


## Chapter 6

# Distributing Leadership Within Rural Schools: Sharing Responsibility for Diverse Student Needs

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Along with the immigration throughout the US, rural schools have experienced changes in demographics and need to adapt to meet the needs of diverse students. Addressing this issue, this chapter argues that rural schools in the US might benefit from distributed leadership (DLS) to meet the needs of school personnel and better understand emergent bilingual (EB) students. The authors highlight that DLS is likely to promote student-centered pedagogy (SCP) when the values of democratic education are adhered to. They first map out the recent research on rural schools with EB students and address the common challenges through big ideas from DLS. Then, they argue why DLS is functional in grappling with these challenges and discuss how rural schools can implement DLS efficiently. Lastly, they present pedagogical implications for professional development with a focus on deliberative democracy and share recommendations for future research.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Data from 2016 shows that the immigrant population in the US is 43.7 million, which makes up 13.5% of the nation's population (Pew Research Center, 2018). In this immigrant influx, the Latinx<sup>1</sup> population is increasingly moving towards midwestern, northwestern and southeastern areas of the United States in accordance with the job availability and affordable living costs in suburban and rural areas (Kandel & Cromartie, 2004). One challenge that these families face is that rural communities are not always culturally and economically ready to host large immigrant populations (Jensen, 2006). This impact of immigration is also observable at rural schools given the recent population of emergent bilingual (EB)<sup>2</sup> students. According to the Department of Education, EB students constitute around 9.1% of the total student population enrolled in suburban areas (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

While the rural education literature has looked rather extensively at mainstream teachers and students within these schools, little research has devoted attention specifically to the intersection of rural schools and EB students. Given the rapidly changing demographics within rural schools, we see a need for thinking about what kinds of environments are best suitable to addressing the needs of these students. Given our particular backgrounds and interests in teachers and leadership, we saw this as a natural entry point into this complex territory. Therefore, drawing across multiple domains, including educational leadership and student-centered pedagogy (SCP), our aim of this chapter is to consider how educational leadership might be organized to help build more inclusive schools for EB students within rural settings. We look to the literature on Distributed Leadership (DLS) for inspiration in developing our argument.

We saw distributed leadership, or the sharing of leadership responsibilities and roles across multiple school actors (Fletcher & Käufer, 2003; Parker, 2015; Southworth, 2009; Spillane, 2006), as a useful framework because of how it values collaboration, inclusivity and collective responsibility. Given some of the challenges that schools (regardless of location) face in terms of building equitable and inclusive schools for EB students (e.g., providing necessary support, having adequate resources and qualified teachers, sustaining an inclusive culture, etc.), we argue that DLS offers compelling features that might help mitigate some of these challenges. In particular, DLS models that emphasize teacher participation in decision-making processes, professional development, and peer mentoring, offer ways of leveraging individual teachers' expertise, experiences and qualifications in ways that might help bolster a school's material and symbolic resources needed to support their EB students.

While we are careful not to suggest DLS as a simple "solution", we borrow from the logics and principles of the DLS literature in order to think through what

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