Chapter 6
Teaching Across the Demographic Divide With Latinx Texts on Immigration

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a preliminary introduction into the topic of Latinx immigration in texts. To begin, the authors discuss the demographic divide between majoritarian teachers and multiply minoritized students in the U.S. literacy classroom. Then, the authors briefly share their experiences regarding their work in light of major trends relating to literacy teaching before outlining the key tenets of culturally relevant and culturally sustaining pedagogies. The majority of the chapter will focus on detailing how teachers can support Latinx students around the topic of immigration by providing examples of culturally relevant and sustaining practices with an abbreviated lesson plan of how to facilitate discourse addressing the topic of immigration using a text featuring Latinx characters.

INTRODUCTION

The population of Latinx[1] students in U.S. public schools is exponentially growing. According to the National Council for Educational Statistics (2020) in 2017, 27% of all k-12 public school students were Hispanic. In comparison, 79% of public-school teachers were white and non-Hispanic with only 9% of teachers identifying as Hispanic (Spiegelman, 2020; The Condition of Education, 2020). Thus, the majority of teachers tasked with teaching Latinx students, many of whom are Students of Color, come from different cultural backgrounds from their students. This is the "demographic divide" often described by critical education researchers that has direct implications for teacher preparation programs (Aaronson &

Meyers, 2020, p.2). This divide is consequential because it is often a challenge to think outside of one's own bias in order to facilitate content and discourse around topics that aren't a part of one's life. Teacher identity, including one's cultural identity, affects an educator's worldview, purposes for teaching, and instructional decisions (Cochran-Smith, 2010; Pugach et al., 2019)

For example, if a white teacher grew up as a citizen of the United States and did not have to worry about being suddenly removed from their surroundings after struggling to emigrate, they would not have the same level of understanding as a Latinx immigrant from another country. However, it should also be said that just because a teacher shares the same cultural heritage as their students *doesn't* mean that they are effective in working with them (Villegas & Irvine, 2010). A Latinx teacher born in the United States, but has never experienced what it was like to emigrate from another country, also doesn't experientially know the weight of making a better life for their family amidst myriad hurdles unique to a first-generation immigrant. True, the teacher may have family members that have experienced this, but their experience may be markedly different due to varying U.S. immigration policies over history in addition to not having direct experience of their own. Both of these examples (and more) may reveal a combination of disconnect, obtuseness, and/or angst as literacy teachers attempt to approach the topic and themes of immigration. While positive intent should be assumed, often even the most well-meaning teachers (both white and Teachers of Color) are not prepared to plan and facilitate standards-based lessons using culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy around these topics (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Pre-service teachers not only have to learn how to teach but become familiar with content and effective supports for diverse student populations (Mkandawire et al., 2018).

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

In light of growing demographic trends, the demographic divide, and the need for more humanizing and liberating educational practices overall, the authors of this chapter argue that pre-service teachers should be *culturally competent* and explicitly taught the importance of *culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) and culturally sustaining practices (CSP)*. It is fundamental to understand the terminology before subscribing to the beliefs and putting them into practice as a teacher. Culturally competent means having the ability to understand, interact with, and appreciate others from different cultural backgrounds and beliefs (Goode & Dunne, 2004). Then, culturally relevant is the theory that supports students in understanding and celebrating their culture while seeking to implement practices that challenge injustices. In particular, Ladson-Billings' (1995) culturally relevant pedagogy involves three aspects in relation to the teacher: 1) notion of self and others, 2) social relations, and 3) conceptions of knowledge.

First, thinking of notions of self and others, teachers need to understand their own agency and how it relates to students, families, and communities. Pre-service teachers need to understand how their own cultures and experiences may influence implicit biases as they begin working with students. Teachers also need to approach students from a *learner's* stance, seeking out ways to become inclusive of other cultures in their classrooms. Second, social relations refer to the teacher's ability to build relationships and facilitate learning. Social relationships start with building positive relationships, which sets the foundation for learning. Generally, if teachers invest in their students, their students will invest in them. Third, conceptions of knowledge indicate the teacher's ability to understand how knowledge is constructed in and out of school amidst complex, layered social systems. Teachers must respect background experiences students bring to school, celebrating any differences that are not familiar to them. This could include but is not limited to: race, culture, language, religion, gender, etc. In light of this, there are three moves CRP

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