community members to provide equitable educational opportunities for our AI/AN and other ELLs so they cannot just survive but thrive in our schools.

7 Terminology

7.1 *Native American, American Indian, Native, Indigenous?*

There are a variety of terms that are used throughout the literature on Indigenous peoples of North America. I encourage teachers, researchers, and allies to use the identifiers Indigenous individuals prefer which often name their tribal affiliation in their respective heritage language (e.g., Apsaalooke for Crow or Aaniiih for White Clay). Throughout this chapter I have chosen to use the inclusive term American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) and its established historical and political significance related to tribal nations of the United States. Where deemed appropriate because other scholars have preferred different terms such as, American Indian, Native, and Indigenous, I have respected their decisions and this manuscript reflects that.

7.2 *Native, Non-Native*

Confusion frequently results when the terms Native and non-Native are used in our context because they often involve the difference between individuals who identify as American Indian compared to those who do not as opposed to referencing whether an individual speaks English as their mother tongue, or as a second or third language. The question arises, 'Are we talking about AI/AN individuals by racial distinction or referring to first languages?'

7.3 *LEPs, ELLs, Els, MLs?*

In Montana, at the time we crafted the Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA) Montana Teachers of English Language Learners (MontTELLs) grant proposal in 2015, we were still using the acronym, LEPs (Limited English Proficient Students) as the label to describe students who needed to improve their academic English language literacy skills in order to master content. By 2019, we adopted the term English Language Learner (ELL) even though at that time, the preferred national label was English Learner (EL). In 2020, the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) started using the term Multilingual Learner (ML) here to reflect the latest research and pedagogical practices implemented by WIDA. Even though WIDA is promoting the term MLs as a more accurate description of ELs, and has published the *WIDA Mission, Vision, and Values: From English Learners (ELs) to Multilingual Learners (MLs)*, the terms ELLs and Els are still more common in Montana. We can identify American Indian and other children and youth who are, or have been, consistently exposed to multiple languages, i.e., additional languages other than English that they come in contact with and/or interact in on a regular basis, still, we have not yet adopted the term MLs extensively (WIDA, 2020). However, we understand that American Indian ELLs who are, heritage language learners, and students who speak varieties of Indian English or Indigenous languages are included under the MLs label.

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Where Do I Go? What Do I Do?

Training Educators of Rural English Learners to Provide Accessible Instruction and Assessment

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Abstract

This chapter describes a federally-funded grant project to train West Virginia educators and parents on accessible assessment and instruction for K-12 English learners. West Virginia is a rural state, but individual districts and schools may not be rural. Districts are large and represent an entire county. Some districts may have only one itinerant English learner teacher. Some teachers in rural areas work in isolated locations. For these reasons, the project developed on demand training for general educators so that they could better instruct English learners who enroll in their schools on short notice. Teachers can take the online training when they need it, regardless of their geographic location in the state. Similarly, a flexible tool to support parent participation in decisions about accessible assessment and instruction for their child was created to be useful to parents from a variety of backgrounds and home languages. This chapter details the educational participants and landscape of West Virginia to situate the distinctive nuances of 'rural schools' in West Virginia. It then describes the design and development of teacher professional development modules and a parent-educator toolkit. Adaptations created to make the materials relevant and meaningful during a pandemic are also described.

Keywords

Accessibility – instruction – assessment – English learners – professional development – parent involvement

1 Introduction

Ms. Smith (not her real name) is having difficulty connecting with several of the parents of her 5th graders. The students are English Learners (ELs), and she desperately wants to talk to them about their children's progress in school, and strategies she can use to help them both in instruction and assessment. She has run out of ideas on how to set up these meetings, so today, she is packing her satchel and bringing a folding table to the local manufacturing plant where most of the parents of her EL students work. She hopes to catch them at the end of their shift to talk to them about their children.

Mr. Jones (again, not his real name) teaches 4th grade at a rural elementary school. He has just found out that he will have a student in his class this year from Afghanistan who has very limited English proficiency. He is not sure what to do. He has never had an EL student in class before. To make matters more challenging, there is no EL specialist at his school, and the district EL specialist is shared between multiple buildings. He looks into Google Translate to see if it can handle the Dari language and decides to set up a meeting with his principal, so they can plan a course of action for the upcoming school year.

These two situations, based on real stories shared by West Virginia teachers, illustrate the unique educational context that educators face in instructing and assessing ELs in West Virginia, a largely rural state with a few pockets of concentrated student populations. Districts have been consolidated, resulting in just 55 county-wide districts bound by the county lines. Those 55 counties, as well as the schools for the Deaf and Blind and the Office of Diversion and Transition, are served by 35 EL specialists (USED, 2020). Although the need for EL specialists is primarily concentrated in the population centers, where hospitals, universities, and certain key industries are located, this need is not limited to these areas. A small number of EL students attend rural schools scattered within urban districts; even smaller numbers of ELs, who are particularly difficult to identify, attend rural schools in rural districts throughout West Virginia. The additional support these students need to achieve grade-level standards and the limited number of EL specialists underscore the importance of making Professional Development (PD) on accessible instruction and assessment for ELs widely available to teachers in West Virginia districts with all types of geographic locales.

This diversity in need, population, and resources has created a *pressing* situation that the West Virginia Department of Education is working to address. The Rural School and Community Trust listed West Virginia as one of the top ten highest priority states in rural education in 2018–19 (Showalter et al., 2019). Over the last 5 years, they have partnered with the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), a University of Minnesota technical assistance center, on a project called Improving Instruction Through Improved Accessibility Decisions (Improving Instruction). The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. First, this chapter details the educational participants and landscape of West Virginia to situate the distinctive nuances of ‘rural schools’ in West Virginia. Secondly, it describes the work of the Improving Instruction project to show how several easily accessible online tools have been developed to guide underprepared and under resourced teachers to better meet the needs of ELs.

2 The West Virginia Context

Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, n.d.) show that a majority of West Virginia districts (60% or 34 of 57) are classified as rural. A quick review of the geographic nature of the interior of West Virginia shows a broad swath of the Allegheny Mountains forming a terrain with long-established small communities in tight valleys. West Virginia is also the only state completely within the Appalachian region (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2021). However, by looking more closely into the demographic data it becomes apparent that there are additional rural pockets of ELs attending school in unexpected places, and local educational agencies are attempting to provide services to rural students inside of formally classified areas of urbanization.

Historically, each West Virginia community supported a local school, but as local economies and populations declined (IBISWorld, 2021), schools consolidated in the effort to provide services to as many students as possible (DeYoung, 2021). The creation of large, countywide school districts through this consolidation effort led to few certified EL teachers being employed locally. Those who are hired by the district struggle to reach students in these geographically isolated areas. Additionally, smaller school systems have lower tax bases with which to develop annual budgets, with one result being that beginner teacher salaries are only at the state minimums (West Virginia Department of Education, 2020). In an effort to address the certified EL teacher shortage, some districts have contracted services with retired educators, shared EL teachers with neighboring districts, and investigated ways to provide direct and indirect support via virtual tools.

3 Characteristics of West Virginia Students

In this section, and those that follow, we use data from the ZoomWV¹ data portal created by the West Virginia Department of Education to describe the student population. Overall, there were 261,633 K-12 students enrolled in West Virginia public schools in 2019–20 (West Virginia Department of Education, n.d.-a). The student population in this rural state has declined by more than 20,000 students in roughly the last decade. In 2019–20, roughly 43% of students overall were from low-income families. While the majority of K-12 students in 2019–20 were White (89.5%), the state has a small, but growing population of students of color (Black or African American, 4.1%, Multi-Racial, 3.6%, Hispanic or Latino, 2.0%, and Asian, 0.6%). Less than 1% of K-12 students (2,029 students) were classified as ELs eligible to receive English language development services (West Virginia Department of Education, n.d.-a). In 2019, the majority of ELs in the state were Hispanic or Latino (56.4%), followed by Asian (20.1%), and White (14.1%; West Virginia Department of Education, n.d.-b). Most ELs in the state were from one of the top five language groups nationally (Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Somali; Office of English Language Acquisition, 2019).

In general, ELs in West Virginia have a higher attendance rate than their non-EL peers (94.3% compared to 93.1% for non-ELs) and a slightly higher five-year graduation rate than the total student population (92.5% for ELs compared to 91.7%). Still, broad indicators of their academic achievement show that the majority of ELs are not yet meeting state academic standards for their grade-level. On statewide assessments in 2018–19, approximately 37.7% of ELs met or exceeded standards in math, 46.13% of students did so in reading, and 32.8% of students met or exceeded standards in science.

3.1 *ELs in Rural West Virginia Districts*

Identifying ELs in rural West Virginia districts is a consistent challenge for educators. District-level data on rural English learners can be hard to locate, depending on whether one defines rural at the district or school level. The majority of the 32 rural districts reporting demographic data in ZoomWV showed either no ELs enrolled (34.4%) or fewer than 10 ELs (53.1%) enrolled in 2019–20. Only four rural counties reported that there were more than 10 ELs.

3.2 *Rural ELs in Non-Rural Districts*

Some West Virginia ELs attend a rural school in a non-rural district. Monongalia County Schools, in the northern part of the state near the Pennsylvania border, is an example of this situation. Census data indicate that Monongalia

County has the fourth largest population in the state. The school district as a whole has more than 10,000 students and NCES classifies it as a *small city* locale.² However, a portion of the schools in the district are assigned a rural geographic locale code in the NCES school locator database. Enrollment data in 2018–19 from ZoomWV, combined with NCES geographic locations of schools and districts, illustrate how variable the numbers of ELs are across rural schools within this district. We also use the data to show how small and shifting numbers of ELs in the rural schools in the district makes it a priority to train all teachers on how to serve ELs.

It would be easy to attend to the large population of ELs near Morgantown in Monongalia County and miss those students, in sometimes small and shifting pockets, who enroll in five rural schools outside the town. These five schools are identified by NCES as either *rural distant* (between 5 and 25 miles from an urbanized area), or *rural fringe* (less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area), indicating their close proximity to Morgantown. Table 7.1 shows that in 2018–19 there were two *rural distant* schools in Monongalia County (one elementary and one high school) reporting fewer than 10 ELs enrolled. Exact student numbers and student characteristics are not reported when the total is below 10, to protect the identity of the students. There were also three *rural fringe* schools (two elementary, one high school) with fewer

TABLE 7.1 Rural and non-rural Monongalia county schools

Type of school and frequency	Location (based on NCES locale) and number of English learners				Total number of English learners ^a
	Rural distant	Rural fringe	Rural remote	Non-rural	
Elementary (n = 10)	< 10 (n = 1)	< 10 (n = 2) 0 (n = 1)		167 (n = 6)	More than 167 (n = 9)
Middle (n = 4)	n/a	0 (n = 1)		22 (n = 3)	More than 22 (n = 4)
High School (n = 3)	< 10 (n = 1)	< 10 (n = 1)		51 (n = 1)	More than 51 (n = 3)

a Total number of ELs is taken from 2018–19 West Virginia Zoom Data Dashboard (see zoomwv.k12.wv.us) and accompanying Excel spreadsheet *Historical School Composition* (SY11 to SY20). Number of schools is given within parentheses. Locale information at school level in 2018–19 is from NCES (n.d.).

than 10 ELs enrolled. No ELs were identified in *rural remote* schools that are farther away than 25 miles from Morgantown. Clearly, there are ELs present in these rural schools, but it is difficult to determine from publicly available data how many ELs there are or what languages they speak.

In some cases, EL enrollment numbers have fluctuated across years in these five rural schools. For example, the *rural fringe* high school shown in Table 7.1 decreased from 14 ELs enrolled in 2015–16 to fewer than ten enrolled in 2018–19, just three years later. Students may have moved, exited from EL services, or graduated.

4 The Improving Instruction Project

The Improving Instruction project was funded to support educators statewide, but given the highly rural nature of the state, it has particular importance for rural educators of ELs. The Improving Instruction project has three primary goals:

- Improve teachers' understanding of how to select, implement, and evaluate the use of accessibility features and accommodations by ELs for instruction and assessment.
- Create a school culture that values the cultural background of all students, including ELs.
- Improve outcomes for ELs in math, English language arts, and English language proficiency.

The goals are accomplished through the creation of teacher PD on accessible instruction and assessment for ELs, and the creation of a multilingual parent-educator toolkit. These two resources help inform each other, and take strides to keep teachers, administrators, parents, and families working together to achieve better outcomes for EL students in the complex educational environment of West Virginia.

The PD has evolved through a deeper understanding of the West Virginia educational context and close collaboration with local educators and policy-makers. It is presented in an online, asynchronous format, so that West Virginia general educators who work with ELs, especially those in rural locations, can use this PD when they need it. Informing and supporting this PD is the creation of materials for parents of ELs that will help them understand, and be equal partners with educators in, making accessibility and accommodations decisions for their child.

5 Challenges/Obstacles of Delivering Teacher PD

Two key issues related to teachers and teaching have influenced the project's decision to create virtual, on-demand PD for all West Virginia general education teachers who serve ELs, rather than providing in-person PD or targeting the PD for EL specialists. First, along with much of the country, West Virginia is experiencing a growing teacher shortage that may be felt more acutely in some of the rural districts (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). The shortage may result in more teachers working outside their licensure areas. In addition, issues such as high teacher turnover and fewer numbers of teacher education candidates affect the teaching profession generally. Added to those factors, West Virginia educator salaries are among the lowest in the country (National Education Association [NEA], 2021) and some rural districts are geographically isolated, making it more challenging to recruit and retain well-trained teachers. Some rural districts have attempted to implement a "grow your own" strategy via partnerships with local post-secondary education institutions. This partnership encourages young people from the community to stay and become teachers. Others may hire teachers with alternative or emergency certification with the understanding that they work towards the required certification while on the job (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). Individuals with alternative or emergency certification may not have had the opportunity to receive extensive training in working with ELs yet may already be working with children in classrooms. In both situations, teachers benefit from having training available to them where and when they need it. The training needs to be flexible to allow for teachers with varying levels of experience and training to benefit.

Second, anecdotal information from WVDE and West Virginia teachers suggests that in many rural districts, or in rural schools within a non-rural district, there may not be a permanent EL teacher inside a school building for the whole day. In some cases, there is only one EL teacher for an entire large countywide district. In other cases, an EL teacher is contracted from other districts, particularly when one district has too few EL students to justify the full salary for an EL teacher. These itinerant EL teachers visit schools as often as possible but are not able to be a regular presence in the building. Thus, general education teachers, particularly in rural districts, may often have to provide most of the instruction for ELs with consultation from the EL specialist, when available. In order to have a greater impact on rural ELs in West Virginia and create more accessible instruction and assessment, it is imperative to provide increased support and training to all general educators. All teachers need to

know how to design accessible instruction to support the learning needs of all students in their classroom, including ELs. They also need to know how to ensure assessments appropriately differentiate between a student's content knowledge and their English proficiency using testing supports called accessibility features and accommodations.

6 Defining Accessible Instruction and Assessment for ELs

For many years, typical instructional practice was to leave ELs out of grade-level instruction and related assessments, in the belief that they did not have the English skills needed to be successful until they were fully proficient in English (Collier, 1987, 1995; Cummins, 1981; Mitchell et al., 1997) and “fully competitive” with their fluent-English speaking peers (Hakuta et al., 2000). This view of instruction resulted in ELs not having the opportunities to develop content knowledge they needed to demonstrate grade-level learning outcomes (Abedi & Herman, 2010), graduate from high school (Callahan, 2005), or to be successful on annual assessments administered for school accountability (Starratt, 2003).

Now thinking has changed. Current best practice is to include ELs in grade-level standards-based education and related standards-based assessments while providing them with the language supports they need to learn academic content and demonstrate their knowledge and skills on tests (Bunch, 2013; Slavit & Ernst-Slavit, 2007; Understanding Language Initiative, 2013). There may be some accessibility supports, such as universally designed instruction (see cast.org) with embedded EL instructional strategies, which can benefit all students in a classroom. For example, a teacher can design science instruction to allow all students to access key readings electronically or in hard copy, so that digital learning tools can be used if desired (e.g., embedded dictionaries, screen readers, etc.) or hard copy readings can be marked up with a highlighter, according to student preferences. As another example, all students can have the choice of a few ways to demonstrate learning on an assignment (e.g., make a two-minute video explaining the frog life cycle, draw a picture and label it, or write a paragraph). In addition, introductions to a new science unit can start with background building and oral partner discussions, so that all students have a chance to build key academic English vocabulary. These supports provide some high-level support for all students, including ELs. They also provide the opportunity for ELs to take advantage of flexibility in learning modes so they can draw on their strengths as learners. However, high-level supports are not enough to meet the needs of all students.

There are also individualized supports, based on level of language proficiency and background knowledge that can be offered to meet the needs of a specific EL. We call these supports *accessibility features and accommodations* (Larson et al., 2020) and they provide a student with greater access to grade-level content instruction. However, not all ELs have the same characteristics. Thus, each student requires an individualized approach. For instance, a beginning level EL might need a study guide in simple English to complement the math textbook and convey key concepts in easier language and might also require extra time on the state math assessment to allow the beginner to read and understand the problems. In addition, states typically provide at least some accessibility features and accommodations on state assessments. For example, a state may administer a computerized state math test where all students can have the math problems read aloud with the click of a button. This is an example of a testing accessibility feature. States may also offer accommodations such as native language dictionaries or glossaries for students identified as English learners.

Careful planning by teachers and parents working together can ensure that an EL receives consistent accessibility features and accommodations, across instruction and assessment, matched to the student's characteristics (e.g., degree of home language literacy, prior exposure to content in the native language, English proficiency level, etc.). When students have need-appropriate, scaffolded, and supported ways to learn the grade-level content and take assessments, we expect to see their academic progress increase. The use of accessibility features and accommodations matched to an individual student's characteristics, decided through educator and parent collaboration, and based on local standards and curricula, intersects with the notion of pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003b) because place matters in a school's linguistic resource to support EL students. In short, providing accessibility and accommodations to ELs starts with recognizing who the student is, what is important to the student and the family, and the language, human, and financial resources in the specific classroom, school, and community. In doing so, it incorporates the needs of rural educators and families. When planning accessibility features and accommodations, a team must consider the community resources that can be used to support her, such as accessibility of community members who speak the student's language.

To learn to engage in this type of collaborative decision-making that puts students and families at the center requires long-term, extensive coaching to ensure positive outcomes for ELs. Receiving this training should, ideally, start in teacher education programs, and continue, with consistent support and deeper learning through PD. PD of this type that is made available to rural teachers can provide a solid foundation for rural ELs to thrive. In West Virginia,

the Improving Instruction project has helped the state begin to research and develop tools to help train and support all general education teachers, including those in rural schools and districts, to better serve the EL population any class. To do that, the project developed on-demand PD for teachers, decision-making tools for teachers, and a multilingual, multi-format Parent Educator Toolkit to encourage collaboration and communication between parents and educators.

7 Description of Improving Instruction Project Activities and Materials

7.1 *Project Activities*

Over the course of the five-year grant project, the Improving Instruction project has engaged in a collaborative and iterative cycle of design, implementation, feedback, and revision to create three key products that are all a part of the online PD package, but that can also be used independently. These materials included online PD modules, EL accessibility decision-making form, and multilingual parent-educator toolkit and they are made for West Virginia general educators, including principals, and parents of ELs. In addition, the project created an innovative process for engaging local educators in an iterative process of piloting and revising the modules.

7.2 *Online PD Modules*

The project developed two online PD modules, one for elementary and another for secondary teachers, about providing individualized accessibility features and accommodations for ELs. The project decided to focus the teacher PD courses on e-learning modules that could be available to any teacher, on demand and at their convenience, regardless of their location. E-learning modules are content that is delivered asynchronously via the internet, whenever a teacher needs it. These modules generally involve some sort of interactive activities, audio, video, and text.

The Improving Instruction online modules take teachers through the steps of identifying the needs of ELs, finding instructional supports that match those needs, identifying assessment supports based on those needs, and ensuring alignment between instructional supports and assessments supports. In each section, the learner (i.e., the West Virginia teacher) is first told about the importance of the information, and then shown a video of teachers demonstrating the information. Lastly, the learner has a chance to put what they have learned into action via interactive scenarios.

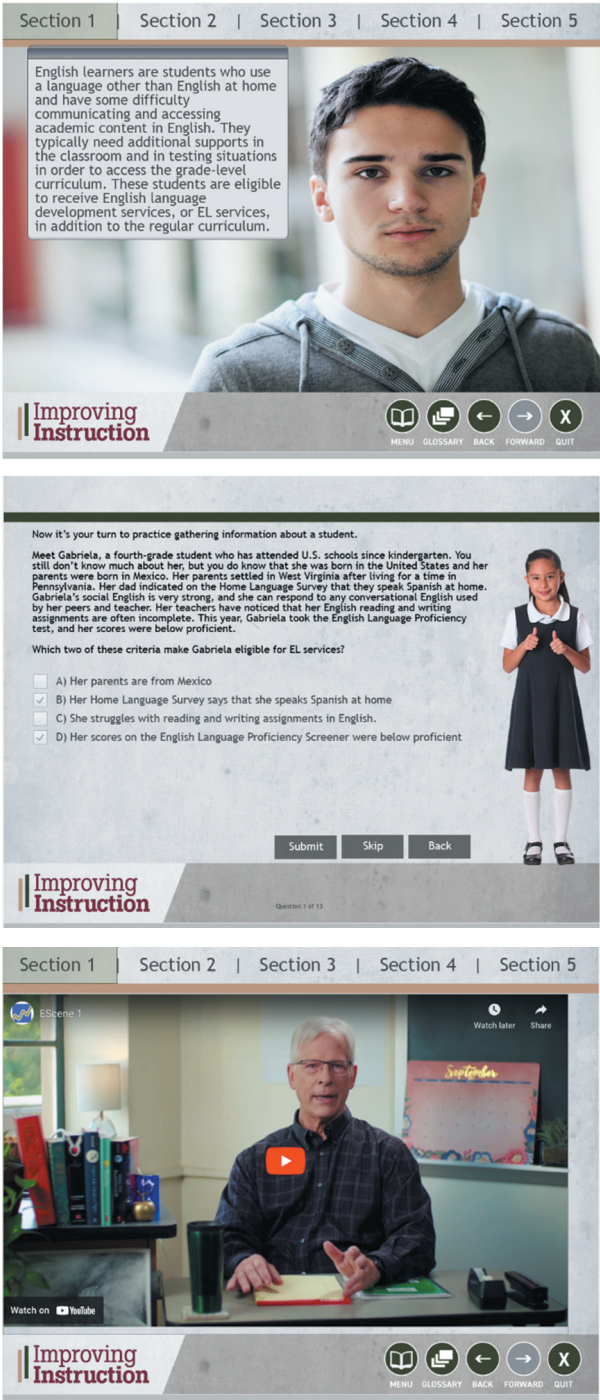


FIGURE 7.1 Snapshot of improving instruction modules

7.3 *EL Accessibility Decision-Making (D-M) Form*

The project developed an EL accessibility decision-making form template (“The EL Accessibility Plan”) that educators can adapt and use to track accessibility decisions for individual students in their buildings. Recording these decisions helps to facilitate collaborative conversations on what works and what does not work to support an individual student and ensures consistency across grade levels.³

Sections of the EL Accessibility Plan ask educators to have collaborative conversations with parents, the student, and with other educators who know the student. In this way, educators learn about the student’s educational history, as well as strengths and areas of needed support in the classroom and on tests. Other sources of data might include a review of test scores and classroom work. Based on what teachers learn, and a review of state assessment policies, teachers and parents can determine the types of accessibility features and accommodations that they think will benefit the student in class and on tests. They can also document what seems to be most and least effective for the student over time to make improvements in how individual student’s needs are being identified and addressed. This type of tool facilitates communication between educators who may not regularly be in the same building.

7.4 *Multilingual Multi-Format Parent-Educator Toolkit*

The Improving Instruction team also created a multilingual, multi-format Parent-Educator toolkit.⁴ This toolkit was distributed to parents through multiple avenues. Local parent centers were used as one avenue to distribute the toolkit. Local schools were also encouraged to provide a link to the toolkit to their parents. Finally, the website *Colorín Colorado*⁵ wrote an article about the toolkit, which contains a link to it. The goal of the Toolkit is to encourage team-based decision making about ways to create accessible instruction and assessment for ELs. The Toolkit is centered on the idea that parents and caregivers should be active partners with educators in making these decisions for their student because they understand their child the best. Knowing the child’s individual needs helps teachers and school leaders provide specific accessibility features and accommodations.

The process of collaborative decision-making entails effective communication between parents, teachers, and principals. To contribute to decision-making, parents need to not only understand the concept of accessible instruction and assessment, but also understand how to collaborate with educators. In turn, educators need to know how to work with parents of ELs. Thus, the Toolkit topics describe, with concrete examples, ways for parents and teachers (including principals) to communicate about a child’s learning, the use of

language interpreters, and accessibility features and accommodations. The Toolkit also describes ways for parents to reach out to the teachers using various media including emails, phone calls, and text messages. Interpreters and community liaisons may be needed to build trust and facilitate communication between the school and parents. As part of the Toolkit, educators can read pieces intended specifically for them, and share the Toolkit with families of ELs in their classroom, to enhance communication.

Just as instruction should be accessible for an EL even when the child is developing English proficiency, the Parent-Educator Toolkit was developed to help parents of ELs access information regardless of their fluency with English or their ability to read their home language by using different format and languages, so it. It is accessible by families who speak other languages. The Toolkit was developed in multiple formats, including both print and audio, and in six languages including Arabic, Chinese (both simplified and traditional characters), English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. Parents can read or listen to the Toolkit in the language they prefer, or bring it to a trusted community elder, relative, or friend to read and explain to them. Further, through this Toolkit, parents can also learn the skills and knowledge on how to communicate with teachers/school, in addition to requesting an interpreter, even though some materials were developed for teachers and principle.

While a tool to support parent involvement was always planned as a component of the project, the need for pieces on specific topics became evident during a pilot of the secondary module with West Virginia teachers (for more information, see sections on the Marshall University pilot course). For example, West Virginia teachers, particularly in rural areas, indicated they had difficulty finding language interpreters, which led to the creation of an educator piece on creative strategies for identifying language interpreters. Educators also indicated that they often used digital tools (e.g., SeeSaw app) to share student work with families, but those tools might not have led to sustained conversations with families about a child's academic support needs. As a result, the Toolkit also contains pieces promoting the importance of two-way communication about a child's learning.

7.5 *Innovative Pilot Process*

Improving Instruction developed an innovative pilot process for the secondary teacher PD module that allowed local educators to give substantial input into the content and materials as they were being developed. The pilot took place through Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia, a college where many teachers get credits for re-licensure. At the suggestion of WVDE staff, Improving Instruction developed a hybrid credit-bearing course (CISL 564 -132

Making and Implementing Accessibility and Accommodations Decisions for Instruction and Assessment for English Learners) that enrolled over 60 West Virginia teachers. Participants viewed the first version of the secondary module, read about best practices for making accessibility decisions, read case studies of a fictional teacher making decisions, practiced making decisions for an EL student, and participated in collaborative small-group discussions about their needs and challenges. They also tried out a draft of a customizable EL Accessibility Plan template to facilitate communication and coordination of accessible instruction and assessment across teachers, the student, and the family. In addition, a subset of the pilot teachers participated in a research study to develop quiz questions for the online PD module.

Out of the Marshall University pilot process, the project revised and updated the secondary PD materials and then added elementary PD materials. West Virginia educators asked for an expanded secondary PD module with a video component to visually illustrate key concepts that may have been unfamiliar. In response, the team developed video clips with actors representing teachers talking about planning individualized supports for ELs in their classroom and modeling the type of educator-parent collaboration the project aims to promote. Using the updated secondary module as a guide, the team created an elementary PD module with examples and illustrations appropriate for elementary school teachers and embedded video highlights illustrating elementary educators making accessibility decisions.

From the extensive feedback received from Marshall pilot participants, other educators, and additional feedback from parents relating to the multilingual Parent-Educator Toolkit, the Improving Instruction team created a final PD course, containing both modules, the multilingual Parent-Educator Toolkit, readings used during the Marshall University pilot, and the EL Accessibility Plan template. Improving Instruction rolled out the revised course in February 2020 through the WVDE PD portal, WV Learns.⁶ It is available for any West Virginia teacher to take, including rural educators, free of charge. It is also available on the Improving instruction website with free access⁷ for anyone.

8 Overcoming Project Challenges and Creating Success

Activities during two of the five years project years were conducted during a significantly changed educational landscape due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this section, we describe the challenges that arose, and the project's successes in responding to them in ways that were sensitive to this rural state's specific educational context.

8.1 *The Challenges*

The PD modules were released in February 2020 just prior to the COVID-19 outbreak. At that time, approximately 20 West Virginia educators took the modules. However, when the pandemic closed schools, distance learning became the norm. WVDE decided to prioritize emergency teaching and learning and to minimize requirements for teacher PD. Therefore, while the online courses and modules remain available to teachers, they have not been widely advertised. One of the biggest issues affecting the applicability of the modules was that the essential nature of instruction changed for West Virginia teachers. The premise of the modules was face-to-face classroom instruction. Videos in the modules highlighted scenarios of teachers talking with their colleagues between classes and over lunch, while collaborating to make accessibility decisions for students they knew well. Videos also discussed student support needs in the classroom and individualized ways of responding to those needs. With the onset of distance learning, few teachers interacted with each other or with students in person anymore. Instead, West Virginia schools delivered instruction in multiple ways. Each of these schooling methods had implications for the module content.

First, during the pandemic, there was a digital-learning-only option available for families who selected it. Students who chose this option left the “home” school they attended the previous year and were enrolled in an online school with different teachers. The bulk of the learning was done independently in students’ homes. For the 2020–21 school year, online-only teachers did not have opportunities to meet face-to-face with students and were not necessarily aware of how students interacted with instructional content outside of online sessions. Further, they may have met with students online as infrequently as once a week. Teachers and students did not necessarily have any prior interaction before online learning. Further, online-only students’ educational records stayed with the “home” school, giving teachers access to more limited information about their ELs’ learning characteristics than they might typically have had to support individualized decisions about accessible instruction.

For students who stayed in their “home” school and did not choose the online-only option, many schools implemented a combination of distance and in-person learning. Because of its rural geography, getting access to a computer and to broadband internet service was a significant challenge for 30 to 50% of West Virginia’s K-12 students during the pandemic (Maher, 2020). However, some districts were able to provide some instruction online. Online learning allowed for new forms of accessibility, while creating other accessibility challenges. For example, students could take advantage of embedded accessibility features and accommodations like audio-captioning, increased font size for

a vision issue, or the ability to replay an instructional video multiple times in order to better understand it. In addition, accessibility features like a thesaurus or dictionary may have been built into some online materials and available to any student. However, at the same time, teachers needing to switch to online emergency learning on short notice did not necessarily have the time to create or find materials with these features built in. They also may not have known how to use the features and how to help their EL students use them.

Other districts and schools, some of them rural, chose to create hard copy homework assignments and learning packets for students to complete at home. These districts typically did not have reliable internet access to provide online learning. ELs in these districts used whatever educational supports were available at home and returned work to school. They may have had little to no direct interaction with teachers. It is likely these students had few accessibility features or accommodations to support their learning.

In addition to challenges with the roll out and use of the PD modules, pandemic-related travel restrictions led to challenges in the creation of materials related to the Parent-Educator Toolkit. The goal of the Toolkit was to be relevant to the largely rural population of West Virginia educators and families. However, given the travel restrictions, school closures, and extreme stress on families of ELs during the pandemic, accessing families in West Virginia to better understand their needs and get valuable feedback become a complex task.

8.2 *Project Successes in Responding to Challenges*

The project experienced some important successes in responding to the challenges that arose. A key success is the way in which materials were built to solicit educator input during the iterative development process and to be responsive to local needs at multiple levels. For example, as previously described, the Marshall University module pilot course was taught by Improving Instruction team members. It provided participating teachers with a chance to experience instruction based on the goals laid out by the project while also fulfilling a PD requirement. The course also provided space for teachers to try out course concepts in their classroom, talk to each other and to course instructors about their areas of understanding, request more information, describe challenges experienced in the classroom, and obtain feedback on ways of creating accessibility for individual learners. Teachers could provide an update to the class via online chat. While the Improving Instruction staff engaged in these discussions with teachers they gained insight into the daily realities of teachers, particularly those in rural areas. They learned about places the online modules needed to be strengthened and clarified. They also learned about teachers' successes and challenges in communicating with parents and used this

to inform course development. This long-term interaction and relationship building with local teachers led to high quality materials in which they had direct input. Finally, one of the important successes is that this PD was built with a focus on identifying and supporting individual student learning needs in general, instead of focusing on a specific content area or a geographic area. As a result, the modules can be used by any content area teacher, at any grade level and at any state, who currently as EL students or anticipates that they will have EL students.

A second success is that, in addition to incorporating West Virginia educator feedback, the project was nimble and leveraged local resources in two states to meet objectives during a pandemic. For example, when COVID-19 closed West Virginia schools and prevented travel of the project staff to West Virginia to work with parents, staff pivoted to collaborate with parents, teachers, and principals in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area instead. Minnesota parents of ELs gave us input on topics to be highlighted in the Toolkit. During one-to-one interviews, we explained concepts relating to accessibility and accommodations to these parents. Next, we showed them drafts of products and asked for their feedback. In addition, groups of parents, staff from parent advocacy centers and staff from regional technical assistance centers serving ELs were asked to evaluate the Toolkit after completion and publication to ensure that it is high quality. Overall, reviewers agreed that the rich information and insights gained from collaboration with educators in West Virginia and parents and educators in Minnesota, has resulted in high quality materials that are useful and applicable in West Virginia and other states. Also, the Toolkit was created based on exploring the individual student needs, so the content is appropriate for and teachers and family of ELs.

A third success has been the strong collaborative relationship between WVDE and project staff at the University of Minnesota. Through monthly virtual meetings, there were frequent opportunities to discuss the larger educational context in West Virginia, the needs and priorities of the state, and existing avenues for enhancing the work of the project. This close contact resulted in four important outcomes:

1. WVDE staff proposed the pilot course at Marshall University based on their knowledge of places West Virginia teachers took PD coursework for credit. The Department advertised the course and helped to offset the course fees for teachers who completed it.
2. The online PD courses were built to include West Virginia assessment policy documents on accessibility features and accommodations for summative assessments. The Improving Instruction team, working with WVDE, updated the documents in real time when WVDE issued new

ones each year. Educators participating in either the module pilot or the actual use of the final modules had guaranteed access to up-to-date policy information.

3. Through discussions with WVDE partners, the Improving Instruction staff learned about the largest language groups of ELs in the state, which happen to mirror those of ELs nationally, and provided translations of parent materials in the Toolkit in those languages. The team also learned about a pocket of Japanese ELs whose families work at a Japanese automobile manufacturing plant. While these students do not represent one of the largest language groups in either the state or the country, the parents need an understanding of accessibility features and accommodations in language that is comprehensible to them. Future work is planned to translate existing parent materials in Japanese.
4. WVDE colleagues shared the challenges of providing emergency distance learning during the pandemic. The Improving Instruction team used the information to develop plans to bring the online module material to educators in a new format in the fall of 2021. It quickly became apparent that the existing PD materials would need to be augmented to apply concepts of accessibility and universal design for learning to distance learning situations that have continued into the 2021–22 school year and possibly beyond. As a result, future professional learning on accessible instruction and assessment will need to be applicable to teachers providing instruction through any type of format. In addition, to accommodate and support rural teachers, future learning will need to be brought more directly to them through technology. In this way, they can receive mentoring and support, on demand, to better meet the needs of specific ELs in the particular instructional context in which they work.

9 Implications for the Future

Enhancements were made to the existing PD materials in the summer of 2021 and a webinar series began just before school started, with a follow up session after the first month of school. The webinars highlighted selected module concepts and had an embedded coaching component. Educators, regardless of whether they teach virtually, in person, or through a distance-learning model with hard copy instructional materials, received support applying accessibility concepts to their specific teaching context and the specific students they teach in 2021–22. The timing of the series allowed teachers to create initial instructional plans and then revise them, with support from the PD development

team, as they tried out concepts in their classrooms. The webinar content was based on concepts from the online modules but was supplementary to ensure the continued relevance and use of the modules.

The series was co-planned with the WVDE staff and two West Virginia teacher leaders with expertise in working with ELs. The teacher leaders were trained to deliver the webinar series, and to adapt it to meet the needs of participating teachers, including those in rural schools and districts. The extensive involvement of both state education agency staff and local teacher leaders ensured that the content was relevant and applicable to the local context. Rural teachers who had limited access to an EL teacher had increased chances for mentoring and support from their colleagues statewide. State education agency staff had additional opportunities to engage with rural teachers and to hear their needs. Plans are underway to modify the webinar materials based on fall participant feedback, recruit and train an additional teacher leader, and deliver the Webinar again in the spring of 2022 with increased opportunities for individualized support for specific problems of practice teachers experience. This type of “train the trainer” structure will ensure that the state has the capacity to continue to adapt and deliver the training in the future when the grant project ends.

10 Conclusion

Gruenewald (2003a) said, “Our relationship with places has been obscured by an educational system that currently neglects them” (p. 621). The Improving Instruction project has attended to the way the work of West Virginia educators is shaped by the places in which they live and in which ELs go to school. Large school districts with few EL specialists and small pockets of sometimes isolated rural schools that enroll a few mobile ELs has led to the need for on-demand PD materials. West Virginia teachers need the ability to find some basic training when a student enroll in their classroom on short notice. Teachers requested that these PD materials show them visuals and video of what accessible instruction and assessment look like because West Virginia general educators may have limited training in EL instructional strategies. The EL accessibility plan form created by this project also provide general education teachers and EL teacher a way to start thinking about the appropriate accessibility and accommodations for ELs and documenting the decision-making process. The project responded by creating media-rich PD modules that any teacher, K-12, can take. In addition, in some large districts, the limited number of EL specialists and lack of language interpreters may make it difficult for

educators and parents to truly communicate about the educational progress of EL s. Thus, the project created a multilingual, multiformat Parent-Educator Toolkit to support increased direct communication between educators and families. In doing so, the project has provided a solid foundation for the West Virginia Department of Education and its teachers to build on in developing their skills related to working with rural EL s. It has also created a way to involve parents as key partners in the accessibility features and accommodations decision-making process.

The project has not overcome all of the challenges facing West Virginia EL s. School districts are still large, and there are still a small number of EL specialists. General education teachers require ongoing support and training to be effective teachers of EL s. Still, the Improving instruction project has addressed some challenges, and laid a foundation to move toward better outcomes for EL s in the future. Besides improving the teaching quality, WV is still facing some quantity issues. For example, teacher shortage. Also, the low salary for WV teachers makes the shortage even worse. Policy makers and state leaders should also address these issues to attract more young people to become educators.⁸

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Notes

- 1 <https://zoomwv.k12.wv.us>
- 2 See <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/>
- 3 To access the complete form, please go to EL Accessibility D-M Form at https://nceo.umn.edu/docs/OnlinePubs/II_EL_accessibility_form.docx
- 4 <https://nceo.info/About/projects/improving-instruction/parent-educator-toolkit>
- 5 <https://www.colorincolorado.org>

- 6 <https://wvlearns.k12.wv.us>
- 7 <https://nceo.info/About/projects/improving-instruction/home>
- 8 In addition to PD modules available in West Virginia, the modules and all related materials (EL Accessibility Plan, Parent-Educator Toolkit) are available to any state or district through the Improving Instruction website <https://nceo.info/About/projects/improving-instruction/parent-educator-toolkit>

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Conclusion

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We believe that what the chapters in *Educating Multilingual Learners in Rural Schools: Illuminating Diversity in Rural Communities in the United States* show is that rural educators can teach and support multilingual (ML) student learning and their families by learning about them, and that learning about ML students and their families can enable educators to become leaders in their communities. The chapters in this book demonstrate that education for teachers, leaders and staff, professional development programs, and government-funded projects aimed to improve rural education need to begin with three interrelated, multifaceted principles. The first principle is the need to *center place and rurality* as essential for all the educators, students, and families within a particular instructional context. Second, educators must *humanize multilingual students, their families, and their cultures* in ways that go beyond merely acknowledging their presence but that goes further—to deeply seeing and understanding the lives and (hi)stories of students and families in schools and communities. Finally, the third principle involves *identifying multilingual resources for ML students and their families*. Given the persistent inequities in access to resources and opportunities that rural ML students and families face, this last principle requires careful planning, networking, and advocating in ways that can truly effectuate change.

As we conceptualized this first edited book on rural ML students, we aimed to set a footprint into the field that would begin to build a strong research base that others could follow. Research has a pivotal role to play as scholars move their work into action and advocacy (Machado Casas et al., 2015). Having conducted reviews of research that examined this population in the past (Coady et al., 2019; Coady, 2020; Golombek et al., 2022; Marichal, 2021), at the intersection of rurality and multilingual students, we knew the research base would appear scant. This is not because studies have not been conducted in rural communities on or with ML students, families, and educators; rather, the research often loosely describes a community as rural or provides demographic data on MLs, community density, and industry base. We realized that in those studies, rurality was relegated to a simple description of place, ranging from a sentence to a page or two within a study; it remained a methodological side note rather than taking up its position in a conceptual framework or as a central focus

of the study. In most cases, the word rural or rurality does not enter into keywords that authors assign to their work. Thus, identifying research on rural ML students remains obscure and, in a perverse way, even novel. In contrast, when place takes up its central role in scholarship, our work as scholars and advocates becomes much clearer and direct. That is to say, place shapes equity issues in important and nuanced ways that is essential to unpack in order to challenge systemic inequities in education.

We were not quite sure how scholars in the field would respond to our call for chapters. We had a few initial spontaneous responses from scholars to publish their research, but not enough for an edited volume. We then sought out and invited scholars directly to submit chapters for the book. Several told us that the timing of the COVID pandemic would preclude them from submitting a robust chapter. Educators worldwide were facing ongoing burnout, and personal and professional challenges. As authors submitted their draft chapters to us, we found that meeting with authors to talk about place added an additional dimension and a richer understanding of their work and contribution to the book. We encouraged authors to describe their communities—details such as the amount of time it took to drive to schools, the various signs and people that they encountered in rural spaces, and thick description of the landscape and industries nearby—and then to write what they told us. This added tremendous depth and nuance that helped (us) to see their communities with increasing clarity. An important take-away was the underscoring diversity that exists in rural communities and the diversity that *is* rural communities in the United States. We, then, hope that this book illuminates diversity in ways that leads to clearer understandings and stronger pathways to advocacy for equity in education.

1 For Educators

1.1 *Foreground the Centrality of Place*

What the chapters in this book have demonstrated is the diversity and complexity of rural places across the United States due to an interplay of factors, including geographic, demographic, economics, historical, raciolinguistic, and sociocultural. Though we might conjure up an image of a rural place as having open spaces with a nominal and widely dispersed population some specified distance from an urban/suburban area, that image becomes problematized as the characteristics of individual places are illuminated. For example, geography, demographics, and history shape the proverbial one-room schoolhouse in the vast Frontier State of Montana (Chapter 6) and differs greatly from the

West Virginia county that includes the urban school districts of Morgantown and the pockets of rural districts scattered nearby (Chapter 7). Economic factors, such as natural resources and the consolidation of livestock producers and packers into a few corporations, shape places in profound ways where and why multilingual students' families move to rural areas. Workers are needed for the often harsh working conditions in rural industries, for example, pine baling and agricultural work in north central Florida (Chapters 2 and 3) and the meat-packing plants in Athens, Nebraska (Chapter 4). Raciolinguistics shapes the identification of "English learners," such as the historical legacy of American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) students being separated from their families and placed in boarding schools (Chapter 6) and 'major-minority' districts of Latinx and Spanish speaking populations in a Nebraska town whose educators are overwhelmingly white (Chapter 4).

What these chapters collectively suggest is that we need to foreground the centrality of place with our educators in teacher education programs and in teacher professional development programs. Teachers should explore what place means to them in terms of the place(s) from which they come and have been shaped, the place in which they work, and the place(s) from which their students and their families have come and been shaped. We recall the first meeting of an undergraduate level education course (Foundations of Language and Culture) several years ago and asking for a show of hands of how many students came from rural communities. Not surprising was that 1/3rd of the students in the room shot up a hand. What *was* surprising, however, was the fact that despite that number of students representing rural communities, rurality—or "place" for that matter—had never been made central to the teacher education program. Just as we ask rural educators to center their instruction on students' experiences and lean into their strengths and knowledges, so should we in our teacher preparation programs. Scholars in this book offer examples and insights into how place connects educators and how stronger connections can benefit schools and communities (Chapters 2 and 5).

1.2 *Humanize Rural ML Education*

These chapters demonstrate that a fundamental change needs to be made in terms of how educators work with ML students and their families. This change begins with humanizing ML students and their families. Emphasizing strategies for working with MLs without understanding ML students' abilities, resources, backgrounds, goals, and desires deskills teachers and essentializes MLs, resulting in a 'one size fits all' approach. Rather than focusing on strategies to work with ML students, teacher education programs and professional development programs need to focus initially on how teachers can build

bidirectional teacher-student relationships. In this way, teachers can build the trust and sense of caring that is necessary to support ML students and their families.

Humanizing ML students and their families in rural spaces means that educators need to build relational knowledge of and with ML students and their families. This relational knowledge is informed by place, so exploring what place means for students is part of humanizing ML s. We have evidence of how crucial it is for teachers to build relationships with their ML s students to support their cognitive, emotional, and cultural needs and goals (Chapters 2, 3, and 6). Furthermore, teachers need to share who they are with ML students and their families as this mutuality helps to build trust and strengthen relationships (Chapter 2). We must recognize the central role that paraprofessionals play in supporting ML s, especially as they often have personal, cultural experience from which to build their relationships with ML s, which can also support teachers (Chapters 4 and 5). Family involvement is also important in developing relational knowledge, and this may require educators to guide families as to how they can participate in and support their children's education (Chapter 7).

1.3 *Identify the ML Resources in Rural Communities*

What these chapters have also shown is that, given the challenges that under-resourced school districts face in rural areas, educators must identify and integrate available local resources to support ML s and their families. Locally, this begins with paraprofessionals—often devalued in schools because of their lack of educational credentials, what may be perceived as deficit English proficiency, and unaddressed racial prejudices. Yet, several chapters show how paraprofessionals serve as bridges between teachers and ML students and could be appropriately integrated and appreciated for the cultural and language resources they embody (Chapters 4 and 5).

At the same time, multilinguals teachers, such as Spanish teachers, embody the same cultural and language resources to support ML students in rural school districts. Spanish teachers, as well as paraprofessionals, can mediate as translators when disseminating important information about ML students' educational expectations and opportunities through communication in Spanish, such as written memos home, college information nights, and school marquees (Chapter 2). Though there are often local resources in schools for Spanish speaking ML s, this becomes challenging when ML students speak languages for which there are no speakers in the school district. Focused efforts can be undertaken to provide resources for parents in multiple languages on websites (Chapter 7).

Irrespective of place, all educators have a federal obligation to provide information to parents in languages that they understand, wherever possible. This is essential in key educational areas such as parent/caregiver notices for meetings on ELL services, special educational services, individual education plans (IEPs), and assessment practices for special needs. Rural schools also face limited access to education specialists, including bilingual school psychologists and personnel, and technologies and materials that their more sub/urban counterparts have readily available.

The persistent and systemic inequities that rural schools and districts face, when school funding is based on revenues derived from local property taxes, further penalize rural ML students and families (NREA, 2022). The chapters in this book begin to examine, with a fine-tuned lens, the complex spaces that educators face in their work teaching, learning, and leading on behalf of their ML students.

2 Advancing a Research Agenda

2.1 *The National Rural Education Association (NREA)*

In 2016, the National Rural Education Association (NREA), the largest U.S.-based organization to support and promote education in rural schools and communities, disseminated its 5-year research agenda, through 2022. They noted that “[e]quity of educational opportunity lies at the heart of our mission as an organization and serves as a guiding principle for our research agenda” (NREA, 2022, n.p.). The 2016 Agenda identified ten research priorities, including several that directly pertain to linguistic diversity in rural schools and communities. Those included: building capacity to meet the needs of diverse and special populations; closing student achievement gaps in rural schools; and rural school and community/family relations. Others address technology gaps, college and career readiness, and teacher/leader preparation for rural schools.

Since 2016, scholars have been working with the NREA and have refined those priorities and retained equity as a key component. In a recent statement on the 2022 NREA Research Agenda, they stated, “the updated NREA research agenda highlights the strengths of rural people and places while also recognizing inequities that perpetuate harmful rural stereotypes and create barriers in accessing educational opportunities.” Utilizing a grounded theory approach, scholars surveyed the NREA membership, and conducted semi-structured and focus group interviews. Data were open-coded and were further coded using a priori codes from the 2016–22 NREA research agenda. Scholars identified five interconnected themes that were centered on issues of ‘spatial and educational

equity' (NREA, 2022, n.p.). Centering equity involved identifying diverse identities located within rural communities and how place affects equitable access to resources and opportunities. The five themes identified included: policy and funding; teacher/leader recruitment, retention, and preparation; college and career trajectory; community partnerships and relationships; and health and wellness.

We recognize the need for scholars to explore each of these research areas and we underscore the call for intersectionality in research, particularly surrounding diverse perspectives, and the multiple "issues affecting rural schools, school systems, communities and places" (n.p.). To that end, on the basis of the work identified in this volume, we propose adjacent and synergistic research areas, and refined research questions, that expand upon the NREA's bold research agenda. We have learned in this volume that educators of ML students hold varied positions of power within rural communities, such as linguistic power among bilingual paraeducators and insider community knowledges among teachers. How powers are (re)appropriated and (re)enacted among educators of rural ML students longitudinally, in collaboration with demographic shifts, and in and as a result of educator professional development is left to be explored. In other words, as we learn more about valuing languages, orienting languages as resources (Ruiz, 1984), and the linguistic capital of ML students and families (Yosso, 2005), we need more dynamic frameworks and lenses that capture shifts in power that result from critical reflection and changing ideologies (Golombek et al., 2022). The context and conditions under which these changes occur, that is, across diverse rural locales, is of great interest. We also wonder what changes occur at the classroom, school, and community levels when a significant number of educators engage in PD that leads to changes from deficit ideologies.

A second synergistic area includes examining the relationship between linguistically- and culturally-relevant family engagement, student learning, and ML students' sense of belonging, which we believe supports their college and career readiness. We know from multiple meta analyses and case studies that a family's engagement in their child's learning has a strong, positive effect on student learning outcomes (Jeynes, 2003). Yet family engagement, according to scholars, is not predicated upon parent or caregiver presence in the classroom or on student field trips; rather, family home conversations surrounding the importance of education and how their child is participating and experiencing education seems more impactful on child learning. For multilingual families, who frequently feel that their English language abilities are a barrier to participation and engagement in their child's education (Coady et al., 2015), this is critically important news. Family engagement and support programs that tap

into the strong familial capital of MLs in rural communities could be explored through research and examined for its impact on ML students' sense of belonging, and desire to stay in school and attend college. In other words, we suggest that there are features and outcomes from ML family engagement, when linguistically and culturally responsive and predicated upon family strengths, that could align to ML students' well being. Those features need unraveling.

A third area aligned to the new NREA Research Agenda involves the need for educator (teacher, leader, paraeducator, counselor and other support staff) specialized preparation for ML students in rural schools. Herein we acknowledge the tremendous resource of support staff (bilingual paraeducators, counselors, literacy coaches, etc.) for ML students. In our research (Coady et al., forthcoming) we identified a holistic model of PD that includes teachers, leaders and support staff working together in democratic and equitable ways for ML students. After more than 25 years of teacher preparation and inservice education, we recognize the limitations of working only with classroom teachers, when what is needed in rural schools and communities for ML students is a system-wide approach to ML student learning and equity work. We remain deeply concerned for rural communities that lack ESL/ESOL specialists, or whose specialists have limited time (as in a traveling ESL teacher) with ML students to support students' language learning. Our observations when visiting "mainstream, inclusive" classrooms is that they resemble pre-1974 *Lau v. Nichols* guidelines. In that seminal legal case, the courts ruled that Limited English Proficient (here ML) students must have equitable access to the curriculum. Essentially, 'doing nothing different' for ML students to assist them accessing the curriculum violates their educational rights. We recognize that rural schools and communities face deep inequities in funding that preclude them from hiring or preparing a sufficient number of specialists for ML students. In other words, even though federal guidelines require effective programs for ML students (Castañeda v. Pickard, 1982), inequities in rural school funding is a major barrier to implementing those programs. Examining this issue more systematically could build into the NREA's updated agenda by illuminating how inequities in funding based on local property taxes actually violate (other) federal laws.

We remain optimistic. Over the past 10 years, national organizations have worked tirelessly to illuminate the work of rural educators. For instance, the NREA has led programs such as "I am a Rural Teacher" (IAART) campaign that highlights the work of rural educators across the United States; initiated podcasts on rural education; worked with federal agencies and politicians to address funding issues for schools and for scholars working in rural communities and who face diseconomies of scale when subpopulations, such as

ML students, are low density and under-examined. Organizations such as the U.S. Council of Chief State School Officers and the Spencer Foundation have reached out to fund and explore rural education for ML students.

Digital resources that include reading lists, book review podcasts and videos are now available for teachers, scholars, writers, and readers to explore and reflect on how their relationship with a place and the place itself shapes and is shaped by its “peopled history” (Greenwood, 2019, p. 366).

Greenwood reminds us that as place conscious educators we must “support our own ontological-becoming-in relationship with ourselves, each other, the land, and the cosmos itself” (p. 369). In other words, we can humanize our work with ML students and families by becoming “more deeply reflective about [our] own ontological experience, and not merely better at teaching techniques” (p. 363). In the same vein, Corbett (2010) stresses the need for educators

to know a great deal about where you are teaching and the conditions experienced by people in that place. This involves an immersion in the culture of the place, its history, the way power is exercised there, how resources are distributed, the racial, gender and class dynamics that shape social life, the way school has been experienced historically in the community by different kinds of families. (p. 83)

Ultimately, we all must recognize that “no place is ever just one place” (Greenwood, 2019, p. 368) because when ML students are “in a place,” they are “also somewhere else” as “distant places can be just psychically present and emotionally real to us as the physical places we move in and through” (p. 369).

There remains much to do. Our hope is that the work and scholarship highlighted in this book will advance further research, and spark interest, excitement, and refined methodologies that continue to build our collective knowledge of rural ML students.

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Authors' Positionalities

Jioanna Carjuzaa

My name is Jioanna Carjuzaa. I earned a Ph.D. in Multicultural, Social and Bilingual Foundations of Education from the University of Colorado-Boulder. I have thirty-four+ years teaching experience in higher education as a multicultural teacher educator, diversity trainer, and English for Academic Purposes instructor. While I am well versed in the many aspects of multiculturalism, linguistic diversity is my passion. In addition to English and my heritage Greek, I have mastered numerous languages. I have lived, studied, worked, traveled, and taught in rural communities around the globe and I have hosted over 350 Fulbright and other international scholars who have come to study in the U.S., many of whom come from impoverished, low population density areas.

At Montana State University (MSU) I am a Professor and serve as the Executive Director of the Center for Bilingual and Multicultural Education (CBME). Under my leadership, the CBME generates multiple funding streams focusing on the following program areas: the revitalization and maintenance of Indigenous languages, the facilitation of culturally responsive pedagogy in K-12 schools including the integration of Indian Education for All (IEFA) across the curriculum in all content areas and at all levels, academic support for American Indian English Language Learners, and professional development for Class 7 Indigenous language and culture teachers as well as a variety of other projects designed to promote social justice by increasing cultural sensitivity. Through these projects, I have had the opportunity to work extensively in Indian country and I have cultivated relationality in our unique context. In this *frontier* state I traverse the 147,000 square miles within our boundaries to serve the educators and students in the 826 public schools which comprise the 403 school districts in Montana, two-thirds, of which are small rural districts with fewer than 100 students. I collaborate with many state and tribal organizations to support the academic success of our Native and other students. I am proud to say that I have taken my commitments and responsibilities seriously and have been able to build meaningful relationships throughout Indian country.

I served as the Principal Investigator for the Montana Teachers of English Language Learners (MontTELLs) grant project and designed a model which includes a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLDE) graduate certificate that blends IEFA, Indigenous language preservation efforts, and English academic literacy skills. As a committed ally, I am grateful to serve tribal community members and provide culturally responsive professional development opportunities for teachers of American Indian and other ELLs. I am the lead

author of *Teaching in the Middle and Secondary Schools*, Pearson's leading methodology textbook which is now in its 11th edition. I was the recipient of the 2013 G. Pritchey Smith Multicultural Educator of the Year Award. I was honored at the 2016 AIC MSU 41st Powwow and was also awarded the 2014–2016 Distinguished Professorship Award by the College of Education, Health and Human Development at MSU. Recently, I was also honored to be the recipient of the Montana Indian Education Association's 2018 Special Recognition Award.

Maria R. Coady

I grew up in small town New Hampshire, a short drive away from the immigrant communities working in the urban textile mills in Lawrence, Massachusetts, but far enough to make the journey there feel like descending onto a completely new planet. My family consisted of my single mother and three siblings, me being the third (read, hand-me-downs) following my brother and sister. In the 1970s, my "number" was an awkward "3," which represented the number of tickets I had to request to attend all school events: one for my mother, and one each for my grandmother and grandfather. They were first-generation immigrants to the US and placed heavy value on family and supporting each other. We had Sunday dinners on tables that extended out into the apartment hallway, but everyone sat at the same table. My mother, who wanted to be an English teacher, was forbidden to attend college. I recall one day asking her how to spell a word that I needed for a school paper I was writing. Her response was, "there's the dictionary." She would have been a darn-tough English teacher. It was this confluence of small-town New Hampshire; immigrant-background, single mother, low-income family; first generation college student; and puritan work ethic that shaped my educational experiences. I knew that education mattered. My mother talked about its importance extensively and made sure that all four of us knew that not going to college was *not* an option. These experiences instilled in me the need to work with others who, like me, might painstakingly stumble over the invisible rules of navigating a complex social system.

I obtained my doctorate degree in Bilingual and Multicultural Education from the University of Colorado, Boulder, in 2001 as a US Department of Education Title VII Fellow. About the time I graduated, the federal government was scrapping Title VII and the 1968 Bilingual Education Act and my colleagues and I debated the likelihood of getting jobs in our field. Twenty years later, bilingualism and biliteracy remain heated topics, but the revivalist bilingual education movement (with dual language immersion programs) is strong, if not hesitant of neoliberal forces and white monolingual families. At the same time, I continue to experience the "research deserts" (Thier et al., 2021, p. 12)

that is rural education for multilingual learners. As the Goodnight Professor of Educational Equity at North Carolina State University, my work prepares educators (teachers, leaders, counselors, and staff) for ML students and families in rural, and often forgotten and overlooked, locales. I consult with the US Department of Justice and Office of Civil Rights and have received grant funding to support my work in rural ML education. My work extends internationally as a U.S. Fulbright Scholar and Specialist and in the preparation of educators for ML students.

Thier, M., Longhurst, J. M., Grant, P. D., & Hocking, J. E. (2021). Research deserts: A systematic mapping review of U.S. rural education definitions and geographies. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 37(2), 1–24. <https://jrre.psu.edu/sites/default/files/2021-02/37-2.pdf>

Paula Golombek

As a Clinical Professor in the Department of Linguistics at UF, I created and have worked in the Undergraduate Teaching English as a Second Language Program since 2009 after 15 years teaching in the MATESL program at Penn State. Teaching English to multilingual students and later teaching teachers of English learners was my professional center. I found my first experience teaching English to refugees when I was 18, unqualified but enthusiastic, at the International Institute in Buffalo. Since then, I taught English to adults and have had a long professional history working with English teachers in the U.S, Mexico, and Colombia. This professional continuity was upended in the fall of 2016. I felt an urgent need to do **something** in response to the dehumanizing discourse concerning immigrants of color, as well Immigration and Custom Enforcement's intensified execution of immigration policies concerning Latinx persons in our locale. That something was reaching out to Maria Coady to volunteer with Project STELLAR, a professional development program for educators in the rural school district in a neighboring county. Suddenly, I immersed myself in this rural school district as a seemingly novice professional while reexperiencing my sociohistorical roots as a grandchild of Polish peasants who spoke no English upon arriving in the U.S. My grandfather's internal passport from the Russian partition of Poland did not have his name but that of the farm owner for whom he worked! I felt those migrant worker roots through my grandmother, mother, and aunts who lived at a farm in the summer picking strawberries when my grandfather broke both arms crossing Lake Shore Drive as he left Bethlehem Steel. I felt a heightened sense of empathy as my initial experiences with Project STELLAR, with Maria and Nidza, required my being a learner: learning about this place and these educators, this rural school district neighboring our county, through weekly meetings; planning the kickoff for the

educators with our team members; modifying parts of the Danielson rubric to include a language focus; and observing teachers. I learned more intimately about the Latinx community when I taught the PD course *Meeting the Educational Needs of Children Living in Poverty* and taught weekly English classes to parents of students in the district. Learning about and working in this place, as well as developing relationships with STELLAR team members, the educators in the district, and Latinx families—all have sparked my commitment to bring multilingual learners and their families in rural contexts into educational.

Shuzhan Li

I am an Assistant Professor in the Department of Education at Ithaca College in Ithaca, NY. I completed my doctoral dissertation at a rural school district in southeastern U.S. and my chapter in this book is based on my dissertation work. Reflecting on my relationship with rurality, I cannot help but think about my position as an insider sometimes and as an outsider most other times.

I grew up in a small town in northwestern China, a small town that is not exactly rural because it is the site of a large heavy equipment manufacturing plant. The plant was established during the Third Front in the 1960s when many industries moved inland to remote areas after the China-Soviet split. My father worked in the plant while all my family members resided in surrounding rural areas. Every year, my father brought me to family members' farms to help with wheat harvesting. With almost all workers in my father's plant coming from all over the country, the lingua franca on the plant was Mandarin Chinese, which became my only language. As a result, every summer, when I went to the wheat harvesting, I was this withdrawn child that did not speak the dialect of my family members. I remember feeling awkward, distanced, yet welcomed by family members as if I came from afar.

One of the most distinct memories of living and working in family farms was the flea bites. Miserable me at 9 years old got over 200 flea bites one summer. Everyone in the family joked that fleas liked me because I was new to them. I had fun, too. It was an adventure to ride in tractors and trucks that slid on muddy unpaved country roads after the rain. Every grandpa carried a tobacco pouch, the smell of which, together with the wrinkles on their faces and the slippery tones of their dialect, forms heartwarming memories of my ties with rural.

Coming halfway across the globe to do research in a small rural town in the Southern U.S. positioned me as a complete outsider during the process. However, the time spent with multilingual families in the town, the relationships that were cultivated with teachers, and the stories that teachers shared with me allowed me to gain deep insights into the lived experiences of teachers

and community members. Being an outsider to the rural community which I wished to teach and research, I started to have a keen eye with which I learned about the rich experiences, expertise, and cultural meanings in the community.

At Ithaca College, I continue my adventures into rural schools and communities with this keen eye. I was welcomed by teachers and administrators of a one-building school district that serves over 50 multilingual learners. Many of the multilingual learners and their families work on dairy farms. Again, I am slowly building relationships that allow me to learn about the experiences, cultural assets, and needs in the school and community.

Kristin Kline Liu

I am the Assistant Director of the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) where I specialize in the inclusion of English learners (ELs) and ELs with disabilities in assessments and instruction. My passion is ensuring that these students are well-served by schools, feel a sense of belonging, and their languages and cultures are honored. This passion developed through a variety of intercultural experiences that have given me a strong tie to particular rural places. My great grandparents emigrated from Norway and bought farmland in Western Minnesota in the late 1800s. That farm has stayed in the family for four generations. My mother was born there and spoke no English at home until she started school. She would have qualified as an English learner today. My big extended family—whose rural homes were near each other—taught me about the culture, food, art, music, and traditional clothing of northern Norway. For those in my generation, “the farm” is the home we come back to in our memories even if we live far away. A bench in my house is made with the boards of my grandfather’s cattle barn. It is a constant reminder of the people and place that helped me understand my heritage and developed my wish to see the way others lived. This wish led me to study in Indonesia as a teenager. The multicultural city I lived in was a mix of ancient Hindu temples, Muslim mosques, Chinese neighborhoods, and a Javanese royal palace. My classmates spoke Indonesian, Arabic, and Javanese at school. I was a language learner trying to catch up to my peers in three languages. For holidays my host families brought me to the rural villages in which they were born. Decades later, I remember those big family gatherings for Ramadan that rivaled my own family celebrations in size and in love. Indonesia is the place that sparked my interest in teaching language and culture. Likewise, I have grown to love the rich multicultural and multilingual heritage of my husband’s home in Taiwan. When I travel there now I hear a mixture of Mandarin, Taiwanese and Hakka languages although many families were strictly encouraged to speak only Mandarin when my husband was in school. I have learned a little Mandarin during the pandemic and

am anxious to practice on our next trip. We often stay in the Buddhist temple in the mountains or at my mother-in-law's house in the family tea fields just outside the village where she grew up. There is a peacefulness and beauty in rural Taiwan that is hard to find in the bustling, big cities. My experiences in each of these three places drew me to teach English in adult basic education classes, even though my teaching degree was in elementary education. Many of my refugee and immigrant students experienced some type of disability, which challenged me to learn how to be a better teacher. Eventually, I went back to school for my master's and doctorate degrees in language teaching.

Nidza V. Marichal

Reflecting on my own intersectionality and positionality as a White Hispanic teacher from Puerto Rico living in the diaspora, and as an English Learner (EL) myself, I know that place matters in the context of education. I also recognize that my cultural and bilingual experiences have influenced my research agenda and my work with rural EL teachers. Thus, my personal, educational, and professional experiences as a Puerto Rican in the United States have shaped my work with ELs in a rural community.

I am a postdoctoral research associate at the University of Florida, disseminating research in the context of Latinx/English Learners education and supporting rural educators in their work with Latinx students and families. I have served as co-principal investigator of a five-year professional development grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Project STELLAR (Supporting Teachers and Educators of English Language Learners Across Rural Settings), providing high quality, place-based professional development to teachers and educational leaders of ELs in rural north Florida. While working on my doctoral degree at the University of Florida, I had the opportunity to work as program coordinator of the Project. As such, I provided onsite professional development and support to rural secondary teachers and educators of ELs in the same rural school community. The opportunity to be part of Project STELLAR ignited and transformed my research agenda creating a pathway that led me to rural education. Working with secondary teachers in rural Florida allowed me to understand both the impact of rurality on the education of ELs and the process of designing place-based instruction that meets the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. I also learned the importance for educators to establish and build authentic relationships with their EL students to best identify their needs taking into consideration the strengths and challenges of place. Since then, it has been my goal to advance understandings of rural EL education and to illuminate rural educators' knowledges about their struggles in implementing ESOL instruction in rural school communities. My

dissertation research *Teacher Knowledge and Secondary English Learners in a Rural Community*, the 2021 first place winner of the American Educational Research Association's (AERA) Rural Education SIG outstanding dissertation award, examined secondary teacher knowledge related to the teaching and learning of Latinx students in a rural community. This work adds to the limited literature on the intersection of rural secondary teachers and Latinx students and elevates awareness of the diversity and complexity of rural communities.

Prior to my research career, I spent 20 years teaching Spanish Language and Culture at the K-12 level. Through this experience, I learned that being authentic while building trusting relationships with students is central to advance and humanize the educational experience. Born and raised in Puerto Rico, I received a BS from Yale University, and MA and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Florida. My work today continues to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion for Hispanic/Latinx students in the United States.

Charity Funfe Tatah Mentan

I am a Research Associate with the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO). I am a multilingual expert and community-engaged scholar. My work with English learners (ELs) began when I graduated from high school in my home county, Cameroon, in a semi-rural area. I taught English to French speakers for one year. I also learned French because I attended the university in a French-speaking zone. Courses were taught both in English and French. My knowledge of French became relevant by the time I completed my law degree as a multilingual. I could speak and write in English and French; speak my first language and Pidgin. I served as a government attorney in charge of agriculture. I interacted with farmers to resolve conflicts around farmer grazer issues, and engaged in early warning principles for sustainable farming. My heart has always been to serve the underprivileged. I earned a Master's degree in law Philosophy of laws and legal perspective from the University of Yaoundé in Cameroon. I was awarded the Humphrey Fulbright Fellowship to study international human rights law at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs in Minneapolis, Minnesota. While studying international human rights law, I noticed that most immigrants were facing challenges adjusting to the American system, where English language proficiency is needed to thrive. I engaged in volunteering in adult basic education at the Minnesota Literacy Council. I assisted ELs in reading/writing in English. I earned three master's degrees: a Master of Public Affairs, a Master's in Comparative International Education, and a Master's in Education. I also earned my Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction, with an emphasis in Culture and Teaching. I used my interdisciplinary background to reflect and research the concerns of parents of English

learners and how the school system can acquire/access resources for teachers and school professionals and better serve English learners who are bilingual. It is in this light that I initiated the idea of a parent educator toolkit to provide resources to schools and parents of English learners to partner with parents of ELs and meet the needs of ELs with and without disabilities for educational outcomes. Our primary audience is the schools in rural West Virginia, where some parents of ELs reside. The benefit of this resource is that it can build successful communication between parents and schools. It can also help educators understand the home culture and the individual needs of ELs. This toolkit is being utilized by various stakeholders including, rural and multilingual organizations. Colorin Colorado has published this toolkit on its website, and it is getting a lot of views. I have presented at conferences on how to engage parents of (ELs) with or without disabilities. I am currently researching how to engage parents who are culturally and linguistically diverse and culturally responsive in teaching. I received an award in educational leadership in the immigrant community in Minnesota. I have been serving the underserved immigrant population in the Africa Network for Development Inc., a non-profit organization I initiated in 2005.

Kym O'Donnell

I was born and raised in a suburb of St. Paul, MN. My paternal grandparents were raised on farms and only ventured to the city in search of work during the depression. They found themselves welcomed into the diverse immigrant area of the West side of St. Paul. Although they left the farm, the farm never left them. Despite growing up in a suburban area, going back to "the farm" for family gatherings and reunions was a staple of my summers growing up. Like many during the depression and dust bowl, my mother's parents had fled to California to find work in the thriving agricultural fields. My mom and her siblings were born in towns up and down the west coast as the family moved with the crops. I grew up hearing her memories of the strawberry fields. When they finally arrived in St. Paul, they were welcomed into the multicultural community on the East side.

I worked for twenty years as an English learner teacher in suburban school districts of St. Paul, Minnesota. During this time I was able to work with students and families of many newly arrived immigrants to the area. In addition to teaching, I coordinated an English learner program as well as participated in the Minnesota Department of Education committees to establish English learner program entrance and exiting procedures. Furthermore, I have had the opportunity to be a part of the Improving Instruction of English Learners Through Accessibility Decision Making project while working towards a Ph.D.

in Second Language Education at the University of Minnesota. Through my role on the project, I have been able to create and facilitate a series of webinars that provided West Virginia educators with professional development in the area of English learner teaching strategies. I have been directly involved in training West Virginia teacher leaders to continue to provide these webinars in the future. Currently, I am working as a secondary English teacher in the state of Florida. St. John's County, a district in northern FL, has 52 schools with a total student body of 44,550 students. There are some rural schools and a small but growing population of ELs. There are roughly 750 identified ELs and three licensed EL teachers to support them across the district. My job is providing me with first-hand experience in teaching English learners in rural school districts.

Stephanie Oudghiri

I am a Clinical Assistant Professor of Curriculum Studies in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Purdue University. The over-arching concentration of my work is on social justice and practices that contribute to enacting ethics of care for Latinx immigrant and minoritized students in rural communities. My research focuses on increasing pre-service teachers' level of cultural confidence and deepening their level of understanding of their students' customs and beliefs, which contributes to a culturally enriched classroom environment to increase quality instruction and students' capacity to learn. As a teacher educator, I offer a community-based course to first-year, pre-service teachers. The primary purpose of this course is to engage students within community partner organizations that serve our local populations and to reflect on how working in these sites helps to develop competence in culturally responsive teaching and learning practices. My work in this course is also centered on creating and sustaining rich, mutually beneficial relationships with parents, community members, and the community that the school serves and supports.

My passion for education and community work stems from my parents. Born and raised in Indiana, my parents encouraged involvement in several service-learning organizations (e.g., 4-H, Rotary Club). These experiences taught me the value of developing authentic relationships with community members. Additionally, as the daughter of an Arab immigrant, I became aware of the linguistic, racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of my community at an early age. My parents were especially focused on recognizing and confronting issues related to immigration and educational inequities.

Born into a family of educators, I am proud to be a teacher. Previously, I taught 6–12th grade language arts and social studies for ten years, working with diverse populations in Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Idaho. I have experience

teaching in a wide variety of school communities; parochial, charter, alternative, and public in urban and rural communities and have worked with demographically diverse populations, students who are undocumented, economically disadvantaged students, and students with special needs.

While my teaching experiences have provided part of the impetus for my research, it is my ongoing engagement in rural communities in Indiana that have deeply influenced my work in rural spaces. While living in and researching a rural Indiana community, and the elementary schools that serve the community, I have developed knowledge of the history of immigration to rural communities, changing community demographics, the education of immigrants and people who are undocumented in rural communities, and teacher understandings of working with rural immigrant populations.

My work contributes to several bodies of existing literature on rural education, immigrant Latinx student education, teachers working with minoritized populations, and the importance of care in education by exploring the nexus of these bodies of work. This synthesis makes this work unique; researchers must consider changing demographics in states not generally considered immigrant destinations and in rural communities where many of the new immigrants seek employment. My research creates a strong sense of place, a strong sense of who these teachers and students are, and a strong sense of being in the midst of community and school life.

Darrell Peterson

I am an Educational Program Specialist in the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) where I specialize in the creation of professional development for teachers of students with disabilities and English language specialists. I am passionate about ensuring that ALL students receive appropriate access to instruction and the curriculum. This has been a lifelong passion that really began to foment in my elementary school days. As a talented and gifted student, I felt the instruction and curriculum were not tailored to my unique talents and interests, and this continued on through high school. After graduating from college and becoming an instructional designer, my wife and I adopted two boys from the foster care system. One was 6 years old when he moved in with us, and the other was 18 months old. Both boys had special educational needs, and this new chapter in my life caused me to focus my energies and passion on helping them, and all students with special needs, receive the instruction and access to the curriculum that they deserve. One of my adopted sons also has a birth father from Laos, and incorporating his cultural story into our family's cultural story heightened my awareness and passion for the diverse cultural stories that exist in today's schools. All of this led me to pursue and obtain

my Master's in Education and my Ph.D. in Learning Technologies and Special Education to better serve and advocate for these under-represented students by using technology in all its various forms. I have also used the conversations that have taken place at my own family dinner table regarding heritage, race, and how kids fit into their world in vastly different ways as an inspiration for advocating for their needs and rights. I have done this primarily by harnessing technology to deliver professional development courses to teachers who may not have access to quality professional development because of their remote or rural locations. I am continuing this enormously rewarding work through the pursuit of grants, and by making presentations, webinars, and e-learning courses available to all teachers, no matter where they are located.

Sonja Phillips

I was born and raised in West Virginia and am a third-generation West Virginia teacher. My grandfather sold chickens and eggs to afford school supplies for elementary and high school but went on to earn his master's degree in English. He was also the principal of the local elementary school. My grandfather treasured his education so much that he made sure that each of his six children and many of his grandchildren had the opportunity to receive higher education. I was a recipient of this generosity and have spent more than 20 years teaching special education students in very rural schools in the heart of West Virginia.

My classroom experiences include teaching students with disabilities in a general education classroom as a co-teacher (including a few semesters co-teaching Algebra with my husband!), teaching in pull-out resource and self-contained settings, and providing support for students on homebound services. Several of the homebound students I supported lived in such rural conditions that I had to park my car and cross a creek via a pedestrian, swinging bridge and was sent home with freshly laid eggs. My mother was also a homebound teacher for many years in a northwestern West Virginia county—one of her student's homes still did not have an indoor toilet in the late 1980s—but this student was determined to continue her education despite having just become a young mother.

After I left the classroom, I spent five years as a special education Specialist for my district in which I managed multiple schools' needs—chairing IEP meetings and evaluating students for eligibility for special education services. These schools ranged from downtown Charleston, West Virginia to schools in the far reaches of a "holler" with families who historically worked the coal mines. Throughout the last two decades, West Virginia has enjoyed a small influx of immigrant families from countries around the world and part of my

job included identifying students needing further supports due to a disability in addition to their multilingual needs.

I have earned a master's degree from Marshall University and continue with post-graduate studies at Northcentral University in Special Education. My research focuses on post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities in rural West Virginia. My current position allows me to advocate for accessibility and accommodation needs for students with disabilities on West Virginia state summative assessments.

Jenelle Reeves

My first days of school were defined by rurality. Half-day kindergarten divided us up into "town" and "country" kids. Town kids went to school in the morning, and we country kids attended in the afternoon. Each weekday around 11 AM, the school bus roared to a dusty stop on the gravel road next to my house, opened its screechy door for me, and once I was on board, carried on through the farmlands of central Iowa, picking up the other country kids and delivering us to town for afternoon kindergarten. Despite getting to ride the school bus, being a country kid was not considered cool. Town kids lorded it over us that they could walk to the store or to their friends' houses anytime they wanted. How I longed to be a town kid.

In actuality, all of us kindergarteners back then were, by nearly any standard, rural students attending a rural school in a Midwest farming community of fewer than 1,500 people. Farming and farm life dominated our communal identity. Most of us were from third, fourth, or fifth generation farm families of European descent (Dutch and German, mostly). Life was seemingly the pastoral idyll—a shared love of land, strong community ties, and a well-supported school. I benefitted from my rural upbringing; never was family and community support far away. But I also suffered in the face of community expectations, particularly around gender roles. I was teased for being a girl who was good at school, which was mostly good-natured but also a signal that I was approaching a boundary, that too much education would not serve me well as a woman. Being a wife, mother, and a teacher within our community should have been entirely enough. But, for me, it was not. The familial and community supports of rural life sustained but also restricted me.

I have long since stopped being a country kid by geographic location, but rurality and growing up in the country has left a lasting impression on my identity. Today, I explore rural education from an academic perspective. I live in Nebraska (in a city), and rural schools are the norm here. We are not very far removed from one-room school houses, and farming and agribusinesses are top economic drivers in this state. Education research tools assist me in

understanding rural education today, but so, too, does my lived experiences of rurality. My own struggle with place as a “country” kid in a rural community has sensitized me to the ways rural spaces, particularly schools, can offer unique supports for children but may also restrict opportunities and enforce community norms that may not benefit—or fit—all community members.

Yi-Chen Wu

I am a Research Associate at the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) where I specialize in large-scale assessments, especially accommodations and accessibility features. My passion is ensuring that students are assessed fairly to be able to detect their “true” ability. This passion was developed through a variety of experiences, including my childhood life in rural places, training as a teacher and a psychometrician, and learning experience as an English learner. I grew up in rural places in Taiwan. Towards the end of third grade, my family moved from a rural place to a small town which was about a 15-minute driving distance. We moved because my parents wanted their kids to have a better life and receive a better education. I transferred to a new school before finals. Then, I encountered my first learning challenge at school. Even though these two schools used the same textbooks, I did really badly on my finals. I used to have perfect scores on all my tests, but I barely got 60% correct on my finals. I was very upset with this outcome. In the meantime, my parents were busy working to survive in this town and making sure we had food on the table every day, so they did not pay too much attention to my learning. However, they gave me supplementary materials to study by myself. That opened my mind about assessments. Teachers used different types of questions to assess students’ understanding. Also, the items were related to life experiences, instead of testing memorization skills. They were quite different from what I had experienced before. Further, teachers used different strategies to help students understand the content. That was the first time I became aware of the differences between urban and rural education. This experience also impacted my decision about my first job. After graduating from a teacher’s college, instead of staying in a big city, I decided to teach in my hometown because I wanted to make a difference for students in this town. Through my classroom experiences, I learned it’s challenging to get parents involved in student’s learning because most of my students were living with grandparents who could not read. Thus, teachers played an important role in rural education. Through my teaching, I made sure students were provided appropriate assistance to access content material and were tested fairly. As an English learner in my doctoral program, my teacher offered me extra time after my midterm. This made a difference on my final in which I was able to

show what I know. After obtaining my Ph.D., I taught at the Center for Teacher Education at National Sun Yat-sen University in Taiwan. I went to different rural schools to observe my student teaching and advise them how to guide/assist students in rural settings. My current position allows me to advocate for all students to access accessibility and accommodation as needed. I believe all students deserve to have some modification to show their true abilities.

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Educating Multilingual Students in Rural Schools

Illuminating Diversity in Rural Communities in the United States

Maria R. Coady, Paula Golombek and Nidza V. Marichal (Eds.)

Illuminating issues of diversity at the intersection of rural education and multilingual learners (ML) in the United States, this edited volume brings forth new research that captures the importance of place and rurality in the work of educators who serve multilingual learners and their families. The six chapters in this book demonstrate that education for teachers, leaders and staff, professional development programs, and government-funded projects aimed to improve rural education need to begin with three interrelated, multifaceted principles. The first principle is the need to center place and rurality as essential factors that affect education for all educators, students, and families who live, work, and attend schools in rural communities. Second, educators must humanize multilingual students, their families, and their cultures in ways that go beyond merely acknowledging their presence – they must deeply see and understand the lives and (hi)stories of the multilingual students and families that they serve in their rural schools. Finally, the third principle involves identifying multilingual resources for ML students and their families. Given the persistent inequities in access to resources and opportunities that rural ML students and families face, this last principle requires careful planning, networking, and advocating in ways that can truly effectuate change.

Contributors are: Jioanna Carjuzaa, Maria R. Coady, Paula Golombek, Shuzhan Li, Kristin Kline Liu, Nidza V. Marichal, Charity Funfe Tatah Mentan, Kym O'Donnell, Stephanie Oudghiri, Darrell Peterson, Sonja Phillips, Jenelle Reeves and Yi-Chen Wu.

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