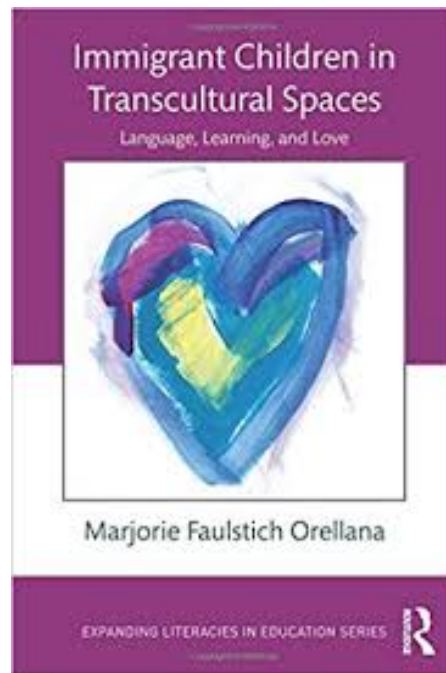


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Immigrant Children in Transcultural Spaces: Language, Learning and Love **By Marjorie Faulstich Orellana**

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Overview

Immigrant Children in Transcultural Spaces: Language, Learning, and Love by Marjorie Faulstich Orellana (2016) details the learning experiences of immigrant and multilingual children at B-Club, a play-based, K-5 after-school program in the heart of Los Angeles. The author describes how “seeing with our hearts” (Orellana, 2016, p. 31), or the pedagogy of love (Freire, 1970), unfolded over time as people and youth from a wide range of backgrounds worked in and created a transcultural space in B-Club. Written especially for educators practicing within the U.S., the book is based on ethnographic data collected over four years by the author, other researchers, and university students who were studying to be teachers. It weaves together a narrative that centers children’s interactions and highlights their flexible language practices, especially *translanguaging* and *transliterations*, key concepts that will be further defined in this review. Ultimately, Orellana suggests that teachers, parents, and other adults could learn from children and, as they do, (re)consider the joy of crossing borders, learning through play, and the beauty of our worlds.

A real strength of the book is how the 11 chapters interweave thick descriptions of context with analyses of interactions and linguistic contact zones and even a few of the author’s own experiences and memories working in this community. It also raises thought-provoking questions, asking readers to consider how important it is to love transcultural work, especially in our current times of hardening borders (Dorner et al., 2017). Finally, drawing from her own learning and experiences in transcultural spaces, Orellana is able to bring to life, theories and perspectives from Latin America, such as the pedagogy of

love (Freire, 1970), something we hope that she will continue to expand in future work.

In this review we first provide a synopsis of each chapter. Then, we discuss the implications of Orellana’s work with the children at B-Club, especially for educators in the U.S. who work with immigrant and multilingual children. We conclude by summarizing our critique and make suggestions for future work in this tradition.

Chapter Synopses

Chapter 1, “Introduction and Overview,” presents the context of B-Club and how linguistic and cultural border crossings happened within the club space. In this chapter, Orellana (2016) offers her perspective on her role as an ethnographer and the importance of love and children’s perspectives. She frames the book in the idea of crossing borders, while also recognizing that society “constructs and works hard to enforce” such borders (p. 2). Sometimes, she explains, borders are there to provide safety or to order the “messiness” of human lives, but they often constrain and sometimes cause pain. That said, borders are crossed all the time, and such crossings are even fun! At the end of the chapter, Orellana introduces the key questions that guided the work at B-Club, including one question we believe is especially important in our schools that are too often focused on standardized tests, conformity, and rigidity:

What kind of world might they [the children] build if we gave them more freedom to play, invent, imagine, and dream, then help them cultivate the tools they already have, supported their visions, and sometimes, perhaps, just got out of their way? (p. 8).

Chapter 2, “Blurring Borders at B-Club,” starts by elaborating how this after-school club came to be, its history, goals and composition. Orellana emphasizes how B-Club educators aimed to create a space that looked different from participants’ homes or schools, not boring or constraining (as the kids sometimes described their schools), but rather a place for children to explore and be creative with their language practices. In this chapter, Orellana also introduces the set of norms, beliefs, values, and practices that guided the work of B-Club. As part of these norms, children and their after-school educators (including undergraduates who were studying to be teachers) together developed *Acuerdos*, “a set of agreements that we co-created and re-created each year” (2016, p. 18). Although some prohibitions were necessary, the *Acuerdos* highlighted positive behaviors and ways of interrelating with others, rather than making rules to constrain interactions. In B-Club, one can begin to imagine how listening to children created an energetic, free, and fun atmosphere for learning to occur. Moreover, this learning importantly occurred across generations, as the undergraduate and graduate students were also learning by teaching and doing research alongside the author and other university participants.

In Chapter 3, “Seeing with our Hearts,” the author encourages readers to reflect on how adults impose their interpretations of the world or their ways of being on children. Orellana discusses how adults often assume what children want to say or need without necessarily listening to them. She explains that the way adults see society has been internalized for so long that many of them cannot see it any other way. Therefore, Orellana emphasizes that it is necessary to learn to interact with diverse perspectives, to re-align oppositions, and expand our visions through what “we see with

our hearts” (2016, p. 37). In sum, this chapter inspires readers to “be open enough to really see” before deciding what is “believed or felt” (p. 38).

Chapter 4, “A Pedagogy of Heart and Mind,” continues this focus on love in education. First, Orellana explains the theoretical foundations and historical roots of the B-Club in work by Michael Cole and Olga Vásquez with *Clase Mágica* (Vásquez, 2013), and by Kris Gutiérrez with *Fifth Dimension* (Gutiérrez, 2002). She describes the Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural framework of these programs that lives on in B-Club: that humans learn through “meaningful activities,” “experimentation and play” (2016, p. 42). Orellana then proposes that we must build upon this work with a “sociocultural pedagogy of heart and mind” (p. 42). Such a perspective importantly foregrounds asset-based approaches, and the idea that learning happens within loving relationships among students and educators in many directions: not only from teachers to students, but also from peer to peer and from children to elders. This approach aligns well with the foundations of critical pedagogies, which highlights that we all are lifelong learners and that knowledge circulates in a non-hierarchical form.

In Chapter 5, “Shining Lights in a Globalized World,” Orellana challenges the idea of “engagement,” a common concept in education and in research. She explains that the idea of engagement typically assumes that children and learning are separate and must be drawn together. She offers the concept of *animation*, which “refers to the soul or spirit level of the human experience, our very life force, which comes from within” (p. 56). She demonstrates how children at B-Club lit up or became animated when they had the opportunity to remember, talk, and share their families’ or their own transnational experiences.

Sometimes, these memories were painful, but still they were part of kids' understanding of the world that many times do not have a space in school, and she argues that is important to *animate* them. For example, in opening spaces for children to share and animate, teachers at B-club learned what it means to live across transnational borders and within mixed-status families. In answer to a question about having a sister, one girl felt comfortable sharing, "I did. But the police took her." This book provides clear examples that can help educators imagine how to open spaces for really listening to how children see the world around them (Cervantes-Soon, Dorner, et al., 2017).

Chapter 6, "Faces of Globalization," presents how globalization was part of B-Club. In this chapter, Orellana considers how the signs and symbols of globalization are interwoven with children's daily lives in Los Angeles. In transcultural spaces and immigrant communities like this one, children are exposed to rich multilingual print environments; however, these multilingual resources often go unnoticed. She describes an exercise where both children and their undergraduate mentors go into the community to take photos. Interestingly, while the undergraduate students often saw poverty – run-down buildings and barb-wire fences – the children took photos of people they knew, shops, street signs, flowers, and the beauty they saw. The activity demonstrated how the adults, especially the undergraduate students studying to be teachers, came to have new perspectives of the community through the eyes of the children.

Chapter 7, "Learning and Love," details the interactions that occurred in B-Club through an exploration of the question: "What does our animated sociocultural pedagogy of love look like in practice?" (2016, p. 77). A core practice was building authentic caring relationships. To

cultivate and maintain this practice, the club offered a "writing center," where kids wrote letters to each other and to the adults at B-Club. This was "one small way in which kids from B-Club 'shared love,' and took what they experienced at B-Club out into the world" (p. 79). The letters and other interactions were modeled by a mysterious character without a gender, which instigated interesting conversations and, sometimes, confusion. As kids interacted with this character named "X," they learned transcultural competencies and empathy: "a *willingness* to connect across differences, and an *open-ness* to building such connections" (emphases in the original, p. 81). The chapter provides multiple examples of how such work unfolded at the club, including the writing of dialogue journals between children and teachers, where exchanges in writing helped both the young students and undergraduates learn more about each other, and even how to express love for each other in different ways.

Chapter 8, "Transculturation," details the rich reservoir of cultural and linguistic knowledge possessed by immigrant children. In contexts of superdiversity, children understand that language and culture are connected. Orellana explains that when multicultural education only focuses on the superficial aspects of culture such as the food or clothing of immigrant communities—It tends to reinforce stereotypes (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2016). Instead, B-club members proposed that "culture be viewed as everyday lived practices" (p. 89) and that transcultural children should be considered experts in the classroom who can facilitate learning. In this chapter, Orellana defines this process as transculturation: "a movement *beyond* borders, a transcendence or transformation of things that were being held apart, or artificially constructed as separate and

distinct... it is about questioning the ontologies that hold things apart” (p. 91).

In Chapter 9, we learn about “Translanguaging” as Orellana illustrates how language codes and practices for translingual children are not fixed or separate, but fluid. This chapter has examples and transcripts of immigrant children moving between multiple languages effortlessly. Linguistic practices are shown as flexible, adaptable, and versatile. In contexts of super-diversity where kids are familiar with two or more languages, translanguaging “encapsulates many different kinds of hybrid language practices” (2016, p. 105). At B-Club, translanguaging occurred in collective practices and in personal interactions, as students were encouraged to use their communicative toolkits to cross linguistic and cultural borders, resist linguistic hegemony, and use their linguistic reservoir in creative ways.

Chapter 10, “Transliterations,” focuses on writing and other modes of literacy as it provides illustrations of how emerging bi/multilingual writers navigate and learn when and where to use certain codes. In this chapter, Orellana emphasizes that, while adults may view children writing in multiple modes/language varieties as a problem, children who translanguage at B-Club viewed this practice as a normal aspect of their literacy. In fact, as they moved across languages and literacies, it became clear to undergraduates and their teachers that multilingual youth had great opportunities to develop rich meta-linguistic awareness. Precisely, the term “transliterations” points to literacy practices that cross modes and languages. The book provides multiple examples of teachers trying “on new ways of speaking, doing, and being in relationship with the kids” (2016, p. 121).

Finally, Chapter 11, “Policy, Practice, and Possibilities,” closes the book with the argument that educators and adults must provide spaces for immigrant children like the one created in B-club, a place “where fun can reign, in the midst of a community, city, and world filled with real and perceived dangers of many kinds” (2016, p. 130). To review, the practices and experiences at B-Club *animated* children’s and adults’ hearts and minds by fostering “transcultural and translingual skills, creative expression, and loving human connections” (p. 131). Such a focus on creativity and love is particularly important to counteract the typical educational focus on outcomes, measurement, and only one “right answer.” At B-Club, kids learned flexibility, versatility, and adaptability as critical competencies in a changing world. This concluding chapter reiterates the importance for an education that considers the perspectives of children in the classroom, where children’s knowledge and experiences are assets and where learning is bidirectional, transforming both educators and their students.

Discussion and Implications

This book captures very important aspects of U.S. immigrants’ cultures, and, although not its original aim, of Central and South American cultures in particular. It introduces ideas and values that have grounding in the Global South and animates them for readers who may not have had extensive exposure to such perspectives. This book is a blueprint for educators to foster asset-based approaches for multilingual and immigrant children in their own schools, after-school programs, and communities. Our main hope for future work in this realm, by Orellana or others, is further reading and sharing—Indeed, translanguaging and transculturations—of theories and perspectives from across the globe, especially Latin America.

For instance, this book brings forth and builds upon the differences between “being educated” and teaching (Valdés, 1996). As evidenced by the concept of *educación* in Spanish, the idea of “being educated” in many Latin American families encompasses academics and upbringing where “both are part of a larger whole that leads to becoming a good person” (Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, & Goldenberg, 1995, pp. 63-64). At B-Club this happened through the *Acuerdos* and the care placed on students’ well-being beyond academic content.

Orellana’s book also highlights the ways children express love in their daily interactions that are not the same for adults, perhaps especially in the U.S. context. Specifically, the author reveals her own learning through B-club that love “can be a foundation of teaching and learning without being labeled;” (2016, p. 83) that is, Orellana argues that she and other educators at B-Club could interact lovingly without using the word “love” to express their feelings towards children. However, she goes on to question whether that hesitancy to name love leads to her not “fully embracing love as a central part” of her work (p. 83). In contrast, in other cultures, teachers label love as love and express feelings to children in physical and emotional ways. For instance, elementary teachers across Central and South America usually hug and kiss their students in respectful yet caring ways, and they are viewed as members of an extended family; a good example is the movement of mother-teachers of Central America or *las madres maestras* (Cordero, 2009). Similarly, at B-club, immigrant children displayed their familiarity with loving forms of interpersonal relationships in educational spaces.

In many U.S. schools, however, there is a perceived fear to manifest love to kids given the cultural values placed on setting emotional

boundaries as a display of authority or respect, as well as recognition that, too often, adults have abused the position they have over children. In short, Orellana lays bare her struggles with Western notions of love and education in this book (also see marjoriefaulstichorellana.com), as she learns from immigrant children to understand learning and human relationships in other forms. We believe U.S. educators can learn from Orellana’s own struggles in this realm and from seeing the different cultural ways of showing love in education. Future research might explore how Orellana’s proposed sociocultural pedagogy of love might help to move U.S. education and our world forward in more positive, uplifting ways.

Finally, in this book, Orellana acknowledges certain values and pedagogical concepts born and developed in the Global South, in particular the notions of solidarity and transculturality. For example, the author identifies that transculturality was first used by Fernando Ortiz (1978), a Cuban scholar, based on José Martí’s (1989) ideas. Unfortunately, very few other Latin American authors were cited throughout the book even though the pedagogy of the heart is grounded in Central and South American cultural traditions and values of care, love, solidarity, and affection in education. These values are what Cuban scholars Lidia Turner Martí and Balbina Pita Céspedes (2004) have called “*la pedagogía de la ternura*,” or the centering of affection and human relations in education.

Immigrant Children in Transcultural Spaces: Language, Learning, and Love invites readers to think about education in new ways, to resist falling into assumed cultural patterns, and to revisit pedagogical values—primarily by opening both our minds *and hearts* to children, their transliteracies, translanguaging, creativity,

and play. As reviewers who are educators, and also parents from diverse backgrounds interested in language and literacy, we recommend this book to educators, literacy coaches, after-school program coordinators, and especially to anyone who works with immigrant

children. We invite the readers to join this journey, a journey that is critical, as ever more migrants continue moving across cultures, time, and space.

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