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## **Affirming Students' Right to Their Own Language: Bridging Language Policies and Pedagogical Practice; Jerrie Cobb Scott, Dolores Y. Straker, and Laurie Katz, eds.**

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## *Affirming Students' Right to Their Own Language: Bridging Language Policies and Pedagogical Practice*

Jerrie Cobb Scott, Dolores Y. Straker, and Laurie Katz, eds.

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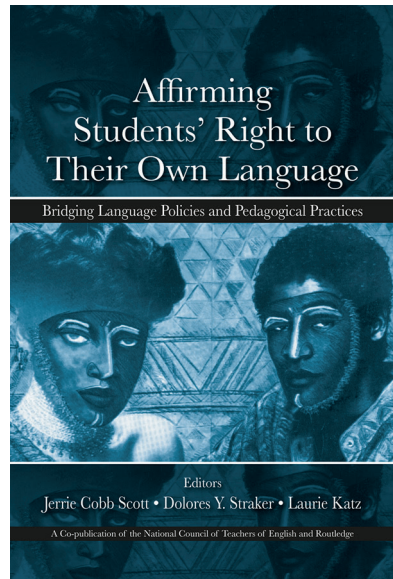
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In *Affirming Students' Right to Their Own Language*, a wide variety of authors address the pedagogical implications of the 1974 National Council of Teachers of English resolution on students' rights to their own language (STROL). This resolution, revisited and reaffirmed more recently in 2003, calls for schools and teachers to respect and draw on students' linguistic diversity as both a right and a resource. This book, designed for pre- and in-service teachers as well as teacher educators, professional development consultants, and policy makers, does an excellent job illuminating what the editors describe as the "unfinished business" of the STROL resolution: what teachers can do in their classrooms everyday to uphold students' linguistic rights.

This volume covers research on how classroom practices can give students access to their own languages. These practices are closely described and placed in a national and international context. In Part I of this comprehensive volume, STROL are situated historically and legally in the history of United States policy and legislations. This is done chronologically by the editors and thematically through interviews with authors Joel Spring, Geneva Smitherman, Mary Carol Combs and Christina Rodríguez. These interviews are noteworthy not only for thoroughly contextualizing STROL but also for the vernacular style. Conversational and easily accessible, the interviews provide balance to a largely academic text. In the manner of Alim and Anzaldúa, these authors expand traditional definitions of academic discourse both by what they say and by how they say it.

Part II explores some of the ways that language policies and classroom practices have failed to give students access to their own language, the reasons behind resistance to the 1974 resolution, and the consequences of such resistance. Part III is the most applied of all of the sections, describing teachers' use of STROL to guide instruction in different contexts and with different populations. In Part IV,



the book steps back into the workings of policy, this time in a global context. Part IV serves to contrast the permissive stance towards linguistic rights found in the U.S. with countries whose language policies explicitly acknowledge, protect, and defend linguistic diversity and linguistic minorities. It also highlights the links between the U.S. and other countries in a globalized world. This section serves to expand the readers' idea of what may be possible in U.S. classrooms, courts, and legislatures.

The book provides an important connection between the ideological commitment to giving students access to their language and the means with which to do this. This goal is well accomplished, particularly in Part III. The authors describe a variety of promising pedagogical techniques. The variety of settings (pre-K through 12) and languages (Spanish, Chinese, African-American Vernacular English, Greek Cypriot) and teachers' linguistic knowledge made this book useful for a wide range of audiences. Teacher educators in particular will find much of value here, including ideas to inform their research, advocacy, and work with pre-service teachers. A common criticism of edited books is uneven quality; this is not true of *Affirming Students' Right to Their Own Language*. The works included are uniformly excellent; all of the chapters are highly relevant, based on sound, diverse methodology. Together, they advance our understanding of how to respect students' linguistic rights and promote their academic achievement. Moreover, the book includes both a short and long view. It addresses how to support students now, as well as steps to address linguistic prejudices and values for future expansion of what counts as valuable literacy and linguistic practices.

*Affirming Students' Right to Their Own Language* encompasses wide territory, perhaps in an attempt to reach the many audiences identified by the editors in the introduction. The book contains multiple theoretical frameworks with which to understand student language, the core of the book. Some present STROL as a moral imperative: "the right of children to speak the language or dialect their mother loves them in," (Meyer, 54). Others, like Mari Haneda and Danling Fu, present powerful pedagogies that draw on language as a resource and an instrument for effective teaching. In their chapter on indigenous language policies and practices, Dorothy Aguilera and Margaret D. LeCompte frame language as part of Native identity and the historical struggle for greater tribal autonomy. These different theories of language are left to the reader to reconcile. For example, Rebecca Wheeler's chapter describes the usefulness of contrastive analysis (CA) as a technique for expanding students' linguistic repertoires; in contrast, David Kirkland and Austin Jackson's chapter, also on the uses of CA with African-American Language, concludes that the technique alone will not remove students' negative attitudes about the worth of their own language. While not contradictory, these two chapters in concert are at different points along a spectrum of language ideologies.

This presentation of multiple viewpoints may stem from the editors' goal of serving multiple audiences, many of whom differ in their background knowledge and beliefs about language. Several of the authors that write here about their work with pre-service teachers describe this group as primarily monolingual, middle-class and possessing internalized mainstream ideologies about the correctness of Standard English. The same generalization can be made of the general teacher population (Lippi-Green, 1996). This implies that some of the book's intended audience may

resist or question the book's premise. Nor do all of the chapters *necessarily* challenge standard language ideologies; some, in isolation, might primarily serve as guides to help students acquire Standard English more effectively. This multiplicity of frameworks is both a strength and a weakness. It means that even a skeptical audience will likely find something valuable and usable, particularly in the sections that position language as an instrument for academic success. However, not every piece adheres to the stated purpose of affirming language as a right.

This book would have been even stronger had it detailed more thoroughly the extent to which hybridity and code-switching constitute valid linguistic practices in themselves (Martínez, 2009). A reader new to the field might come to understand that code-meshing and code-switching serve as a transitional phase before fluency, rather than a normal practice of multilingual speakers in plurilingual communities (Canagarajah, 2006). Manawwar Hock's chapter on multilingualism in India highlights this, but few others do explicitly. This, however, is a relatively minor criticism and does little to detract from the book's worth.

Overall, the book does an excellent job increasing our understanding of how practices and policies can better support students. Throughout, language policies and practices are considered as they relate to students as whole people. In presenting student language as both a resource and a right, it advances the goal of making schools more humane places for students who are currently marginalized. *Affirming Students' Right to Their Own Language* provides important pedagogical insight and at the same time helps envision what macro and micro policy changes will be necessary to create a more just future for multilingual and multilectal students.

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