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Li’s Culturally Contested Pedagogy: Battles of Literacy and Schooling between Mainstream Teachers and Asian Immigrant Parents is based on her longitudinal research in Richmond, the suburb of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, where there are a great number of Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong. The research was conducted in two combined classrooms in an elementary school where 85% of the students were Chinese children learning English as a second language. The study involved the school principal, two mainstream teachers, one teacher assistant, one English as a Second Language teacher, and eight focal Chinese students and their parents who are the first generation immigrants.

The main theme of Li’s work is the cultural battle between Canadian mainstream classroom teachers and Chinese immigrant parents over literacy learning and schooling. Li presents detailed descriptions and insightful discussions of mainstream teachers’ and Chinese parents’ understanding about literacy instruction, different cultural beliefs and traditions of literacy, and the resulting perspectives on children’s schooling. She also discusses various reasons and facts that contribute to the cultural clashes on literacy practices and schooling experiences. Finally she suggests a solution which settles the cultural conflict and bridges the cultural and educational differences: ‘pedagogy of cultural reciprocity’ (p. 207). The intended audience of the book are educators, researchers and graduate students who are interested in Asian children’s literacy learning and schooling in North America.

The structure of the book is well organized for readers to locate key ideas. In Chapter 1, Li provides an overview of the theoretical framework of the research: socio-cultural and socio-political perspectives on literacy and education, where literacy is mediated in socio-cultural discourse and literacy teaching is highly political (Pahl & Rowsell, 2006). In Chapter 2, she gives a historical review of the Chinese immigrants in British Columbia in the light of racial, economic and educational tensions between the Chinese and the main society. In Chapter 3, she examines the literacy and cultural battles from the perspectives of teachers, parents and children in terms of their different perceptions and understanding about children’s home literacy environment and practices, as well as parental involvement at school. In Chapters 4 and 5, she brings readers to the discussions of participating children’s literacy learning journeys at home and at school. In Chapter 6, she offers critical and logical illustrations and comments on the meaning of the literacy battles between Chinese parents and mainstream school teachers over children’s school achievement and parent-school relations. In Chapter 7, she puts forward ‘a pedagogy of cultural reciprocity’ to solve the cultural conflicts between parents and teachers on different literacy practices (p. 207). This pedagogy takes a balanced view toward Canadian and Chinese cultures and educational practices by incorporating the merits of both.
cultures and educational traditions. It intends to create an equitable education for Chinese immigrant children studying in Canadian schools as well as to provide a pedagogical model for mainstream teachers to further support Chinese children’s English literacy learning at school. To some degree, this pedagogy also strongly reflects traditional Chinese thoughts, especially Confucianism’s emphasis on harmony and balance.

This book contributes to the literacy research of immigrant children in Canada by providing a practical pedagogical model to bridge Canadian and Chinese literacy instructional differences. The interview data guide readers to understand participants’ views of Chinese immigrant children’s schooling experience and literacy learning in the Canadian context, and participating children’s work samples present their literacy development. However, there seem to be too many detailed descriptions about the literacy worlds of the four participating children, and there is a need to add a summary of the field observations and present a more critical analysis of what has happened in the field. Despite that, it is a book useful for educators and researchers who are interested in early literacy research of immigrant children in Canada.

References