



The Power of Culture: Teaching across Language Difference. Zeynep F. Beykont, ed. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Publishing Group, 2002. 288 pp.

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In this collection of articles the editor, Zeynep Beykont, attempts to focus the reader's attention on the essential role of culture in effectively teaching across language difference. Beykont highlights how educators might use the student's home culture to facilitate the construction of knowledge, and how educators must also make an effort to explicitly teach mainstream culture. Beykont maintains that schools neither teach the mainstream culture nor capitalize on students' home cultures, thereby doubly limiting the academic development of language-minority students, especially within the context of high stakes testing. The purpose of the book is clear and unquestionably valuable.

The book is divided into three parts. Part One consists of three chapters anchored to the current standards-based reforms that have recently taken root in education. More specifically, the chapters examine the negative social consequences that high-stakes testing has had on language-minority children, and on how education has failed to be responsive to the needs of language-minority children. Part Two offers four chapters that highlight the power of culture in effective K-12 mainstream classrooms that cut across different language groups. Part Three examines recommendations and challenges regarding the preparation of mainstream teachers to teach across language difference by harnessing the power of culture.

Collectively, I found the chapters to be of very high quality, and one would expect no less from researchers such as Walt Haney, Patricia Gandara, Nancy Hornberger, Maria Estela Brisk, Lilia Bartolome, and Sonia Nieto. In short, all of the invited authors successfully fulfilled their obligation. As a faculty member who teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses in language-minority education, I would be more inclined to use the book for undergraduate course work. The chapters are not highly theoretical or technical, and would help generate interesting discussions well beyond the power of culture.

As a researcher, I was left feeling that the theme of the book was not highlighted across the three sections of the book. This shortcoming probably lies with the editor, as opposed to the contributors. For example, in Part One, which deals with educational reforms and language-minority students, the two chapters on high stakes testing do not explicitly and consciously focus on the proposed theme of the book, the power of culture. If they had, one might expect to find a closer analysis of how high



stakes testing and issues of culture lead to dismal outcomes for language-minority test takers. I suppose elements of the analysis are there, but it is up to the reader to draw them out.

In Part Two, the reader essentially has to take the effectiveness of the highlighted teaching practices at face value. It would have helped immensely if these promising practices had been supported by some tangible measure beyond teacher or researcher judgment. Ideally, it would have proven extremely powerful to read an account of how a school or group of teachers in Massachusetts, Texas, or California utilized the power of culture to mitigate the negative effects of high stakes testing.

Along this line of critique, Part Three on teacher training could have been enhanced if the authors had explicitly drawn from empirical research on teacher training that is linked to desirable student outcomes or achievement patterns. In other words, we can more readily understand the power of culture and improve teacher training by examining test data and carefully researching the schools that have been successful at meeting the needs of language minority children. In sum, the three parts of the book are not as fully integrated as they could have been. An alternative design might have begun with effective teaching practices, supported by test data, and then translated into teacher training practice. On the other hand, I recognize that the authors were not working jointly on a shared research agenda. At the very least, the editor of the book might have considered writing an epilogue to synthesize what was voiced across the three sections of the book.

In sum, *The Power of Culture* is a great collection of chapters written by some of the field's most respected researchers. The book will and should be used to help improve language-minority education by drawing attention to the power of culture in the teaching-learning process, and in the preparation of mainstream classroom teachers. In terms of moving related research and educational policy forward, the chapters will prove useful for generating research questions, reviews of literature, research designs, and research as it is conducted.

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