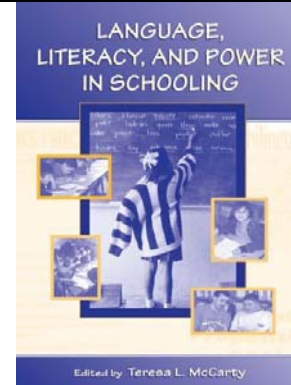


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***Language, Literacy, and Power in Schooling***  
**Edited by Teresa L. McCarty**  
**Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers**  
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***Reviewed by Arda Arikan***



Ethnographic research as a critical practice has produced a considerable amount of knowledge and the effect of such a lens is still visible in the works of many academics and practitioners currently situated at all levels of education as well as in academia. Such voices have discussed educational and socioeconomic issues related to power, race, literacy, pedagogy, and agency by situating these problems in the framework of equity and diversity as a social practice among many others.

*Language, Literacy, and Power in Schooling* is a book which follows the aforementioned tradition by looking into the lives of those agents who work not as technicians but as social workers/ engineers who envision a different world with the each word taught as a part of the practice we call literacy. As stated in the preface of the book, the chapters grow out of a symposium held at the 1999 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association (AAA), which had focused on anthropological perspectives and the negotiation of language, literacy, and power relations in linguistically and culturally diverse educational contexts. 17 writers, including the editor, pick up the issues intersecting at ethnography and literacy and extend them to the sociopolitical in a powerful research practice which both informs the theories of literacy, ethnographic research methods, and the ideological and political realities which constrain our everyday living, teaching, and learning.

In addition to the preface and introduction written by the editor McCarty, the book is composed of three parts, each reflecting a different focus and unit of analysis. Part I

problematizes the local and the general, the margins and the center, and the spaces in between. In Part II, literacy classrooms are studied as places where face-to-face interactions shape literacy practices. In Part III, the ethnographic lens is widened so that it includes politics of standardizing regimes in the larger context of globalization. It is apparent that all papers (chapters) in this book aim at bringing social action stemming from the nonacademic attitude of the writers who act as witnesses to real, lived experiences of inequality in schools and society. A commentary chapter follows each chapter and reframes or extends the issues discussed in the chapters read.

In the introduction, McCarty starts her words with Freire's which ends as "teaching literacy is, above all, a social and political commitment (xv)." From this point to her last words, she picks up the issue of great divide arguments, in other words, claims about fundamental differences or divisions between "kinds" of people and extends this to what literacy and orality are and builds a short but strong points to justify and lay out the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the issues discussed. In a powerful and meaningful series of arguments which connect theory with practice, her final paragraphs are devoted to ethnography, which is, in her words "a way of seeing, being, and acting in the world." Her final words, clearly, show the book's intention of bringing social action into our literacy classrooms since "as ethnographers, then, our goal is not only to examine and expose the sites of domination that reinscribe 'great divides,' but to provoke the dialogic transformations that lead to positive social change.

Part I, "Taking hold of local literacies," discusses local literacies through key concepts such as indigenous accounts of dealing with writing, the Hopi way of life through literacy, indigenous literacies and teacher empowerment, academic power, subaltern voices and counter narratives in higher education, borderlands accounts. The commentary on Part I scrutinizes contra mystification by language hierarchies to shed light on literacy as a microcosm of and prelude to a worldwide and wide spread practice.

Part II, “Literacy practices in diverse classroom contexts,” looks into our reading, bilingual/ multicultural, and mathematics classrooms as well as our schools largely as places where many forms domination, oppression, and race based inequalities are experienced by those whose voices are studied with ethnographic lenses of the writers of each chapter. The commentary on this part extends the ethnographic knowledge produced in these particular contexts to demographics and social class realities of the US to show the multiple ways through which the status quo, and systematic inequality, are maintained despite all changes occurring in the country.

Part III, “Literacies and knowledges in a changing world order,” presents today’s world as it is lived in the New Capitalism which is associated with differing economies, identities, schooling with its never ending reforms that follow one another, and inequality which point at a crisis in society. In relation to these, commentary on part III, written by Jim Cummins, discusses if schools can challenge coercive power relations in the wider society by articulating our experiences in many pedagogical conditions. In his analysis, he mentions our preservice and in-service teacher education programs in which prospective and professional teachers can learn to resist coercive power relations while their instruction is policed by standardized tests.

The last part of the book, afterword, by McCarty, invites readers to dismantle the multitude of disabling divisions that cripple the liberating potential of critical literacy research. In such an attempt, as McCarty claims, ‘ethnography is singularly positioned to provide rich, robust data on how student learning can be enhanced under particular conditions.

Even though this book does not inform the reader on how ethnographic research is done as a methodological book, it tells us what it can do in our schools and in academia. Furthermore, the writers’ way of conducting such research can help us develop ways of conducting similar research if such is our aim. As a rich book of many conditions, facts and figures, realities, stories, and professional researching, *Language, Literacy, and Power in Schooling* is especially useful for those who are interested in what

ethnographical research can do in our schools when our aim is to study the state of language, literacy, and power in schooling.

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