

Sociocultural Contexts of Language and Literacy

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SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXTS OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY. Bertha Perez (Ed.) with Teresa L. McCarty; Lucille J. Watahomigie; Maria E. Torres-Guzman; To thi Diem; Ji-Mei Chang; Howard L. Smith; Aurelia Davila de Silva Mahweh. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates 1998.

This is a solid contribution to the literature on language and literacy, which fuses theory and practice, but only in the context of the continental United States. With that limitation, it is a model of its kind, a book which has a great deal to offer and which works at several levels. It is highly recommended for teachers working on TESOL programs and for applied linguistics with an interest in multicultural education.

The editor is responsible for six of the twelve chapters, and two of the three sections. She begins with "Theoretical Perspectives on Language and Literacy," examining culture and linguistic diversity in the United States; existing programs for linguistically diverse students; research on literacy and biliteracy; writing systems; language discourse differences and the implications that all these factors have for the classroom.

In the second section, "Language and Literacy Acquisition in Diverse Communities," her associates speak for themselves. The reader is introduced to the problems facing Native American, Native Alaskan, Puerto Rican, Vietnamese-American, Chinese-American, and African-American community children, and is provided with a study of the development of the Spanish writing skills of a second grade student from the Mexican-American community. Hawaii, unfortunately, receives no attention, but a close reading of Section Two reveals that many communities have difficulties in common.

This point is emphasised in "Literacy Development in Multilingual, Multicultural Classrooms," where the editor moves from theory and first-hand evidence into practice. She explores instructional approaches, the teacher's role in biliteracy, capitalising on students' languages, developing a literacy curriculum, assessment, and the use of student portfolios. Her advice is eminently sensible, the use of theme-based instruction is thoroughly explored, and she includes a list of multicultural readers which could have applications beyond TESOL programs.