

**Tongue-tied: The lives of multilingual children in public schools** edited by Otto Santa Ana. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004. 311 pp. ISBN 0-7425-2383-7

It seems that the current wave of xenophobia sweeping our nation is giving rise to social and linguistic amnesia. Bilingual education programs have a rich history in our nation, and research has established that well-implemented bilingual programs increase the academic achievement of bilingual children. However, in times of war and social stress, Americanization programs and English-only educational policies have carried the day. *Tongue-Tied: The Lives of Multilingual Children in Public Education*, edited by Otto Santa Ana, sheds light on the consequences that anti-bilingual programs and policies have had on children throughout our nation's history. *Tongue-Tied*, an anthology of poetry, essays, and research, offers readers poignant reminders of the ways in which public education has been both painful and harmful for many bilingual and bicultural people. Yet, it is also a testament to the resiliency of the human spirit in the face of institutional racism. Although the authors included in this volume suffered many injustices, they have flourished and have enriched our culture with their work which is exemplified in this anthology.

One of the strongest qualities of *Tongue-Tied* is that it provides a much needed space for the work of a wide range of multilingual and multicultural scholars, activists, poets, and writers. The text is also valuable because it brings together writers from various disciplines to bolster the legitimacy of the book's main argument: denying people the right and space to communicate in their own languages is wrong, inequitable, and ultimately, destructive. Contributors such as Luis Rodríguez, Simon Ortiz, and Paula Gunn Allen each write passionately about what it means to be denied equal access to education and the right to communicate in one's own words. Through personal experiences, as well as qualitative and quantitative research, this collection brings ideas and discourses from the margins to the center without homogenizing the points of view being represented by each author.

Compiled in response to the passage of California's Proposition 227, an anti-bilingual education measure that replaced bilingual programs with structured English immersion programs, the volume catalogues the history of educational injustices that *non-standard* English-speakers have endured. While bilingual education advocates were astounded by the passage of Proposition 227, they also pointed out that the general public did not fully understand the nature or purpose of bilingual education. Part of the impetus, then, behind this anthology is to address the public's lack of understanding that plays a substantial role in shaping the debate on bilingual education in the United States. Thus, the anthology was also created to give readers accessible, persuasive and moving accounts of what it

is like to grow up bilingual and bicultural in a monolingual and monocultural society that frequently demands linguistic and cultural assimilation.

The book is organized into six sections, each dealing with a unique aspect of the schooling experiences of multilingual children. The first and fourth sections are composed of pieces that relate personal experiences with second language learning and growing up bilingual and bicultural. A common theme that arises among these authors is how losing one's native language and acquiring English can result in feelings of displacement and disconnection. For instance, authors such as Otto Santa Anna, bell hooks and Gloria Anzaldúa, who write from a critical theory perspective, posit that bilingualism and biculturalism are inevitable aspects of colonization and post-colonial relations and often involve processes of uprooting, transformation, and hybridity which arise from contact situations (Santa Ana, p. 3). From this standpoint, schools can be understood as contact situations. Within this post-colonial context, the authors emphasize the contradictions inherent in a student's attempt to maintain authenticity in their home community while also pursuing *success* in academia. An example of this conflict is illuminated by bell hooks' essay which explores Adrienne Rich's statement: "This is the oppressor's language yet I need it to talk to you" (p. 255). A striking aspect of these narratives is the fact that the experiences each author relates are not atypical; they reflect a commonality that spans across the unique voices that comprise the content of this text. What this unifying theme displays is the fact that millions of children were and are subjected to and affected by policies and practices that are based, not on research, but on an ideology of monolingual English supremacy. In reading these stories, essays and poems, one recognizes the pernicious nature of educational policies that seek to *help* children by severing their connections to their families.

These personal narratives are complemented by evidence from pertinent court decisions, legislation and educational research in the second, third, and fifth sections of the book. These excerpts speak to the unfulfilled potentials of children who, due to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, receive inequitable or inappropriate schooling. For example, Guadalupe Valdés illustrates the ways that bilingual children's life chances are often dashed by school systems that segregate individuals into lower level classes which do not prepare them to graduate high school, much less attend college (p. 115). Excerpts from Catherine Snow and Virginia Collier clarify common myths about second language acquisition and offer suggestions regarding ways to appropriately design instruction for English language learners (pp. 214-235). This is a particularly salient contribution since anti-bilingual pundits frequently assert that bilingual programs lack a strong research base. It is important for educators and the general public to understand that scientifically-based research has proven that quality bilingual education programs which build upon children's native languages and cultures are effective.

This anthology includes excerpts of several important research studies which speak to this fact.

Since *Tongue-Tied* surveys the vast field of education for culturally and linguistically diverse learners it could be met with the critique that its breadth is somewhat overwhelming. Part of the reason for this is because Santa Ana compiled these essays and narratives to create a sort of multi-vocal testimonial on the affects of linguistic racism. As such, he does not attempt to summarize all of the arguments presented to the reader. Rather, the structure of the volume supports his effort to provide those who have been silenced a space to speak up for themselves. This quality allows the reader to revisit the book multiple times, finding new insights with every perusal. The volume is not meant to be the definitive last word, but serves instead as an excellent starting point for those interested in becoming acquainted with this terrain.

The strength of the volume comes from its eclecticism. The approach taken in this anthology of weaving together personal experiences with scientific research is unique and effective. Such an approach not only suggests that the work of poets and scholars is equally valuable, but also legitimates alternative ways of knowing. Feminists and scholars of color have pointed out that in order for their work and their ideas to be taken seriously they are often required to write and speak in ways that are alienating. This volume attempts to avoid this paradox. Further, Santa Ana skillfully ties the selections together and distills their main arguments through his insightful and synthetic annotations. Overall, the method of uniting research and literature provided a richer picture of the educational experiences of bilingual children than either genre could have done on its own. *Tongue Tied* provides the reader with a sourcebook of influential research and powerful authors where one can choose to pursue and study a topic or a single author in greater depth. While Santa Ana opted for breadth over depth, he managed not to simplify the issues nor sacrifice emotional authenticity or intellectual rigor.

### **Reviewer**

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