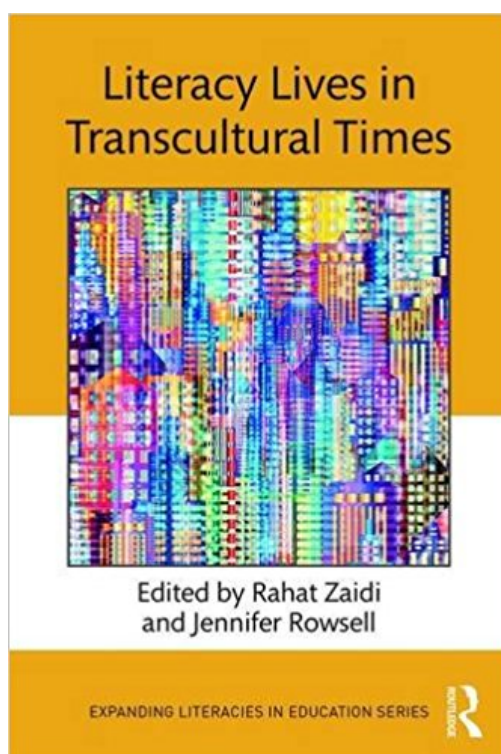


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Review of *Literacy Lives in Transcultural Times* By Rahat Zaidi & Jennifer Roswell

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Introduction

Rahat Zaidi and Jennifer Rowsell's (2017) edited collection *Literacy Lives in Transcultural Times* is part of Routledge's Expanding Literacies in Education Series. Drawing on a range of transcultural, multimodal, critical, and transformative literacy practices, each chapter reimagines a range of local and global spaces as sites of possibility for change. An evident strength of this collection is the diversity of voices that emerge to tell their stories, via the authors but also by those involved in their studies. We hear from emerging and established scholars, teachers, and practitioners who work in classroom and community settings, real and virtual, with young people of all ages. A range of theoretical and methodological orientations surface. As a result, this volume holds tremendous value for language and literacy students, researchers, educators, and administrators who work across contexts and disciplines.

In their introduction, Zaidi and Rowsell (2017) set the stage for thinking through the underlying themes of the collection, including identities, diasporas, spaces, places, texts, and pedagogies. The editors make a strong case for locating transculturalism and cosmopolitanism at the heart of literacy research, suggesting that these frameworks, when interwoven, have the potential to "improve the lives of students and educators" (p. 4). Transculturalism is positioned as being the result of processes such as migration and globalization, wherein ideas, people, and texts transcend spaces and borders, resulting in a mingling of cultures. In this vein, cosmopolitanism refers to identity as "dynamic, plural, connected, local and global" (p. 1) as opposed to being rooted, singular, or contained by a nation. As Marjorie Faulstich Orellana

(2017) notes in her compelling foreword, "the authors do not romanticize cosmopolitanism. They are alert to how power operates to privilege certain ways of knowing They recognize that the movement of people across ... borders is variegated" (p. ix). Rather, the authors "show what can happen when people move across borders, mix and meet and mingle, and engage with words and the world in new ways" (p. viii). A central objective of the text is to purposefully complicate the notion of how we communicate and make meaning across spaces. The stories told within each chapter do not generalize, but alternatively attend to the differences between us, giving voice to narratives that are often silenced. Consequently, the editors' guiding question, "what does it mean to exist in this world in relation to other human beings?" (p. 12), is, on the whole, successfully illuminated.

Teaching with *Literacy Lives in Transcultural Times*

In the winter of 2018, I taught an online course for graduate students in the area of literacy and globalization. My students were teachers and administrators in various public, private, and international school settings, joining me virtually from around the globe. Zaidi and Rowsell's edited collection was our core text. Our conversations across time and space embodied the ideas that underpinned our readings. Here, I focus on several chapters from Zaidi and Rowsell's collection, illustrating how the text pushed my students to think critically about the intersections of theory *and* practice in relation to language and literacy research in these times of uncertainty. Each chapter exemplifies how transcultural approaches to literacy studies have the potential to put our differences, stories, and experiences of the world into dialogue.

Theoretical Approaches to Transcultural Literacies

I wanted my students to begin with a strong grounding in 21st-century literacy frameworks. We began by reading chapter three, wherein Brian Street (2017) provides an overview of the shift from autonomous to ideological forms of literacy. Through an examination of several policy documents, Street reiterates the importance of understanding literacy as a social practice that depends on context. He tasks researchers with “making visible the complexity of local, everyday community practices and challenging dominant stereotypes” (p. 38), echoing Zaidi and Rowsell’s (2017) introduction, which reminds us of how “diverse people really are when researchers listen and document their lives” (p. 3). While Street briefly references his own ethnographic work in Iran in the 1970s, his contribution to this collection offers a sociocultural framework that can be traced in several of the following chapters. Also helpful to my students’ theoretical understanding was Ron Darvin and Bonny Norton’s (2017) chapter, which reflects on the inequalities and isolation of transcultural approaches in relation to the “peripheries and barriers of entry” (p.90) through the lens of investment and new literacy studies.

Identities in the Classroom: Bridging Theory and Practice

A strength of Zaidi and Rowsell’s collection, especially when thinking about it as a teaching tool, is that its chapters feature a balance of theory with more empirical, research-driven approaches. Reading Street and Darvin and Norton’s chapters, for example, supported my students’ reading of chapter four, where Margaret Early and Maureen Kendrick reconsider a multiliteracies framework in the

context of inquiry-based learning. They argue that a literacy approach that is “organized around ‘big ideas’ and ‘essential questions’ might offer a space for educators to seamlessly integrate the two strands promoted by the NLG, two decades ago” (p. 44). Drawing on the fields of multiliteracies and multimodalities, Early and Kendrick present two vignettes from grade four/five classrooms in Vancouver. In explicitly drawing on students’ backgrounds, both vignettes position young people as “capable and confident leaders” (p. 53). These on-the-ground examples illustrate the potential of “well-designed and highly supported inquiry approaches” (p.55) that draw on cultural and linguistic diversity.

Connections can be drawn between Early and Kendrick’s inquiry-based approach and the work of Burcu Yaman Ntelioglou in chapter five, who focuses specifically on situated practice as a tenet of multiliteracies pedagogy. Working in three urban high schools in Toronto, she introduced drama pedagogies around the theme of holiday celebrations to access the transcultural, cosmopolitan identities of English language learners. She argues that our pedagogical practices must *go beyond* simply understanding our students’ lives and identities; instead, it is crucial that we focus on the co-construction and co-production of knowledge through situated practice. In doing so, it is possible to create a generative space of “ethical listening,” where we can hear the voices of “the other,” therein enlarging our own understanding of each other and local/global cultures. Examples of teachers and students co-producing knowledge similarly emerged in Amy Stornaiuolo and Jin Kyeong Jung’s chapter eight, which features examples of students writing for change through digital participatory practices.

In response to these readings, my students prompted one another to revisit past lesson

plans, to reconsider how they could purposefully enhance their pedagogical approaches through a situated practice and/or inquiry-based approach. In their final action-based research projects, many of my students engaged in similar work in community and school settings. They identified with (and appreciated) Early and Kendrick's recognition that these practices involve "extremely complex design work" (p. 55) on the teacher's part.

Stories as Artifacts: Integrating Home and Community Literacy Practices

My students were cognizant of the connections between Yaman Ntelioglou's focus on process/context and the work of Michelle Honeyford and her colleagues in chapter nine. Here, the authors provide a succinct overview of critical artifactual literacies, drawing on the extensive work of Kate Pahl and Jennifer Rowsell (2010). Honeyford et al. warn that there is often a misalignment between curricula/programs of study and students' lives and identities beyond the classroom, a concern that is repeatedly grappled with throughout the collection. In response, they argue for a "transcultural pedagogy" (p. 117) that is framed explicitly around "students and the materials of their lives" (p. 117) in order for curriculum to be "as stunningly diverse and complex as the students we teach" (p. 118). Drawing on two examples from a graduate course taught by Honeyford, their chapter demonstrates the possibilities of language and literacy pedagogies that "are inspired by the significance of who we are, by what matters to us and by our relationships to the world and those around us" (p. 130). Motivated by Honeyford's students' expressions of self through fieldtrips, dance, videogames, and the creation of multimodal texts, my students each shared an artifact that represented an aspect of their lives beyond our virtual classroom. They recorded themselves

telling oral stories about the significance of their artifact, prompting a rich discussion about the ways in which cultural artifacts or places within the community could be integrated into their knowledge-making practices. In response to their reading of this text, our conversations focused on the importance of process (over outcome) in relation to artifactual literacies and the makerspace movement within their schools.

Honeyford et al. (2017) remind us that "artifacts open up spaces for memories to be shared, for narratives to be told, for histories to be re-met and represented" (p. 132). The oral stories as well as artifacts that my students shared with one another were undoubtedly shaped by their reading of chapter two, wherein Pam Whitty revisits and rewrites her relationship with place. Whitty shares her experience of being a settler scholar living on Wolustaqey land. She tells a series of stories that illuminate the complexity of her relationship with the land: about her ancestors arriving from Ireland in the early 1800s, about childhood summers alongside the Miramichi River, and about teaching at the University of New Brunswick. Whitty (2017) acknowledges that, as a child, "the First Nations were quite 'disappeared' for [her]. [She] did not know their stories, their lives with the land or the names of traditional territories" (p. 22). She was told (and lived) a singular narrative of place that resulted in the "erasure of many other histories" (p.19). I paired Whitty's chapter with an article written by Lynne Wiltse (2016), which explores the out-of-school literacy practices of Aboriginal youth in northern Alberta. Wiltse carefully demonstrates how links with culture, community, and family practices can be used to scaffold literacy learning within school walls, specifically to support culturally and linguistically diverse students, mirroring the sentiments put forth by Whitty, but within a local context. The majority of my students are teaching the Alberta curriculum, and the

Teaching Quality Standards require them to embed Indigenous epistemologies within their pedagogies. Whitty's chapter provides an honest example of how many of us need to relearn and decolonize our own histories and stories. Her chapter prompted poignant conversations about the implications of our own positioning on the land, our own privilege, and what responsibilities we have as educators in the era of reconciliation.

In the context of Whitty's chapter, but also others, I am reminded of the editors guiding question: "what does it mean to exist in this world in relation to other human beings?" (p. 12). This question elicited multiple opportunities for dialogue throughout the course. For example, in chapter ten, Candace Kuby's asks: "How do the entanglements of humans, across spactimematterings, intra-act with materials (i.e., other humans and non-humans) to produce agency, literacies, and perhaps identities?" (p. 161). We spent time unbraiding the constructs of human, non-human, and more-than-human, specifically in relation to our conversations about the land, artifacts, and place-based pedagogies.

Transcultural Literacies in the Classroom: Unlearning, Repositioning, & Reimagining

As both emerging scholars and practicing teachers, completing this course while working in the field, my students represented what I feel is this collection's targeted audience. Through their readings and our wider conversations, they were introduced to new theories and perspectives that then put their practices directly into motion. Initially, it was difficult for some to articulate the relevance of the terms we were discussing: How would/could these terms shape their work with young people? The classroom-based examples, however, woven throughout many of the chapters, led them to

recognize the ubiquitous nature of transculturalism and cosmopolitanism within their current pedagogical practices, classroom environments, and school communities. In fact, these concepts were not as foreign as they originally imagined.

To facilitate my students' unfolding understanding of these somewhat heavy theoretical frameworks, I simultaneously introduced the work of cultural geographer Doreen Massey (1991), whose conceptualization of the "time-space compression" has aided my own understanding of the influences of globalization on place. We also read excerpts from Barbara Comber's (2016) *Literacy, Place, and Pedagogies of Possibility*, which is part of the same editorial series as Zaidi and Rowsell's text. Comber draws on Massey's (2005) notion of "throwntogetherness" as a spatial metaphor for "thinking about classrooms" (Comber, 2016, p. xix) as sites of convergence. Her use of Massey's 'throwntogetherness' is a useful metaphor when read alongside Zaidi and Rowsell's unpacking of key terms. I recommend reading these texts in tandem.

Another significant strength of the collection is that each of the individual contributors, as well as the editors, position young people as *active agents of change* within and beyond classroom walls. In line with the definitions put forth in the introduction, identity is not a simple or uniform process. In promoting dialogue across our differences, transcultural approaches to literacy "ope[n] the doors for both teacher and students to co-create understanding about the differences that exist **between** them" (Patriann Smith, Warrican & Williams, 2017, p. 200, emphasis in original). Transcultural approaches enable young people to produce, create, and rewrite their identities, their "truly small stories" (p. 12), while taking into consideration

their diverse histories and possible future trajectories.

What was most inspiring for this cohort of graduate students, and myself as the professor, were the interchanges that occurred as we read this collection together. We exchanged stories and artifacts about our own families and histories, our languages and cultures, our experiences and struggles. Drawn into these narratives, we were required to question and voice our own and each other's experiences of privilege, power, and inequity. While this prospect was often unsettling, it amplified the

possibilities for our differences to bring us to a space of greater understanding in order for our online classroom space to become a place of transcultural exchange. In doing so, Zaidi and Rowsell's collection prompted a dialogue about the ways in which we could, individually and collectively, transform our pedagogies and literacy practices by beginning the process of "unlearning and re-imagining" (Yaman Ntelioglou, 2017, p. 58).

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