REVIEW ESSAY

VARIATIONS ON A THEME: STUDENTS' LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

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Smitherman, Geneva, and Victor Villanueva, eds. *Language Diversity in the Classroom: From Intention to Practice.* Forward by Suresh Canagarajah. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003. 162 pp. Index.

Richardson, Elaine. *African-American Literacies.* Forward by Geneva Smitherman. New York: Routledge, 2003. 177 pp. Index.

Richardson, Elaine B., and Ronald L. Jackson II, eds. *African American Rhetoric(s): Interdisciplinary Perspectives.* Forward by Jacqueline Jones Royster. Introduction by Keith Gilyard. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004. 309 pp. Index.

Kutz, Eleanor. *Exploring Literacy: A Guide to Reading, Writing, and Research.* New York: Longman, 2004. 574 pp. Index. Accompanying Instructor's Manual, 256 pp.

In choosing books for review, I wanted new pieces that would continue the theme of this volume: language diversity. There is also much diversity among these four. The first book addresses issues of students' language and what our profession (teaching and composition studies) has done in the face of such diversity; the next two focus specifically on African-American language and literacy issues, and the fourth is a college

composition textbook that teaches writing through the concept of discourse communities. The first and third are compilations of essays, the second and fourth are single author works. The first is monograph length; the second includes chapters on African American history and reports on a composition class research project; the third features eighteen different writers, divided into three sections; and the fourth is a textbook directed toward first-year college students accompanied by an instructor's manual that discusses the text's linguistic foundations and provides sample teaching plans and activities. The books bring a rich variety of information, issues and perspectives. But it is the similarities that make them important to understanding the relationship between students' language, literacy, and teaching.

All deal with language variation in our English-speaking classrooms and support students' rights to their own languages. All understand that language practices and literacy are intimately bound; all explore the relationship between students' home languages and the "standard" language and literacy expectations of academe. All include pedagogy—ideas that can help us not only understand the issues about language variation but also how to apply our understanding to teaching.

All four books share some fundamental assertions: that students come to the classroom with a rich linguistic repertoire and highly competent home language; that this home language will compete, most often unfavorably, with the "standard" English most teachers expect in the classroom; that most teachers have (and many still do), however unknowingly, try to break the "bad" language habits students bring by teaching them standard English, usually through some form of grammar drills, usually by pointing out errors. Each of these books, albeit in different ways, call into question whether there is any such variation as "standard" or "Standard" English, whether students really do need to learn "our" language. If so, how best to teach them; if not, what do they need to learn? Each of these books asks the fundamental question: how can we teach students the "language" of academe in our composition classroom while still preserving the integrity of their

home language, the language that captures the identity they bring to the classroom. Each is founded in linguistic principles and study; these authors know of what they speak.

Linguists have long struggled to understand the boundaries between a language and a dialect or between any two variations of a language. Where does one stop and another begin? While defining the boundaries may be of interest to linguists, many people, and unfortunately many teachers, as these books variously point out, think they already know the difference: What "I" use is "standard" English; what students bring is a dialect. Thus, what students need to learn is "my" English. Such polarization does little to help teachers understand or respect, much less appreciate, the language competency with which students enter their classrooms—that whatever language variation students use, they use grammatically (albeit a grammar that may be different than the teachers'). Further, as Vygotsky and many second-language theorists have suggested, we learn language best through interaction, exposure, and use, rather than through an authoritative teaching voice telling us what we *should* say and how we *should* sound. Complicating language and literacy-learning issues even further is that the language we use is intimately bound to self and community identities. The variation we speak most fundamentally represents the language of our childhoods, our homes, and our neighborhoods. In our variations are the signals that identify who we are and from whom and from where we have come.

The problem is that we, language arts and writing teachers, do not know what to do with the language variations that our students bring to classrooms. Can we both encourage new language and literacy learning and support students' home language and identity? Certainly, composition studies and members of NCTE/CCCC, which would include these authors, have devoted substantial time and energy toward establishing the policy of students' rights to their own language, toward advocating against authoritative teaching methods, and toward teaching that is conscious and conscientious about power and

privilege. It is this latter issue that creates the most havoc because it forces us to look at our own values and attitudes about language variations and about the people who use them.

Howard Tinberg (2001) touches the heart of the problem: "Compositionists engage in these causes from positions of privilege themselves, privilege based on race, gender, and class" (353). Although he is discussing issues of socio-economic class rather than language variation, language could be added to Tinberg's list; it may even be the basis of such privilege. Tinberg continues by noting the dilemma teachers face, between viewing writing classrooms as a "site for critical literacy and social action" and as "the place to acculturate students into the academy" (354). Given such polarized positions, teachers are left without a way of dealing with class differences. Similarly they are left without a way of teaching literacy that can help students both keep their home language and be able to communicate effectively with an audience that practices a different dialect, including edited written English. Do we need to privilege one language variety? Couldn't we make all varieties legitimate? These books say, yes. However, changing our social conditions and the values that support them becomes the crux of the problem. The goal, to paraphrase Karl Marx, is not only to understand the world, and our students' variations, but to change it—through our teaching. These four books go a far way toward giving us both—understanding and practical classroom help.

The compilation of essays in *Language Diversity in the Classroom*, edited by Geneva Smitherman and Victor Villanueva, shows us just how disparate understanding, intentions, and practices can be. What I like about this monograph is its broad perspective; it gives us an overview of the variety of perspectives and issues involved in understanding and applying values about language variation. The essays range from giving a history of the CCCC Students' Rights resolution (Smitherman), to analyzing literacy professionals' attitudes toward and education in language issues (Richardson, Ball and Muhammad), to discussing the globalization of English that creates "Englishes" (Cliett), to

providing a variety of practical classroom approaches (Lovejoy, Okawa) and, finally, to making available an excellent bibliography (some annotated) on language diversity issues (Swearingen and Pruett). All suggest that we need to transform our intention to respect students' language into practices that will enable students to learn, and it is expedient that we do so as soon as possible. In a democratic society, it is not only just and right that people should be linguistically equal, it is also economically necessary. In an ever more global economy we need a literate, educated workforce. For example, the current issue of the *CAEL Forum and News* (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning) calls the "future worker shortage in the United States and the lack of worker skills" a crisis. "The world is becoming one economy, the nations that fully utilize their workers are more likely to thrive than those that do not" (8). Education is key to developing and maintaining our workforce and our standard of living. The capitalistic motives of U.S. business and the altruistic values of those advocating for students rights to their own language make for strange bedfellows, but they may also be mutually beneficial ones. The irony is that so much of today's attitudes toward language variation in the U.S. can be traced to the effects of slavery, which created African-American English while simultaneously benefiting the U.S. economy.

A more recent history is the focus of the first essay, Geneva Smitherman's "The Historical Struggle for Language Rights in CCCC." She provides a fascinating eye-witness account of the process and the politics involved in the Conference on College Composition and Communication's adoption of the "Students' Right to Their Own Language" in 1974. While the resolution has been much applauded, although not universally so either then or now as Smitherman points out, the issues, the politics, and the controversies continue to be just as real today as they were in the 1970's. Some argued then, and some would argue today, that the resolution went too far, further disenfranchising dialect-speaking students; others argued that it didn't go far enough, still privileging standard English by advocating that teachers inform

students about the need to learn standard English (25). In spite of such conflict, the resolution passed, articulating the intention that teachers be respectful of students' home language.

What it didn't do was provide teachers with classroom practices. Members of the resolution committee did develop materials for the classroom as a sequel to the "Students' Rights" document, but these were never published. Smitherman attributes this omission to the conservative political climate of the 1980's and 90's in which the legitimacy of African-American English, as an example of one variation, was again called into question. To be persuaded, one needs to think only of the ongoing English-only movements, to which the CCCC responded with the National Language Policy, or the brouhaha that the press created about the Oakland attempt to recognize Ebonics as a home language. Such flare ups of opposition to legitimizing variations remind us that language is never politically neutral and that few of us are as enlightened as members of the CCCC's resolutions committees might have wanted. Smitherman does not say where those practical classroom materials are today. We can hope that they will continue to appear in pedagogy sections of books such as these.

What surprised me was that NCTE never passed a similar students' rights resolution. Instead, NCTE passed a "weak version" of the resolution, stating that all dialects are "'equally efficient systems of communication'" and that "students need to learn the 'conventions of what has been called written edited American English'" (Smitherman 34). I can hear my colleagues agreeing; what could be wrong with such a seemingly win-win position? The point is a fairly subtle but important one. The NCTE resolution does admit that all dialects are equally important *for communication*—a good start—but it then separates written language into something "other," as something that needs to be taught, as something privileged, thereby implying that students' home language is not appropriate, not "good enough" for written work, much less for educated and literate use. Of course, such a polarized dichotomy is false as many have pointed out:

Smitherman's essay, the books under review, any number of excellent and effectively written pieces that use multilingual and multidialectal variations, and most sociolinguists. While linguists have shown differences between written and oral language patterns (e.g., Halliday, Tannen), these are differences of degree rather than kind, dependent on audience, purpose, and context, which are variables that affect any use of language. The real difference is in the values and attitudes we hold about specific variations, written English being one of those variations. Obviously much still needs to be done.

Professional attitudes about language is the focus of the next essay, in which Elaine Richardson analyzes data from a 1996-98 survey conducted by the CCCC Language Policy Committee. The survey tried to assess the state of knowledge, training, and attitudes about linguistic diversity in its membership. The CCCC questionnaire addressed areas such as: academic training in language diversity; whether such training is needed and what kind/degree; attitudes toward language variation as well as toward the members' own language; and the extent to which their own practices reflect awareness of diversity. The results are interesting although not surprising; they are only slightly more positive than I might have predicted. For example, findings support the literature that suggests that "teachers generally possess a greater range of language attitudes than the general public" and that "one's attitude toward a language or language variety affects one's attitude toward an entire group of people associated with that language or language variety" (Richardson 42). I was a bit surprised that over 96 percent felt that students needed to master standard English for upward mobility (45). Apparently they have forgotten that any number of bilingual and bidialectal entrepreneurs and shopowners are quite appropriately using nonstandard Englishes when conducting business in their "'hoods." Two other areas gave me pause. First, non-native/bilingual English speakers fair somewhat better than bidialectical ones. Only 33 percent thought that non-native English students should be taught only in English (implying only in *standard* English), but

90% indicated that nonstandard users should be taught in standard English, even though 80% agreed that there are valid reasons for using nonstandard dialects. Foreign languages have academic standing while dialects do not? I also wondered what might constitute "valid" reasons and why teaching wasn't one of them. Finally, I was appalled to see that over 78% thought that learning grammar rules would improve students' ability to understand and communicate concepts and information (46). Have we learned so little about language acquisition—or even about human nature—as to believe that knowing rules leads to using rules? We need to educate each other as well as our students.

Victoria Cliett's essay, "The Expanding Frontier of World Englishes: A New Perspective for Teachers of English" encourages us to understand language diversity outside our immediate local or national context. She reminds us that today's "English" is a global language with multiple variations, or "Englishes," and that our arguments about the legitimacy of Ebonics, in the classroom or out, are myopic, a particular U.S. preoccupation that blinds us to the very real presence and important function of other Englishes used to conduct personal, national, and global business. English variations are not only an African-American English issue, although certainly African-Americans have born the brunt of the problems in the United States. Cliett points to the socio-economic benefits of an inclusionary stance toward linguistic variations: for meeting the needs of global economy for a literate, skilled workforce for whom English of any variety is likely to be a financial benefit, for understanding that all people are multidialectal; and for constantly reminding us that our socio-cultural values about language can affect us all. A war in Iraq seems an appropriate example of the problems that differences in socio-cultural (and so also linguistic) values can create.

The subsequent three essays focus more closely on classroom issues. Arnetha E. Ball and Rashidah Jaami' Muhammad, in "Language Diversity in Teacher Education and in the Classroom," report on their research into language awareness in teacher

preparation. They found that few teacher education programs include the study of language in their curricula. Lucky enough to be in a university where at least one language course is required of English Education students and several more are offered, I was shocked and dismayed. How will we ever change our classroom practices if teachers don't understand the fundamental issues about language variations? The answer, in part, is by each of us advocating for additional language-oriented classes in our schools and by reading books such as these.

In "Practical Pedagogy for Composition" Kim Brian Lovejoy discusses the ways that he has started to transform his practices in the classroom, how he changed the "lessons" he teaches in order to help students shift their conceptions of English and of language varieties, including the varieties that students use themselves. One of the examples he gave made me pause and think yet again about the complex relationship between language and literacy education.

During a discussion about language variation, one of Lovejoy's students

> asked why we should value varieties of English other than EAE [Edited American English]. After all, she reasoned, we are in school to be educated, and part of that education is learning how to use language effectively. Those who do not use EAE are just uneducated; they haven't learned the rules. . . . Everyone knows that standard English is the language that counts. (91)

I have heard similar reasoning from my students, both in my composition classes and in a "Nature of Language" class that I teach. I also can't help but notice the neat syllogistic logic, a form of reasoning privileged in traditional western cultures and in education. What's wrong and what's right with this reasoning? Lovejoy notes that the argument is false for a number of rational and linguistically sound reasons: all variations are equally efficient in communicating needs (true); all people "shift styles in their

spoken language . . . as they move in and out of different situations of language use. Is writing any different, in this respect?" (of course, not). The problem then, as Lovejoy goes on to argue, is one of prescription, an issue of rightness (of enforcing a "standard" English) and wrongness (of legitimizing all variations). If we were to see EAE as only one among other variations of language, then all variations are valid (true). Lovejoy's essay continues by giving readers excellent ideas for integrating activities that will give students exposure to language variations, EAE among them. I value Lovejoy's linguistic approach, intentions, and practices, which would be applicable to a variety of classrooms, although his are writing classes.

Yet the student's question niggled at me. It seemed that there was more to this issue of which language counts, what signifies "educated." It seemed to me that we may be missing the issue of identity in our effort to equalize EAE with other variations. For example, my language, my "voice," including how I sound, what I say, who I am, comes from my history with and in a family. In my voice are: my and my family's first language (Polish), where we are from (northern Midwest), my family's socio-economic background (lower class), and my family's level of education (very low). My voice has changed over the years; I have been able to increase the number of variations I can use. I learned these variations from reading and writing and from interacting with a variety of others. Today my voice also includes academic English (or more academic than my family voice could allow, academic enough to let me write this book review, enough to get me a Ph.D. in English). My identity has also changed: English is now my primary language, although I still sound like many northern Midwesterns who have a Polish background; my educational level is comparatively high. But I wonder about the cause and effect. Did I learn the "rules" about which language to use and so become educated? Or was language a by-product of becoming educated? Do we talk the talk and then walk the walk, or vice versa? The student's point is that the language we use signals "educated" and education is what gets

valued in academe. (The same value does not necessarily hold true outside the classroom, of course. At home or in the business world "appropriate" language is key and appropriate will mean using whatever variation will communicate effectively in that context, to that audience.)

Educating students is what teachers do; it's our job. How we do so becomes the question and how we do so affects what "educated" means. Unfortunately, educated has become equated with the use of "standard English" rather than with the critical thinking students' language can convey irrespective of the variation used. Elaine Richardson's book, *African American Literacies*, examines such connections by looking at the relationships between education, language use, and socio-cultural issues. Focusing specifically on issues of African American English (alternately called Ebonics, Black English, etc.) as a linguistic and socio-cultural phenomenon, Richardson's book joins a growing and impressive body of works about African American language issues, Geneva Smitherman's being among the most noteworthy. It is heady company, and at times I felt a self-conscious tone in the book, as though the author was wondering about its worthiness. In spite of this being Richardson's first book, she shouldn't have worried. The first two chapters provide an important review of the relationship between language and culture in American and African-American history. The book would be valuable for this history alone. But it offers much.

I found Chapter 3, "'To protect and serve': African American female literacies," to be among the most intriguing. So much so that I immediately re-read it. Is there a separate, identifiable African-American women's literacy? Richardson suggests there is, although not well researched or recorded. Yet Richardson shows a history replete with African American women writers and activists—Phyllis Wheatley, Sojourner Truth, Zora Neal Hurston, Toni Morrison, bell hooks, Geneva Smitherman, a rich legacy and heady company indeed. I found the book's self-conscious voice endearing; it provided a very real voice and the real presence of Elaine Richardson, woman, African American, a

dialect speaker, a thinker, a writer. Richardson achieved what few writers can: she allowed me to get to know her in and through her writing, without making this a memoir, without focusing on herself. The story, for this is fundamentally a story, focuses on African-American history and on Richardson's place in it, as both a member and an activist. The book is worth reading for this feat alone—history presented as personable but not simply personal.

There are many other reasons for reading the book. The last three chapters report on Richardson's study of students' writing in her own college composition class, which used African-American language and literature as a thematic basis. Richardson designed the syllabus and materials for the class on African-American language and literature for African-American students, who were allowed to write using whatever variation they chose. (She also had white students in the class but studied only the African-American student samples.) She then compared pre- and post-writing samples for both formal and rhetorical markers of African-American usage and for critical thinking skills. The concept and the methodology are interesting and made me think about ways in which I might study students' grasp of home and EAE language issues in my own classes.

Chapter 4, in particular, focuses on the results of her study. Findings show that the African-American students liked the class but also that the amount they wrote and the level of critical thinking increased dramatically over the semester. While they also used African-American rhetorical and linguistic markers to express their thinking, Richardson found that these decreased in the post-test samples. Unfortunately, the sample is relatively small and more suggestive than it is definitive. To what extent, for example, does the teacher, who is also African-American, affect these results? Could I, a white, middle-class, older woman, implement this curriculum equally well? Possibly; others have at least to some extent.

For example, Arthur Palacas (this volume) describes his success in teaching about Ebonics (or AAE) in his writing class. As

a linguist and writing teacher, I think teaching about Ebonics is a way to teach about language diversity as well as language history and evolution (see also, Palacas 2001). But Palacas's class seems to focus on the language forms and structures rather than on African American literature or rhetoric. Conversely, while Richardson does include AAE structures, her class focuses more on AAE rhetorical strategies and on critical thinking based on an analysis of African American literature (both fiction and non-fiction). Rather than asking students to "learn" standard EAE, Richardson compares variations and discusses rhetorical strategies and effects in the pieces they read but encourages students to write in whatever language they choose. I applaud the stance and appreciate the connection of African-American literature to students' history and lives. Further, if the course content is indicated in the bulletin, all students, white or black, could choose whether or not to take this course. Choice would be crucial, I think. Not all students, white or black, will think such content is appropriate or even interesting, and I wouldn't want to replace the traditional canon with a new African-American-only one. While one might suggest that turn-around is fair play, given African-American subjection to white cultural content and approaches, the objective would be to not disenfranchise any students no matter the color of their skins, no matter the cultural background. Diversity should teach diversity by deed as well as word.

The issue of rhetoric as a cultural construct reappears in *African American Rhetoric(s)* edited by Elaine Richardson and Ronald L. Jackson II. This book expands the scholarship that Elaine Richardson began with *African-American Literacies*. Sporting a lineup of authors that reads like a current who's-who of African-American scholars, the book brings together a variety of perspectives that examine what constitutes an African-American rhetorical tradition and how that tradition makes itself manifest today, including suggestions for pedagogy and for the future. After reading the book, I had little doubt not only that there is an

identifiable Afrocentric, African-American rhetoric, but also that it affects what and how students write.

Following the Foreword by Jacqueline Jones Royster and a Preface by the editors, Keith Gilyard sets the stage with his "Introduction: Aspects of African-American Rhetoric as a Field" by tracing the history of studies on African-American rhetorical oratory. Among the wealth of interesting and well-documented information, I found two notions particularly thought-provoking. The first, "Nommo," was a term I had heard but hadn't encountered in studies until I came across it in Richardson's *African-American Literacies*. The concept is important in understanding the power of language and of understanding the history of African-American rhetoric. While I didn't find a dictionary definition, I can understand why: the term refers to a concept, a cultural understanding that is not easily captured in a nominal definition. Describing Arthur Smith's (1972) work on Afrocentric concepts of rhetoric, Gilyard notes that Smith poses Nommo "as opposite Western persuasive technique:"

> The public discourse convinces not through attention to logical substance but through the power to fascinate. . . . [I]t simply expresses a belief that when images are arranged according to their power and chosen because of their power, the speaker's ability to convince is greater than if he attempted to employ syllogisms. The syllogism is a Western concept, *Nommo* is an African concept. (Smith, cited in Gilyard 13).

The second notion is tied to the first. As Smith indicates, Nommo, and so African-American rhetorical style, emphasizes imagery along with the emotional and affective aspects of the images chosen. This cultural privileging of emotions means that they also appear in students' language use, and in the genres (and attitudes) that support students' ability to express emotions. Of course, such expressions and values fly in the face of the usual emphasis on reason and syllogistic logic as the most appropriate

mode of expression in academic discourse. In brief, Nommo refers to the power of "the word," the power of language and of rhetoric to both include and exclude, to both gather and disperse a people and a person, in the world and in the classroom. An understanding of Nommo supports each of the essays in this book. If we hope to support students' rights to their own language in our classrooms, then we also need to understand not simply African-American English forms such as use of the verb "to be" or the absence of "s" endings; we also need to understand the rhetorical traditions from which students are writing and thinking.

The rest of the book is divided into three parts. "Part One: Historicizing and Analyzing African American Rhetoric(s)" includes works that analyze African-American rhetorical and literate traditions, topics, and personages: Frances Ellen Watkins Harper; Black Power in the 1960's and *Boyz in the Hood;* the Black Panther Party; a comparison of Zora Neale Hurston's and Geneva Smitherman's work. Each present interesting and insightful issues about the development of a personal and public African-American identity. For me, however, the most interesting one was Jacqueline K. Bryant's "The Literary Foremother: An Embodiment of the Rhetoric of Freedom." It presents the on-going role of the African American woman as a rhetor, one who may simultaneously be a symbol (such as the "good mammy" sterotype), a model for today's youth (a strong "anti-mammy" persona), and a very real person who walks between both white and black worlds in order to support, even make, an identity available to African-American descendents.

"Part Two: Visions for Pedagogy of African American Rhetoric" consists of four essays that focus on African-American rhetoric(s) in the classroom and that help students both better understand African-American rhetorical strategies and engage in practicing the same. These include: examining the connections between Nubian/Egyptian and African-American rhetorical styles (Clinton Crawford, whose 2001 book, *Ebonics and Langauge Education,* is also excellent); bringing oral traditions into the classroom in order to teach writing (Lena Ampadu), and using

literacy stories to examine students' backgrounds and identities (Elaine Richardson). The last of the four essays encourages teachers to look at the rhetoric of democracy itself by exploring contracts and bills of sales to examine and write about the fit between such contracts and African-American's history as well as current agency and power (Victoria Cliett). Each of these essays seems to assume an African-American dominant classroom, but the information is important and adaptable. White students rather desperately need to learn about African-American cultural and rhetorical traditions if we hope for a society in which white and black traditions and rhetoric(s) can peacefully co-exist.

"Part Three: Visions for Research and African American Rhetoric(s)" is a bit of a catch-all section that presents interesting views and raises questions about African-American rhetoric that warrant further study. This section includes the effects of technology (Adam Banks); the benefit of movies like *Amistad* (Kermit E. Campbell); the role of "Hush Harbors," or silent places, in the African-American rhetorical tradition (Vorris L. Nunley); the use of Toni Morrison's language issues for teaching (Joyce Irene Middleton); and, finally, a piece by William W. Cook that uses the intriguing title "Found not Founded." It closes the book very nicely by providing a historical context for African American rhetoric in the transition from Africa to the America's. As with African American English, the slaves brought their African linguistic, rhetorical traditions with them but then had to reformulate these to suit their American lives. They had literally to develop a rhetoric for themselves, again showing the intellectual and emotional power of Nommo, a creative force in establishing AAE, an AA rhetoric, and an identity for self and community.

Each of these three books provide some amount of practical classroom help, but none of them lay out a coherent curriculum for teaching writing that focuses on students' own language, regardless of the language background they bring. Eleanor Kutz's *Exploring Literacies* does. It is directed at first-year composition classes, and, among the many hundreds (even thousands?) of

textbooks on the market, hers is, I believe, the only one that puts students' own language at the core, asking students to both study and write language-as-used—for various audiences, in various contexts.

Based on the concept that language variations are features of different discourse communities, the textbook invites students to explore their own language use and study how language is used in a variety of contexts, including academe. The text is divided into three parts, each of which culminates in one major paper and provides ideas for several others: Part I focuses on students' literacy history and home language and asks them to write a memoir. Part II broadens their perspectives by asking them to study how language is used in a community of which they are part. Part III focuses on academic contexts, asking them to research and analyze how language is used in an academic discipline, based either on a class in which they are enrolled (ethnographic type research) or a question relevant to the field (library type research). (See also Kutz et al, this volume, for a good summary of the text's set up and for examples of students' responses to assignments.) I will focus on what I and my students particularly liked about the text after using it in two composition classes—one a first year basic writing course and the other an upper, honors level research and writing class.

I liked the approach, the assignments, and the friendly but comprehensive "voice" of *Exploring Literacy*, but what appealed most to me and to my students was the direct use of and work with students' actual (home) language. Students were surprised at what they "sounded like" when they audio-taped their oral story-sample. They also discovered the differences between oral and written language after they first transcribed, and then transliterated their oral sample into a written version. They examined their experiences with language in their families and with friends (home language) and in school, and they compared the way language use changed in different situations, with different participants. Comparing such changes in familiar situations helped students realize not only the power of language

but also that outsiders to their groups would be as lost as they might be in an unfamiliar class, as they might be feeling in starting college.

Finally, students studied the practices of a disciplinary or professional discourse community—one they might be likely to pursue. This final project provided them with the opportunity for personally meaningful inquiry and research practices, while also providing them with additional knowledge about how to "walk the walk and talk the talk" of their choice. Students learned that our language will change as we join a community, whether personal, academic, or professional, which further supports the idea that we all, including students, make choices about our lives, our educations, and to some extent our language practices. Students found the focus on their own language and own experiences engaging; I found it a wonderful way to both teach respect for students' own home language while still inviting them into writing and thinking in new discourse communities by studying differences in language.

I found the coverage of reading, writing, and research strategies in the text to be excellent, and the text presents a nice balance of theory and practice. It provides concept building tools and ample opportunities to develop skills throughout. I liked the way the text "walked" the students (and the instructor) through the process of building skills in each area, and it explains why it is doing so throughout, something that few textbooks even attempt.

The variety of genres included for reading and writing, is another appealing feature. The book includes assignments that call for reading responses, reflective inquiries, observation accounts, research memos, summaries, comparisons, memoirs, critical essays, and ethnographic reports. Instead of teaching writing as modes of thinking, which at times feels like academic essay exercises rather than meaningful writing, Kutz's text teaches writing as "modes" of doing, which includes both thinking and writing, developing and using language effectively and appropriately for a situation, to an audience, in a context. In

short, I think that this is what we should have been doing in first-year composition classes all along.

The reading selections are also excellent and offer enough variety at an appropriate level. I like the juxtaposition of readings and the multi-perspective, multi-cultural offerings (e.g., Rodriquez, Rose, and Milieux provide Hispanic, white, and African-American perspectives). In addition, I think the difficulty of the readings progresses very nicely, from the narrative memoir types to analytic data-based research studies and theoretical pieces (e.g., Brice-Heath, Gee, and Haas). I also like the student samples included both as examples of writing and as readings; they were interesting to read and engaged students as much as the published pieces did. Further, the student samples increased in complexity and sophistication over the course of the three parts of the text, modeling the growth-over-time that learning and becoming an academic language "insider" entail.

I would describe this book as a new way to think about teaching writing and another way of understanding what it means to be educated. It helped me and my students see education not as a group of skills nor even as a package of information but as an invitation into a somewhat different discourse community, which always involves some difference in the way language is used—differences not in kind but in degree. Alternately, I think of this book as using a language acquisition approach to writing in which the students start by examining their own language and then work to acquire a new, more academic use. The book is inquiry focused and analytic, language-based, challenging, reflective, and eminently democratic. It makes the familiar, the "home" language students use and hear but rarely analyze, exotic, adventurous, and challenging.

Rather than presenting writing as a separate, learned skill, this textbook *invites* students to see writing and learning in a context of language practiced in, by, and for discourse communities. Rather than presenting education and language change as a coercive practice that forces students to change their own language, this text begins with the student's language and

invites them to study what becoming an "'insider,' and so 'changing' might mean." Using what I would consider an inclusionary approach, a course based on this textbook encourages students to ground their college work in their own experiences while also examining the expectations of academic language practices. It gives them choices about whether, when, or which insiders they might want to be.

It is harder for me to criticize the book—I liked it; my students liked it. I found that I could adapt the book for two very different classes—one lower level, the other an upper level research class. However, the book is different than most composition texts and I would suggest that teachers new to this kind of discourse community concept and application take some time to read and reflect on how much of the text they will use and why. The place to start that reflection is with the instructor's manual (written by Eleanor Kutz and Denise Paster), which provides an absolutely excellent discussion of the purpose, the background, and the activities included in the text. It also walks teachers through a semester-long schedule of activities and lesson plans. I can't praise the instructor's manual too highly for its practical as well as theoretical help. After my going on about these texts in a basic writing meeting, another instructor decided to require the text and the instructor's manual as part of his graduate level course for teaching writing. To me, this is high praise indeed, and it's another way that we each do our part in educating others about language diversity.

These four books show that the issues are as real today as they have ever been; that whatever we might call "progress" in welcoming a students' home language much less accepting or understanding or teaching language variations as a socially and historically created phenomenon is scant. They remind us of the historical and social forces that have created the variations; they provide activities for classroom use, and they pose fresh challenges for us as we continue to face the multiple varieties of English students bring. They remind us that, as the world (and English) becomes more and more socially and economically a global

community, we, too, need to learn, that it would behoove us to attend to the lessons we could—and should—learn ourselves so that we can then begin to teach those lessons to our students.

More specifically, more honestly, many of us really do not know quite what to do with the socio-economic differences that students' language variations often signal. We want to respect students' backgrounds; we want them to change so that we can go on hoping that the change will help them do "better" in the future. Many would hope that through education, racial and socio-economic differences would be eradicated, or at least blurred. History suggests this is misguided at best, hurtful at worst. The irony is that we should be having this conversation in the 50th anniversary of Brown vs. the Board of Education. Given that spirit of integration, have racial differences disappeared? Of course not. Are language differences also likely to disappear? Nothing in the history of language suggests that will be the case. In fact, if anything, the differences have become more apparent, the contrasts more visible. These books suggest that we embrace those contrasts as they appear in the students' language and that we understand rather than deny how language affects us and how we and our students affect each other in our mutual use of language in our classrooms. These books suggest that we have as much to learn from our students as they from us. Such lessons are definitely worth reading and learning.

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