

Review:

**Amy J. Wan. *Producing Good Citizens: Literacy Training in Anxious Times*.
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Producing *Good Citizens* excavates the historical trajectories of immigration and economic uncertainty by arguing that citizenship has long been yoked to literacy. Wan posits that literacy learning holds curative and corrective power to ameliorate anxieties over citizenship in the face of immigration and imperialism. Turning to the early twentieth century, she impressively deconstructs citizenship's assumed place in education by complicating seemingly stable definitions of citizenship that permeate throughout institutional and instructional settings. While scholars have acknowledged literacy's involvement in immigration testing and voting rights, Wan's text rightfully submits that the attainment and recognition of citizenship happens through the habits and processes implicated in literacy learning through various educative spaces. Such spaces imagine conflicting definitions of the citizen, and when seen together, she successfully shows that literacy and citizenship strive to sanction some individuals over others.

Wan's robust archive takes readers on a compelling journey to the United States during 1910-1929 to explore literacy instruction in federally funded Americanization programs, union education, and university English classrooms. She argues that within each of these settings, literacy codified citizenship to envision competing definitions for the emerging American. By focusing on three different educational settings, she maintains that unspoken and unstable definitions of citizenship pervade society. Through her use of the term "ambient" citizenship, her analysis responds to participatory and liberatory notions of citizenship; literacy is often used as a "mass strategy" (3) that negotiates the terms of citizenship. Such work amalgamates scholarship from literacy studies (e.g. Graff, Duffy, Young, Heath, Street, Brandt, Prendergast), composition history (e.g. Berlin, Connors, Crowley, Gold, Ritter), and citizenship theory (e.g. Allen, Cruikshank, Turner) and offers a neoliberal vantage point that contributes to the work of literacy and equality. Wan renders an important, noteworthy archive that investigates literacy's relationship to "good" citizenship. Readers get a glimpse at the anxieties, uncertainties, and inequities often negated when defining citizenship. Further, readers confront Wan's compelling argument that illuminates the tensions between literacy education and civic production, which urges composition instructors to nuance meanings of citizenship in the classroom.

The most impressive analyses rest in chapters 2 and 3 where Wan examines how different literacy instruction programs strove to create a particular type of citizen. Chapter 2 investigates the textbooks and guidebooks of federally funded Americanization programs that privileged the citizen identity of the worker while eradicating previous immigrant identities. Wan harkens readers back to the Citizenship Convention in 1916, which called for a unification of citizenship education. This led to the first edition of a federally sponsored citizenship training series dispersed in 1918 throughout towns across America. After the 1906 Naturalization Act, which called for English competency of immigrants, and the 1917 Immigration Act that excluded "truly undesirable" (45) immigrants coming from the Asia-Pacific triangle, these federally funded programs responded to the move from agriculture to mass manufacturing by imagining the immigrant ready for citizenship as one who is compliant, assimilable, and capable of economic potential.

Wan's framework highlights that democracy understood through these programs emphasized a neoliberal American subjectivity that promoted economic participation and personal responsibility. She argues that the gains in literacy immigrants needed to attain occurred through a commitment to economic productivity and individual responsibility. Such commitments helped them prove their capacity to become American.

While the federally funded programs idealized the “right” kind of literacy learning due to its focus on individualism, chapter 3 turns to union education programs from the Workers’ Education Bureau (WEB) and the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union (ILGWU). The “literacy hope” (14) of these groups aimed less at individualism and more towards collectivity. This chapter looks to union conferences, extracurricular education programs for union members, the labor newspaper *Justice*, and testimonies from ILGWU authorities to explore how literacy was used to teach citizenship in light of worker consciousness, introducing socialist notions to the idea of citizenship. Intriguingly, Wan underscores that the union education responded to the same anxieties of immigration and changing work landscapes as the federally funded literacy programs; however, she unveils how these programs imagined a different kind of citizen who worked within a union and maintained equitable civic responsibility to other workers. These educational programs that were sought out beyond public education paid close attention to unequal relationships between workers and employees, which troubled the democratic promise of equality. Wan demonstrates that the imagined citizen, according to union education programs, acted intelligently on behalf of the collective, which stands in direct contrast to the imagined neoliberal, individualistic citizen sponsored by the federally funded programs. While the programs were eventually shut down due to fear of the immigrant and anxiety over socialism, the goals of these literacy programs were believed to counter the ramifications of mass manufacturing and economic stratification.

After revealing the individualist and collective tensions present in these two paradigms for literacy training, Wan turns to the college writing classroom to explore how academia grappled with these cultural, political, and economic shifts. She focuses on the National

Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and *English Journal* in the early twentieth century before moving to the contemporary moment. Academic journals at the turn of the century revealed anxieties concerning the field's responsibility to carry out the public goals of citizenship and literacy. These same anxieties persist today, and Wan presses us as teachers to acknowledge that the values of citizenship endemic to college classrooms are not neutral. She thoughtfully identifies two "brands" of citizenship which are often at odds with one another in our classrooms: "[A] citizenship measured by the self-improvement and success of the individual versus a citizenship measured by the degree of participation and civic responsibility, with literacy playing a key role in both" (153). Looking to two DREAMer testimonies, Wan calls us to locate how individual responsibility still bolsters success in attaining citizenship because the DREAM Act posits success in education as evidence for citizenship. Thus literacy instruction often purports itself to cultivate citizenship that is active and desired; however questions of access are often relegated when we focus too closely on the individual success. Wan urges us to rethink how the individual correlates to the larger structure of literacy.

Wan's work offers important purchase for composition teachers who see themselves as imbuing students with the skills needed for civic participation that might elide the problems associated with access, responsibility, and individualism. While Wan's text does a successful job of revealing the habits that lead one to be seen as worthy of citizenship, more explicit attention could be paid to the relationship college literacy instruction has to the current neoliberal nation-state, how that relationship haunts our writing classrooms, and what composition instructors should do in response. Her analyses at the turn of the century foreground how liberal discourses of individualism, personal responsibility, and questions of equality circulate throughout literacy training; however, the nation-state and neoliberalism seem to loom in the background of her analyses of actual writing classrooms today. Her text leaves us to grapple with the following questions: How have these fraught tensions over sanctioning citizenship through individualism or collectivism, economic participation, and personal responsibility carried over into our current composition classrooms, and what role does the citizen-teacher have in responding to the nation-state's pressure to bound understandings of citizenship?

Literacy classrooms shape definitions of citizenship; achieving literacy skills creates the “illusion of equality” (26). However, Wan crucially reveals that citizenship is not stable, fixed, nor permanent, and literacy is often seen as a way to remedy the tensions surrounding equality. That is, literacy training becomes a way to demarcate the illiterate as unworthy of citizenship. When we dangerously invest in these narratives, we risk acknowledging the legal, material, political, and cultural ramifications present in questions of access to educative spaces. This work calls upon scholars to interrogate the ways we buy into stable, fixed, and permanent notions of citizenship that precariously circulate in our classrooms.

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