

BOOK REVIEW

Black Immigrant Literacies: Intersections of Race, Language, and Culture in the Classroom, by P. Smith. Teachers College Press, 2023, 176 pp., USD 39.95 (pbk), ISBN 978-0-80776-896-9

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The lead-up to the 2024 presidential election saw increasing attacks on Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee and first woman Vice President of Jamaican and Indian descent, exploiting racist and xenophobic anxieties about her identity. At the same time, TIME Magazine recently named Heman Bekele, a precocious 15-year-old Ethiopian immigrant, as TIME’s 2024 Kid of the Year for his innovative development of a soap designed to treat skin cancer (Kluger, 2024). In this complex context—where the Black community contends with political marginalization and model minority recognition—Patriann Smith’s book becomes an essential resource for educators and policymakers, offering readers a framework for resisting essentialized narratives about marginalized communities, particularly Black Immigrant Youth.

Patriann Smith’s *Black Immigrant Literacies: Intersections of Race, Language, and Culture in the Classroom* presents a unique and much-needed exploration of the often-overlooked experiences of Black immigrant youth in the United States educational context. By emphasizing the unique assets and literacies they bring to the United States, Smith examines the experiences of Black immigrant youth through a holistic lens, exploring race, language, culture, and migration as it is implicated in the English they deploy. She argues that we must reimagine Black immigrant youth’s education and literacy practices and make visible the inherent assets and literacies they bring into a schooling space.

Smith's book is organized into five chapters, anchored by the Black Immigrant Literacies Framework. Each chapter builds upon itself, providing the reader with a clear map of the context, framework, and application of the framework with each successive chapter. Chapter 2 broadly puts forth a rationale and vision for reimagining the literacies of Black immigrant youth in US schools. Beginning with an examination of the increasing presence of Black immigrants in the U.S., the chapter looks at literature to reject essentialized frames ascribed to these youth as a model minority or coming from a monolithic language practice. The chapter highlights the youth's diverse ethnoracial and ethnolinguistic practices, with Smith calling for recognizing and utilizing students' holistic literacies or full linguistic repertoires. The chapter maps the intersections between race, migration, and language. This sets the stage for future chapters and calls for educational frameworks to resist the privileging of standard American English in academic settings, building on the work of Rosa and Flores (2017) with raciolinguistic ideologies through a *transraciolinguistic* approach.

Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive overview of the Black Immigrant Literacies framework established by Smith (2019) and encompasses five elements: *laying claim to the struggle for justice, addressing the myth of the model minority, a transraciolinguistic approach, and local-global and holistic literacies*. The framework is discussed through three theoretical lenses: diaspora literacy, racial literacy, and transnational literacy. These lenses provide alternative ways of thinking about how to embrace and leverage the literacy practices of Black immigrant youth. This framework is also essential to analyzing the transcript narratives presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

Chapters 4 and 5 present two *authentic narratives* of Afro-Caribbean youth, Chloe and Ervin, respectively. Using the Black Immigrant Literacies framework, Smith captures with stunning analysis the insights and opportunities that emerge from their stories. Based on a critical dialectical pluralism approach, the authentic narratives in these chapters emerge from transcripts of conversations with Afro-Caribbean youth at the junction of narrative, biographical, ethnographic, and phenomenological methodological approaches. They are presented as autobiographical accounts by the youth. Smith has specifically chosen to resist and disrupt traditional academic texts that often “erase the deeply interwoven connections of literacies that reflect the full lives of youth” (p. 6). In both accounts, we see the often-overlooked experiences that Black immigrants encounter upon arrival into U.S. schooling spaces, including ideas around “becoming Black,” “becoming immigrant,” and “unbecoming a ‘Native’ English speaker.” Smith offers insights into the resources both youths draw upon

based on the Black Literacies Framework to help the youth navigate through schooling spaces. Each chapter ends with ideas for how teachers and other educators can support Black immigrant youth through literacy practices.

In her final chapter, Smith recommends how parents, teachers, and community members can utilize the framework to support Black Immigrant Youth in solidarity and relation together. For example, in her recommendations for schools and teachers, she presents an extensive list of established frameworks and theories that are commonly used in schools, including, but not limited to, culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995) or translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014), to demonstrate how the Black Immigrant Literacies framework can complement them. These resources are ways to extend the text and address specific aspects of Black immigrant youth's lives.


One of the book's strengths is the intersectional focus on race, migration, language, and literacy, which Smith terms *transraciolinguistics*. Smith argues that traditional approaches to literacy education often fail to account for the unique challenges faced by Black immigrants, who must contend with both racial and linguistic discrimination. Thus, Smith builds upon existing literature about the intersection of race and language through raciolinguistic ideologies (Rosa & Flores, 2017), expanding the focus to include migration and cultural aspects. By centering the voices and experiences of Black immigrant youth, Smith challenges dominant narratives that homogenize immigrant experiences, erase the specificities of Black immigrant struggles, and provide insights into how the theory is confirmed through the authentic narratives of the two youth in the book. These compelling narratives introduce readers to two individuals whose stories illuminate a personalized understanding of race, immigration, and language and how they have had to alter or be subsumed by larger identities. Through their narratives, readers see broader systemic issues at play, making the book not just an academic text but also a compelling narrative that helps us imagine what schooling could look like. In other words, readers are left with an opportunity to change the future of how these youth experience schooling spaces.

This work would make an essential contribution to teacher education programs and to teacher educators and scholars. Given the literature has revealed the shortfalls of teacher preparation programs attending to issues of im/migration (Fitchett & Salas, 2010; Goodwin, 2002; Goodwin, 2016) and preparing teachers to work with multilingual students more broadly (Li & Bian, 2021; Rubinstein-Avila & Lee, 2014), this work presents a compelling vision and framework for reaching and teaching Black immigrant youth by explicitly

attending to the intersections of race, culture, language, and migration. Indeed, as a former K-12 English learner teacher, I found myself wishing I had left my teacher preparation program with perspectives and the *Black Immigrant Literacies* framework when I taught Kenise, an Afro-Caribbean Jamaican immigrant who was placed in my school's English learner program in sixth grade, as she likely experienced fragmentation of her literacies as she “unbecame a ‘Native’ English speaker” through this racialized placement.

From a K-12 teacher's perspective, future work could build on the ideas presented in Chapter 4 by providing more practical applications of the framework concerning standards and lesson planning. Chapter 4 provides several examples of how to reframe the Common Core State Standards through a transraciolinguistic lens and includes an exemplar lesson plan. However, classroom teachers may feel limited in their authority to modify state-mandated standards. Further, in an era where teachers' ability to address topics like race is increasingly constrained, future versions of this framework could more directly consider the political and social contexts that influence teachers' agency and autonomy in making curricular and instructional decisions. Smith's work is still an essential read for those in education to reconsider how they are supporting Black Immigrant youth and to form coalitions to incorporate transraciolinguistic perspectives into their pedagogies, lessons, and curricular standards.

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