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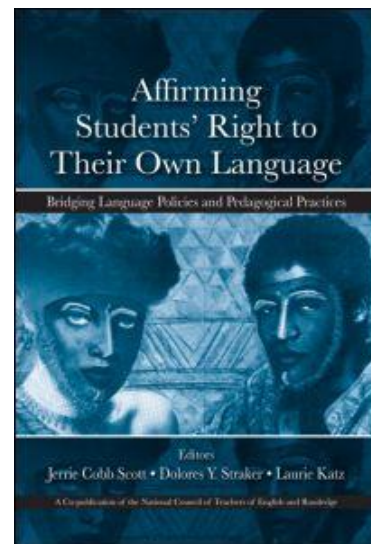
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Affirming Students' Right to Their Own Language: Bridging Language Policies and Pedagogical Practices. NY and London: The National Council of Teachers of English & Routledge.

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Affirming Student's Right to Their Own Language is a compilation of 26 chapters by 38 authors about language policies and pedagogical practices that have developed since the Students' Right to Their Own Language Resolution (SRTOL) was passed by the National Council of Teachers of English College Composition and Communication in 1974 and reaffirmed in 2003. The fundamental rights provided by the resolution that are the focus of the chapters are "(a) the right to access education for social, political, and economic participation in society; and (b) the right to access education in the student's primary language or mother tongue." (p. 3).



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Edited by **Jerrie Cobb Scott**, University of Memphis Professor of Urban Literacy, **Dolores Y. Straker** (recently deceased), former University of Cincinnati dean, and **Laurie Katz**, Ohio State University Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education, the book is broken into four parts containing from five to eight chapters each. The first two sections provide a more general discussion of policies affecting minority language rights, with the last two sections more directed toward providing specific pedagogical practices for supporting these rights in Pre-K-12 classrooms.



In his foreword to the book, Ohio State University Professor of Education David Bloome asks the readers to first consider how language is defined and in so doing, how it might then be redefined in a way that is more inclusive for those whose first language is a non-dominant language. Law and government, social institutions, and music and art are the three areas he identifies as being where language is defined, but that our current definitions of minority languages “have too often been defined in terms of unofficial human beings who are largely perceived as being less than human” (p. xv). English-only policies, racialized definitions of language (e.g., teaching Standard English versus other non-standard varieties), and even music and art have produced language definitions that marginalize speakers of minority languages.



The book’s cover has a drawing of a male and female wearing masks. The authors chose this cover as a metaphor for the treatment of students’ minority language rights; it is the mask that “grins and lies,” from a poem by Paul Lawrence Dunbar titled “We Wear the Mask” (p. xvii). The authors’ goal for the book is the “unmasking” of the support for students to use their “primary language and culture as resources for learning” (p. xvii).



In Part I, the editors review the history of U.S. language policies and the evolution of SRTOL, plus a general overview of what will be discussed in the following chapters. Authors represented in Part I include Joel Spring, Geneva Smitherman, Christina M. Rodríguez, and Mary Carol Combs, who discuss policies from economic, Ebonics, legal, and second language acquisition and social justice perspectives.

Part II continues the discussion of legal precedents and laws that have impacted minority language students, in particular African-Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans and Hawaiians. Seminal legal cases affecting language rights, such as *Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Meyer v. Nebraska*, *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Lau v. Nichols*, are discussed, as is the No Child Left Behind Act passed in 2001 and other acts specifically affecting Native American and Hawaiian students. Authors of the chapters in this section include John Baugh and Aaron Welborn; Rick Meyer; Dorothy Aguilera and Margaret D. LeCompte; Valerie Kinloch; editors Katz, Scott, and Xenia Hadjioannou; Nancy Rankie Shelton; and David E. Kirkland and Austin Jackson.

The first three of the seven chapters in Part II examine law and policy that have affected students from different minority language backgrounds. The last four, however, offer more specific suggestions for teacher education. The chapter by Katz, Scott, and Hadjioannou, as well as Shelton's chapter, show how using inquiry or self-discovery methods in teaching about diversity to pre-service teachers proved to be more effective in creating awareness than merely lecturing about it. One theme that begins to emerge in this part of the book and is echoed by later writers is the lack of representation in the classroom of minority teachers. Most educators entering the field are middle to upper class white females who have had little prior experience with minority language students.

Part III is the longest section of the book. It provides most of the specific pedagogical practices offered to help classroom teachers in implementing SRTOL, a main goal of the book. Most of the chapters have multiple authors. The authors of the chapters in this section are Beth V. Yeager and Judith L. Green; Rebecca S. Wheeler; Laurie Katz and Tempii Champion; Jeane Copenhaver-Johnson, Joy Bowman, and Angela Johnson Rietschlin; Tamara L. Jetton, Emma Savage-Davis, and Marianne Baker; Mari Haneda; Danling Fu; and Dorothea Anagnostopoulos.

The suggestions for teaching practices that support minority language speakers come in a variety of forms, many through descriptions of case studies. In Yeager and Green's chapter, for example, the authors describe their ethnographic study of successful 3rd and 5th grade bilingual Spanish/English classrooms, providing the example of how just by providing books and posters in the room in both languages, the importance of both languages is supported. The authors note that the teachers also used similar practices in classrooms where multiple languages were present, not just bilingual classrooms.

Wheeler's chapter discusses code-switching and how valuing students' African American Vernacular English (AAVE) dialect in teaching students about informal and formal English was successful. This chapter found that "comparison and contrast" was the most successful learning strategy, whereby students compared their dialect and that of Standard English to learn in an additive approach to learning. In describing the use of code-switching and contrastive analysis as part of a well-stocked linguistic toolbox, Wheeler states: "We *add* Standard English to our children's repertoires" (p. 188).

Katz and Champion's chapter discusses how storytelling might be different in different cultures. They do this so that teachers can better understand why minority language children might formulate stories differently from the white, middle class structure found in most curriculums: African-American and Haitian children might approach this genre differently, but this difference is not a deficiency but culturally based.

Copenhaver-Johnson, Bowman and Rietschlin emphasize that in diverse settings, using a child-centered approach might take more time but be more inclusive and encourage more participation overall. Jetton, Savage-Davis and Baker's chapter discusses how more culturally responsive teacher-practitioners can be developed by using multi-cultural literature with stories about challenges faced by children from diverse backgrounds: stories that might better reflect the backgrounds and experiences of minority language

students than the stories these teacher-practitioners have been exposed to previously.

Haneda discusses English Language Learners (“ELLs”), and how applying Dewey’s whole child concept in a 7th grade sheltered social studies class led to successful learning. She describes how an experienced teacher felt that ELLs were getting lost in her mainstream social studies classes, and created a “sheltered” class for ELLs and some native English speakers whom she felt would benefit from a slower pace. She applied various instructional strategies including longer wait time, rephrasing key information, and respecting the use of the students’ first languages. The result was highly engaged students whose class, when observed, could not be identified as sheltered.

Fu shows how letting ELLs initially write more in their primary language (Chinese) makes it easier for them to transition more easily to writing in English as their vocabularies develop. Students were allowed to mix both languages in their essays without censure. Anagnostopoulos finishes Part III discussing showing how high stakes testing influences literature discussions, in this case *To Kill a Mockingbird*. She shows how the concern about students’ knowing the information for the test, following prompts in a study guide, resulted in the teacher limiting students’ venture into a complicated discussion about race and racism. The author points out that what constitutes meaningful literate achievement, and what these tests actually measure, may be quite different.

Part IV rounds out the book with a discussion of approaches to minority language speakers and language issues in other countries by authors Hadjioannou, Ana Christina Dasilva Iddings, Patrick H. Smith, Luz A. Murillo, Robert T. Jiménez, Gerda Videsott, Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu, Carole Bloch, and Zarina Manawwar Hock.

Hadjiannou discusses how Greek Cypriot students code-switch seamlessly between their home Greek Cypriot dialect and Standard Greek, supporting other authors’ writings about their own students’ ability to effectively code-switch

between primary languages (including dialects such as AAVE) and Standard English.

Iddings' chapter about *Projecto Aprendiz* in São Paulo, Brazil is about language from a different perspective: it shows how supporting the right to expression can unleash creativity and empower individuals. Led by renowned journalist Gilberto Dimenstein, community members in a poor, decaying urban area of São Paulo transformed it into a vibrant community/school including a community newspaper, internet café, radio station, art studio, and bookstore. One striking example of the unleashing of creative energy was the transformation of a dirty, dead-end street where drug deals took place “into an open-air gallery where skilled and colorful graffiti art” is now displayed (p. 292). Other areas in São Paulo have been revitalized using examples and ideas from *Aprendiz*.

Smith, Murillow and Jiménez' studies of Chilolu, Mexico remind teachers that different countries may have different reading and writing expectations for students. This may result in immigrant children having a different skill set than U.S. children of a similar age, which knowledge may help teachers set appropriate expectations for these students. Videsott describes how immersion can be effective. She describes how an immersion program in the Ladin Valley area in northern Italy led students to a good level of proficiency in three languages.

Kamwangamalu and Hock's chapters on South Africa and India have interesting discussions of multilingualism and official languages, with both countries recognizing numerous official languages. They provide interesting examples of how of the concept of a country's official language can evolve, and how English is used in these countries. Bloch's chapter discusses South Africa and other parts of Africa from a different perspective: she discusses the problem of developing literacy where reading materials are limited, especially in children's mother tongues.

The many authors encourage readers to think deeply about how others are disempowered due to language and views

about language. The reader is invited to think about how dialects such as AAVE fall into this category, because they are not considered “standard,” with students speaking nonstandard dialects often discouraged from participating in class because the teacher may constantly correct their speech. Using code-switching concepts generally discussed with respect to other languages such as French, Spanish, and the like is an additive versus a subtractive approach presented by several of the authors. It is a concrete example of how minority language rights can be supported by teachers.

Although the book’s audience is both teacher educators and pre-service and in-service teachers, its length and complexity may make it a better tool for teacher educators who are developing and expanding programs for new teachers. An additional, shorter version containing fewer chapters highlighting pedagogical practices that support minority language rights, would be better suited to beginning teachers new to discussions about language learning and culture.

Overall, the authors do a commendable job of educating the reader on the complexity and importance of how valuing students’ language is critical for them to succeed in our increasingly multilingual, multicultural school environments. It provides a rich discussion of language policies up to and after the passage of the first SRTOL act in 1974, with the editors effectively “unmasking” pedagogical practices that other teachers can draw from to implement SRTOL’s goal of supporting students’ language rights.

About the Reviewer

Liz C. Collier is a PhD student in the Educational Leadership and Policy program at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona. She has a J.D. from Emory University School of Law in Atlanta, GA; an M.A. in Teaching English as a Second Language from Eastern Washington University in Cheney, Washington; and a B.A. in Economics from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her main area of interest is language policy and its impact on the public schools.



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