



# **Del Otro Lado: Literacy and Migration across the U.S.-Mexico Border**

*Susan V. Meyers*



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In *Del Otro Lado: Literacy and Migration across the U.S.-Mexico Border*, author Susan V. Meyers draws on her year-long ethnographic study in Mexico and the United States to analyze the literacy practices of Mexican-origin students on both sides of the border.

Meyers begins by taking readers through the historical development of the rural Mexican town of Villachuato. Through a series of case studies spanning the decades between the Mexican Revolution and the modern-day village, Meyers explores the ever-widening gulf between the priorities of students and the ideals of the public education system. As more and more of Villachuato's families migrate in an effort to find work in the wake of shifting transnational economic policies like NAFTA, the town's public school teachers find themselves frustrated by spiraling drop-out rates. Meyers discovers that students often consider the current curriculum irrelevant and reject the established value systems of Mexico's public schools. Meyers debunks the longstanding myth that literacy is tied to economic development, arguing that a "literacy contract" model, in which students participate in public education in exchange for access to increased earning potential, better illustrates the situation in rural Mexico.

Meyers next explores literacy on the other side of the border, traveling to Marshalltown, Iowa, where many former citizens of Villachuato have come to reside because of the availability of jobs for unskilled workers at the huge Swift meat-packing plant there. Here she discovers that Mexican-origin families in the United States often consider education a desirable end in itself rather than a means to an end. She argues that migration has a catalyzing effect on literacy, particularly as Mexican migrant families tend to view education as a desirable form of prestige.

Meyers reveals the history and policies that have shaped the literacy practices of Mexican-origin students, and she raises important questions about not only the obligation of the United States to educate migrant students, but also those students' educational struggles and ways in which these difficulties can be overcome. This transnational study is essential reading for scholars, students, educators and lawmakers interested in shaping the future of educational policy.



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