

Book reviews

LANGUAGE PRACTICES OF INDIGENOUS CHILDREN AND YOUTH: THE TRANSITION FROM HOME TO SCHOOL

Wigglesworth, G., Simpson, J., & Vaughan, J. (Eds.)

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The language practices of Indigenous peoples worldwide remain relatively unknown to the Western world. They are largely unobserved and undocumented and this is even more so for children. *Language Practices of Indigenous Children and Youth: The Transition from Home to School* represents a broad introduction to the complexity that characterises the interaction between Indigenous languages, cultures and identities and the modern schooling system. It takes a strengths-based approach and each chapter clearly illustrates the impressive linguistic capabilities of children that are too often not recognised in the schooling system. For this reason, teaching practitioners will value the insight that this book provides, whilst academics will value the empirical nature of the research presented. Although global in its scope, it is clearly situated within Australian Indigenous contexts that account for roughly half of the chapters presented, which provides much needed insight into a previously little discussed educational context.

The book comprises four parts: curriculum, multilingual repertoires, contact languages and language as cultural practice. The first two parts explore their respective topics in a range of contexts; they explore the theme in Australian Indigenous settings and then expand outwards to the experiences of other Indigenous populations. For Australian readers, this pattern allows for knowledge to be grounded in the familiar before drawing parallels between Australian Indigenous contexts and those presented elsewhere.

Part one spans Indigenous contexts in Australia, Canada and the United States of America to examine local curricula responses to community demands and desires for language and culture to be

included in the classroom. The shared experience of colonisation has resulted in the widespread dispossession of Indigenous lands, language loss and shift, and the cultural suppression of Indigenous groups in these countries. These four chapters highlight the commonalities in the challenges faced in such contexts which include unsupportive government policies and funding models, a shortage of qualified practitioners, and deficit language perceptions. These chapters accurately identify the complexities of these environments and the tensions that exist. In spite of these challenges, each chapter details the inspiring feats of local communities acting as strong advocates for their children, their language, cultural identity and futures in the schooling system. As a teacher reading these chapters, they demonstrate what is possible, and it is difficult not to feel inspired, motivated and excited.

In the first part we saw how educators shape the curriculum in innovative ways to make it their own. In the second we see how children engage in the same practices – asserting their cultural identity and language as they make sense of the world around them. The book's strengths-based approach is particularly highlighted in Feller and Vaughan's (Chapter 8) account of young Brazilian children's literacy practices. In this, they explain and illustrate how multiple languages are a help and not a hindrance to communication and the construction of new knowledge. Wilson et al. (Chapter 6) describe the impressive multilingual repertoires of young children in a preschool context as they already code-mix with competence and confidence before even arriving at school. Poetsch (Chapter 7) demonstrates how children at school partake in such practices and use them to successfully navigate the classroom.

Some of the chapters presented thus far might seem quite removed from the everyday classroom experiences of teachers unless they are working in a remote community setting. Part three speaks to these teachers. The majority of Indigenous Australians live in urban and regional areas and many may be speakers of a contact language. The EAL/D learning needs of such students are often not visible to educators as Angelo and Hudson point out in Chapter 9. Beyond this invisibility that they lay bare in their chapter, they caution that traditional knowledge bases regarding second language development may not apply in these complex spaces. Part three highlights how little we know about the complex interactions between acquiring differing dialects in school learning environments. Dixon in Chapter

11 helps to clarify some of these uncertainties by comparing children's language use at home and at school, relatively uncharted territory in this research space. In this part, extending the range of contributions to include international perspectives might have helped to further clarify knowledge and expand understanding.

The absence of an Australian perspective in part four is disappointing but is mitigated by both Angelo and Hudson (Chapter 9) and Fraser et al. (Chapter 10) in the previous section who speak to the role that cultural identity potentially plays in second dialect acquisition, about which little is known. This points to a gap in the literature more widely. In doing so, they establish a segue into language as a cultural practice, the fourth part of the book. Where most chapters consider the role of home language and culture in the classroom, in this part, Meeks (Chapter 13) describes how the communicative style of the classroom is having positive impact on language learning outside of the classroom. Lastly, Kral and Renganathan (Chapter 14) remind us that not all literacy learning takes place within the schooling system and efforts to re-engage learners through meaningful task-based activities can prove fruitful.

Overall, the book strikes a fine balance between accessibility and insightfulness. The book is enlightening in its consideration of the different responses to children's language in and out of the classroom which are illustrated throughout. It is also great food for thought about the possibilities for Indigenous children in future classrooms.