

BOOK REVIEW

Culturally Responsive Schooling for Indigenous Mexican Students, by W. Perez and R. Vásquez. *Multilingual Matters*, 2024, 250 pp., USD 34.95 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-80041-752-6

Irasema Mora-Pablo ^{a*}

^a University of Guanajuato

* Contact Info: Lascurain de Retana No. 5, Col. Centro. CP., Guanajuato 36000, Mexico, imora@ugto.mx

Article Info

Received: June 12, 2024
Accepted: July 2, 2024
Published: August 12, 2024

Indigenous migrations in Mexico are not a new phenomenon. The patterns of displacement from rural and indigenous localities are contingent upon the historical periods of Mexico (Henderson, 2011). During the 1940s, the industrialization and urbanization of Mexico resulted in the displacement of thousands of indigenous communities to the most significant urban centers of the country. Simultaneously, the Bracero Program directed the indigenous migration toward California and Texas in the United States (Stephen, 2007). This new immigration pattern represented a new emergence of indigenous families and, as a result, of children who were either born in American territory or moved to the United States at a young age. Indigenous youth in the central valleys of California face challenges, as Vargas (2014) has documented. Their lives oscillate between being part of American society and culturally distancing from their parents or claiming their ethnic origin. They occasionally resort to strategies of ambiguous reconstruction of the self.

The United States' ethnicization process is characterized by a multifaceted system of ethnic-racial classification and hierarchization based on skin color and national origin. When migrating to the United States, indigenous Mexicans undergo a dual process of ethnicization. In Mexico, they transition from a dichotomized system between mestizos and indigenous people to an ethnic system that classifies them as Hispanic or Latino and of color in the United States, similar to other immigrants of Mexican and Latin American descent. Nevertheless, this process of re-ethnicization is characterized by an attachment and allegiance

to the Indigenous community of origin in an environment of exclusion and discrimination, which dictates the terms of their incorporation.

Culturally Responsive Schooling for Indigenous Mexican Students, written by William Perez and Rafael Vásquez, provides an analysis based on a two-year study of Mexican high school students from three Indigenous groups that are representative of Mexican Indigenous immigrants in the United States: Zapotec, Mixtec, and P'urhépechas in Southern California. This book consists of seven chapters and examines the multilingual and ethnocultural identity development of Indigenous Mexican youths in US schools by exploring the complex intersections of language, ethnoracial identity, immigration, and transnational ties.

The Tequio Youth Group and the conference *No me llames Oaxaquita* (or 'Don't Call Me Little Oaxacan') are the topics of discussion in Chapter 1. The conference's focal points were the social and educational obstacles encountered by Zapotec, Mixtec, and P'urhépecha immigrant students in US schools. Mexican-origin youths are not acknowledged in these educational institutions for their cultural and linguistic diversity. The conference urged the local school districts to implement antibullying measures and policies prohibiting derogatory terms, such as *oaxaquita* and *indito*. Additionally, this chapter examines the global impact of international migration on the Indigenous population. Also, the chapter highlights that one of the proposals of this book is to contribute to the development of new theoretical lenses that are more appropriate and dynamic for the examination of these understudied groups. The authors contextualize the family-related, linguistic, social, and cultural challenges these young people encounter by employing the term ethnic-racial identity (ERI). In order to comprehend the subsequent chapters, the chapter concludes with a description of the methodology employed to collect the data for this two-year study.

In Chapter 2, the Indigenous Mexican population in the United States is described, and the factors that differentiate Indigenous immigrants from the non-Indigenous Mexican community in the United States are discussed. The authors argue that the sense of Indigenousness among Mexican immigrants is more modern and distinct from previous generations. Their assertion of ethnic identity is founded on the principles of hybridity and change. The chapter ends by emphasizing that the concept of being an Indigenous immigrant has been redefined as a result of historical changes and migration.

Chapter 3 delineates the theoretical framework that served as the foundation for the analyses and introduces the concepts of transcultural identities and translingual practices. The

framework stresses the active role of these adolescents in negotiating and constructing their identities and linguistic practices within their sociocultural and educational contexts.

Chapter 4 begins with a description of the demographic characteristics of the Mixtec population and presents the results obtained in the study with this group. These findings are structured around four fundamental dimensions that the authors propose as a conceptual model of the psychosocial development of Indigenous youth: transcultural ethnoracial identity, dynamic multilingualism, agency, and resilience. Particularly, this group reported that they refrain from speaking Mixtec in schools to pass as *mestizos* due to the discrimination they experience. This act of hiding their Indigenous identity is further exacerbated by the decision of parents to refrain from teaching the Mixtec language to their children to prevent them from being exposed to the same forms of prejudice that they encountered during their childhood, leading to marginalization and invisibility in the classroom, as teachers have no knowledge about Mexican-origin students. Towards the end of the chapter and to delve deeper into the concepts discussed, narratives from two Mixtec students are presented: José and Mónica.

The Zapotec population is the focus of Chapter 5, which employs the same approach as the preceding chapter. The ethnoracial identities and multilingualism of Zapotec Indigenous adolescents are analyzed. They are distinct from the other two groups in several ways. Of the three groups examined, this group demonstrated the highest levels of Spanish-English bilingualism and English language use and understanding. They were the most likely to have used Spanish as children and English with friends. Zapotec adolescents do not conform to the height and skin color stereotypes associated with Indigenous Mexicans. In other words, the males observed were not as short, and the women were not as dark-skinned. The narratives of two Zapotec youth, Manuel and Elizabeth, who were raised in the United States, are presented at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 6 starts by presenting the characteristics and demographic information of the P'urhépecha group. Later, these adolescents' ethnoracial identities and multilingualism are analyzed, as well as the cultural practices and transnational experiences that influence them. In contrast to the other two groups, the P'urépechas reported that the discrimination they face is based on language. Consequently, students and parents opt to blend in with the non-Indigenous Mexican population by refraining from speaking P'urhépecha in public. This chapter also examines how they manage these identities and linguistic practices in the

community and school to confront prejudice and discrimination. At the end of the chapter, the narratives of Mateo and Carolina are presented.


In Chapter 7, the main findings are summarized, the importance of additional research in this area is highlighted, and recommendations are offered for the effective development of positive developmental trajectories for Indigenous immigrant students by schools. The authors suggest that teachers validate the importance of Indigenous culture and language in classrooms to prevent potential adverse effects on academic performance and cognitive development. Furthermore, a key suggestion for teacher training programs is to incorporate education on the historical background, cultural aspects, and challenges encountered by Indigenous students in educational settings. This would enable teachers to make pertinent pedagogical adaptations in the classroom. At the school level, it is recommended to prioritize establishing and promoting campus ethnic/cultural organizations, centers, or spaces that facilitate cultural expression through Indigenous forms of dance, music, art, and language. Opportunities for cultural expression would enable Indigenous youth to explore and embrace their Indigenous identities. Finally, the appendices encompass a glossary, data tables, methods, and a description of the research instruments.

Ultimately, the book emphasizes critical insights into how these young people must navigate not only the typical obstacles of (im)migration but also the deeply ingrained anti-indigeneity and linguicism (Murillo & Smith, 2011) in Mexico and the United States. It is imperative that educators acknowledge the potential for some Latinx immigrant students to be trilingual. Occasionally, upon their arrival in the United States, they transition from speaking an Indigenous language to English without ever having learned Spanish. The book is thoroughly researched and presents a compelling argument for the value of multicultural education in pursuing educational equity and social justice. The challenges encountered by these Indigenous groups are detailed in each chapter, and educators are presented with opportunities to establish environments that embrace and celebrate multiculturalism and multilingualism.

The book would benefit, however, from providing further details—at the beginning of Chapters 4, 5, and 6—about the process employed in engaging with each of the Indigenous groups included in the study. The additional details would provide a foundation for future researchers interested in doing similar studies with other Indigenous groups, enabling them to comprehend the potential difficulties associated with accessing students, teachers, and members of Indigenous community-based and student organizations.

Overall, *Culturally Responsive Schooling for Indigenous Mexican Students* is a valuable contribution to the field of education, and it is a must-read for educators in California and any educator in other contexts involved with Indigenous students. The book can serve as a tool to correct monocultural and monolingual misconceptions about Mexican immigrants. It can also serve as a foundation for understanding transcultural, translingual, and transnational identities. This book certainly achieves its aim of contributing to the understanding of ethnic and academic identity developmental processes to inform future research on Indigenous immigrant youths in a global context. It is an essential read for educators, policymakers, and researchers dedicated to advancing diversity and inclusion in education.

THE AUTHOR

Irasema Mora-Pablo  is a Full Professor in the Department of Languages at the University of Guanajuato, Mexico. She holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Kent, England. She currently teaches courses in English teaching and applied linguistics. Her research focuses on bilingualism, return migration and transnationalism, identity formation, and native and non-native English-speaking teachers. Her most recent book, *Applying Anzaldúan Frameworks to Understand Transnational Youth Identities*, won the 2023 AESA Critics' Choice Book Award. She is currently a member of the editorial board of the *International Journal of Multicultural Education* and *TESOL Journal*.

REFERENCES

- Henderson, T. J. (2011). *Beyond borders: A history of Mexican migration to the United States*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Murillo, L. A., & Smith, P. H. (2011). "I will never forget that": Lasting effects of language discrimination on language-minority children in Colombia and on the US-Mexico border. *Childhood Education*, 87(3), 147–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2011.10521714>
- Stephen, L. (2007). *Transborder lives: Indigenous Oaxacans in Mexico, California, and Oregon*. Duke University Press.
- Vargas, E. S. (2014). *Del valle siempre. Constelaciones narrativas y la presencia de la doble voz. Un estudio sobre los hijos de jornaleros agrícolas migrantes en regiones de acogida: El Valle de San Quintín, B. C., y el Valle Central, C. A.* [Always from the valley. Narrative constellations and the presence of the double voice. A study on the children of migrant agricultural laborers in host regions: El Valle de San Quintín, B. C., and the Central Valley, C. A.] [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.