Foreword

There have been a growing number of edited book volumes and journal articles dedicated to best practices with immigrant students, especially those who are English language learners (ELLs). Even so, it is important to make a distinction between three categories that certainly overlap but cannot be conflated. Immigrant students can be defined as the largest catch-all category; within the group of immigrant students, there is a sub group of linguistic minorities, who are defined as those who speak a primary language other than English at home, and who could be discriminated against on the basis of being non-native speakers of English. A subset of linguistic minority students are institutionally labeled as ELLs when their English proficiency is determined to be limited and they receive English as a Second Language (ESL) services in school. Although these sub groups are often conflated in the literature, there is a clear distinction between immigrant students, linguistic minority students, and ELLs, since not all immigrant students have limited English proficiency.

Many immigrants, especially those who are ELLs are marked not only by their limited skills in English but also by their immigrant and socioeconomic status, their language background, their race/ethnicity, their lack of access to and achievement in developing academic language in schools, and finally, the structural and organizational factors in their schools which often limit their opportunities to learn. The complex nature of these factors for immigrant students, their families, and for teachers to draw on and navigate is something that this new volume attends to both deeply and sensitively. Moreover, this particular volume is especially noteworthy because of three critical attributes.

First, this volume heavily focuses on immigrant students besides English learners. Multiple chapters in this volume make clear the distinctions and incorporate specific strategies for immigrant students and English learners. In addition, the primary goal that various authors have for ELs in many of the chapters is the development of their academic language in addition to building their subject matter knowledge. It is now generally accepted that, to succeed in learning within the academic subjects (e.g., science, language arts, social studies, and math), ELs need to develop specific and appropriate academic language proficiency in English. Further, this volume also expands our understanding of immigrant students by examining immigrant students’ families and their lives outside of school.

The second important feature of this volume is its concern for young immigrant learners. This population is one that needs extra attention – the largest number of immigrants, and especially those who are ELLs belong to this category. By 2015, 30% of all children in the U.S. will be immigrants – it is 20% currently. The number of school-age English language learners is largest in the 5-9 age group, rather than the older ages. Moreover, the additional emphasis being placed on early learning and early childhood initiatives at the federal and state level make it altogether more imperative to conduct research on how to teach this segment of the population.
The last and most helpful aspect of this volume is the practical and insightful chapter contributions. These chapters include examples of youth community organizing, a high school mentoring program for elementary school age children, various instructional strategies embodied by teachers in real classrooms with young immigrant children as well as the challenges and opportunities that teachers of immigrant students experience in the United States. Overall, the various contributors provide either classroom, school, or community level examples of addressing the needs of young immigrant students that are rooted in well-founded research and/or the practices of teachers or scholars. At any rate, these chapters would be useful for a wide array of people, including current and future teachers, graduate students, teacher educators, and other researchers interested in this topic of national significance.

It is a very rare feat to find a volume dedicated to the largest student population sub-group and one that is arguably the most in need that can be accessible, useful, and grounded in theory and research in the expanding but solids field of immigrant education and language education. I look forward to using a number of these chapters for both my research classes that focus on pedagogy for immigrant students and English learners, as well as for my other teacher education classes to prepare future elementary teachers. I also plan on sharing the book chapters with my colleagues in the early childhood education program. I welcome and applaud a robust volume that blends research and practice in such an exemplary way.

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