

# Revolutionising Literacy Research, Practice, and Policy

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Dr Patriann Smith





# REVOLUTIONISING LITERACY RESEARCH, PRACTICE, AND POLICY

**Dr Patriann Smith**, at the University of South Florida, is challenging the norms of literacy research, practice, and policy. Her mission seeks to shift literacy standards from monolingual, monoracial, and monocultural perspectives to embrace multilingual, multiracial, and multicultural diversity. She uses a transdisciplinary approach steeped in quantum physics and racialised entanglements referred to as ‘transraciolinguistics’ to redesign literacy and language practices to be more inclusive and accessible and redefine what it means to be literate. She is the author of the book, ‘Black Immigrant Literacies: Intersections of Race, Language, and Culture in the Classroom’ (2023) and Co-Founder of the RISE Caribbean Educational Research Center.

## A Transformative Journey

As a Black multilingual immigrant from the Caribbean to the USA, Dr Patriann Smith’s multilingualism and diverse linguistic skills have not always been recognised or valued. Her personal struggles, along with her observations of similar challenges faced by her daughter, Black immigrant students, and educators, fuelled her determination to address the systemic biases within academic and educational systems.

Now at the University of South Florida, Dr Smith’s journey to challenge and reshape mainstream literacy research, practice, and policy has been nothing short of transformative. At the heart of her mission is the imperative need to shift literacy norms from monolingual (in which the focus is on what many perceive as a single language), monoracial (a focus on what many perceive as a single race), and monocultural (a focus on what many perceive as a single culture) standards to embrace the rich tapestry of multilingual, multiracial, and multicultural perspectives. The latter perspectives refer to the opposite of the former, meaning

they encompass a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of language, race and culture that extends beyond individual identities.

In an increasingly interconnected world, the importance of this mission cannot be overstated. As our society becomes more diverse and interconnected, understanding and embracing multilingualism and multicultural perspectives in literacy research, teaching, policy-making, and learning are not only essential but also deeply relevant to our daily lives. Dr Smith’s work encourages us to reconsider our roles as language users and educators in a multicultural and multilingual society. It prompts us to question and challenge the biases and standards that have shaped our understanding of language, race, and culture.

This article delves into Dr Smith’s four transformative pathways for this reconsideration, each offering profound insights into inclusive literacy practices through which Dr Smith hopes to bridge divides and redefine and revolutionise what it means to be literate in a diverse society.

## Pathway 1: A Distinctly American Opportunity

Dr Smith’s first pathway highlights disparities faced by students often perceived as monolingual, monoracial, and monocultural in an increasingly interconnected world. National policies regarding language and literacy curricula in the USA focus on what many perceive to be a certain ‘standardised American English’ and fail to meet the needs of non-standardised English speakers. As the emphasis is primarily on this standardised American English, many other standardised, as well as non-standardised Englishes and language speakers, have not been adequately served in literacy instruction. This not only portrays many linguistically diverse speakers as deficient and in need of correction but also implies that their ‘monolingual’ counterparts are necessarily privileged and proficient.

Dr Smith references the concept of ‘translingualism’ from Dr Alistair Pennycook, which is an approach to language and communication that goes beyond a strict adherence to standardised or monolingual





## Pathway 2: How Does a Black Person Speak English?

Dr Smith's second pathway, unveiled in 2020, leads on from her work on translanguaging. She delves into raciolinguistics, as proposed by Dr H Samy Alim and colleagues, as well as Drs Jonathan Rosa and Nelson Flores, which examines how language is used to construct race and how ideas of race influence language and its use. She examines how seven Black educators used standardised American as well as Caribbean and African Englishes after their migration to the USA and how they were subjected to negative reactions in response to their accents, race, communication and vocabulary. Dr Smith astutely contends that not all standardised English speakers enjoy equal legitimacy when languaging, with racialisation acting as a determining factor. This pathway confronts the linguistic hierarchies ingrained in our society and challenges conventional notions of a certain 'standard American English', rearticulating 'a transraciolinguistic approach' as a mechanism for addressing such issues.

Dr Smith's influential 2019 article in the journal *Theory into Practice* provides a compelling foundation for this reintroduction of a transraciolinguistic approach above. It emphasises the urgent need to reconsider standard American English norms and the racialised implications thereof by considering how the lives of Black Caribbean immigrant and transnational students. By exploring this pathway, Dr Smith's work on transraciolinguistics and how people migrating are being constantly repositioned offers a critical perspective on language, race, and identity that highlights the institutional as well as the individual perspective. She extends Dr Braj Kachru's notion of Englishes by unpacking the complexities of standardised Englishes and their impact on racialised migrant populations, inviting us to question deeply entrenched norms and biases within literacy research and practice.

## Pathway 3: A Transraciolinguistic Approach for Literacy Classrooms

Dr Smith's third pathway, unveiled in 2022, rearticulates a transraciolinguistic approach, this time to outline the mechanisms for transforming institutions and classrooms, by exploring what lies between, above, and beyond different aspects of raciolinguistics. This approach aims to proactively bridge the aforementioned divide between populations perceived as dominant and non-dominant, those racialised as people of Colour or not, and between systems that uphold monolingual, monoracial, and monocultural norms versus those evolving imaginaries designed to disrupt such norms.

Importantly, the transraciolinguistic approach is built upon the idea that all individuals can adopt and leverage the metalinguistic, metaracial, and metacultural understandings of individuals racialised as people of Colour when engaging with them, as well as when leveraging literate practice.

At its core, the transraciolinguistic approach is inspired by parallels drawn from quantum physics, specifically the concept of entangled particles. Just as entangled particles remain interconnected across

language norms. It recognises the fluidity and diversity of language in multilingual and multicultural contexts, as well as encourages the use of various linguistic resources and strategies to effectively communicate, even if those resources include standardised, non-standardised or non-native language elements that deviate from what many perceive to be an acceptable language norm.

Translingualism creates bridges between monolingual students and their multilingual peers, recognising that such connections are vital for fostering critical engagement with the evolving global landscape of 'today's society'. Dr Smith advocates for this translanguaging approach in the educational and policy framework so that the rich linguistic diversity of the USA is embraced rather than marginalised.

In her 2020 article, 'The Case for Translanguaging in Black Immigrant Literacies' published in the *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice* journal, Dr Smith extends this research, provides tangible examples of translanguaging in education, reinforcing the notion that embracing linguistic diversity based on intersectionality is paramount in contemporary literacy practices. Dr Smith's extensions of translanguaging, coupled with her focus on translanguaging, represent a pioneering effort to challenge traditional norms and create an inclusive space for linguistic diversity within literacy research and practice. By highlighting the advantages of multilingualism in an interconnected world, she offers a compelling argument for rethinking literacy education and policy.





vast distances, with actions on one affecting the other, racialised entanglements occurring between languaging and people operate in a similar dynamic. Here, languages (including those labelled as ‘dialects’, such as Englishes) interact with individuals racialised as people of Colour across literal and symbolic boundaries, forming complex and interconnected relationships.

Recognising this intrinsic link between languages and the racialised body, Dr Smith advocates that targeting change within the interaction space between languaging and bodies is more effective than attempting to change the languages or peoples themselves. This, she argues, encourages the acknowledgement and utilisation of the metalinguistic, metaracial, metacultural and other meta-insights of racialised peoples of Colour, fostering understanding and unity among diverse populations. By adopting these understandings, individuals who are *not* racialised as people of Colour can engage more effectively with their racialised counterparts, promoting a more inclusive and equitable societal framework.

The practical applications of a transraciolinguistic approach are far-reaching. Dr Smith calls for schools to act upon the intersections of race, language, and migration by incorporating the approach into policies, curriculums, teaching strategies, and training. This empowers individual children in literacy classrooms by embracing and valuing their diverse linguistic and racial backgrounds. It also provides valuable guidance to systems and educators in their teaching and student interactions, promoting more inclusive and equitable literacy practices.

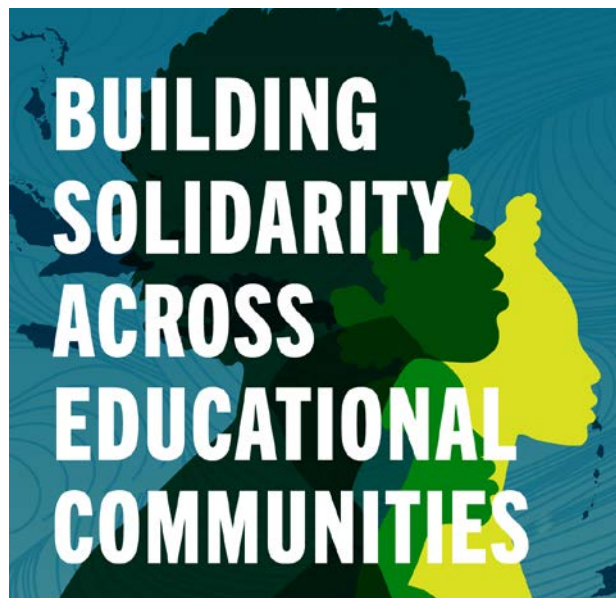
Dr Smith’s work on a transraciolinguistic approach finds further support in her co-authored piece, ‘Characterising Competing Tensions in Black Immigrant Literacies’, published in the *Reading Research Quarterly journal*. Together, these contributions, accompanied by her co-authored book ‘Affirming Black Students’ Lives and Literacies: Bearing Witness’ challenge traditional approaches to literacy education, offering a transformative and revolutionary framework for creating literacy classrooms that embrace diversity, foster understanding, and promote unity among diverse student populations. This approach represents a significant shift in how we think about literacy education, emphasising inclusivity, solidarity, and equity.

#### Pathway 4: Transraciolinguistics for Redesigning Pasts, Presents, and Futures

In 2022, Dr Smith unveiled her fourth and final pathway, which serves as a culmination of her extensive research in transraciolinguistics. In ‘Black Immigrants in the United States: Transraciolinguistic Justice for Imagined Futures in a Global Metaverse’ in the *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, she examines the complexities of linguistic and racial entanglements, shedding light on the injustices and challenges that Black immigrants face as just one exemplar of how these complexities emerge.

Her work envisions opportunities for engaging with transraciolinguistics to liberate fields like literacy and language

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research from the constraints imposed on personhood, as influenced by factors such as foreignness, language accentuation, and racialisation. Dr Smith introduces the concept of a ‘global metaverse’ to underscore the interconnected nature of these experiences worldwide, emphasising that Black immigrants’ struggles transcend national borders. Dr Smith’s ultimate goal is to demonstrate how rethinking these norms can foster solidarity within the Black community and bridge divides between Black and White communities on a global scale, ultimately leading to a more just and inclusive future worldwide.

Dr Smith’s thought-provoking LSE USAPP blog post in 2023, ‘How Black immigrant literacies can reinstate Black language and transcend the global myth of invented illiteracy and Black brokenness’ followed by her groundbreaking book ‘Black Immigrant Literacies: Intersections of Race, Language, and Culture in the Classroom’, offers additional perspectives on the societal impact of her work. By traversing this pathway, Dr Smith’s research on Black immigrants in the USA provides a compelling and powerful viewpoint on the intersection of race, language, and culture designed to provoke a shift in literacy teaching and research worldwide.

#### Dr Patriann Smith’s Impact on Inclusive Literacy Practices

Dr Patriann Smith’s pioneering work is a testament to her unwavering commitment to promoting inclusive and equitable literacy practices. Through her extensive research, she has unveiled four distinct pathways that underscore the pressing need for a profound transformation in literacy research, practice, and policy. Each pathway provides critical insights into how literacy can be more effectively harnessed to create a more just society. We invite readers to explore her extensive publications, books, podcasts, and videos, all of which offer valuable perspectives on the intersection of race, language, and education and a deeper understanding of her mission. Her legacy is an enduring beacon of hope and progress, guiding us towards a more inclusive and equitable future in education.



# Meet the Researcher



## Dr Patriann Smith

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Dr Patriann Smith is a distinguished scholar, author, and educator, specialising in language and literacy. She holds a position at the University of South Florida, and her extensive academic journey includes a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction, with a concentration in Literacy Studies, a cognate in Multilingual Education, and an MEd in Reading Education. She also holds a BSc in Elementary Education and an AA in Elementary Teacher Training. With a diverse career, she has served in professorial roles at various prestigious institutions, including the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of South Florida. Her research focuses on the intersection of race, language, and immigration, emphasising transculturally, transracially, and translanguistically responsive literacy and assessment practices. Dr Smith's dedication to diversity and equity is evident through her leadership roles, numerous awards, and active involvement in academic organisations. Her scholarship is characterised by a commitment to creating positive change and advancing equity in education. She is the author of 'Black Immigrant Literacies: Intersections of Race, Language, and Culture in the Classroom' (2023) and 'Black Immigrant Literacies: Translanguaging Imaginaries of Innocence' (2024), and Co-Founder of the RISE Caribbean Educational Research Center.

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### FURTHER READING

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