

## Review

Kirklighter, Cristina, Diana Cárdenas, and Susan Wolff Murphy, eds. *Teaching Writing with Latinola Students: Lessons Learned at Hispanic-Serving Institutions*. Foreword by Michelle Hall Kells. Albany: State U of New York P, 2007.

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This collection presents the “lessons learned” by teacher-scholars working at a variety of schools bearing the official U.S. government designation of being “Hispanic-Serving Institutions” (“HSI’s”). The designation dates from 1994 to recognize “accredited, degree granting public or private, non-profit colleges or universities with 25% or more total undergraduate full-time equivalent (FTE) Hispanic enrollment” (Laden 186; quoted in Introduction 2). While in some ways this collection would seem to be targeting, and of most use to, teachers working in HSI’s or expecting to do so, it will also be of use to composition teachers, scholars, and program administrators at all schools for its contributions to growing inquiry among compositionists into the complex relationships between language, identity, postsecondary academic performance, race, and (social) class in the U.S. college composition classroom.

As many of the chapters demonstrate, the HSI designation glosses over significant differences among the many schools so designated. Indeed, perhaps chief among the “lessons” the collection offers teachers working or expecting to work at HSI’s is the diversity in the language practices, sociocultural identities, and histories and expectations of academic performance of students enrolled in HSI’s. The collection also cautions against any homogeneity in imagining HSI teachers and pedagogies. For example, while all three of the collection’s editors teach at one institution—Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMU-CC)—they represent quite diverse cultural, regional, and academic backgrounds and teaching experiences (5-7). Likewise, the schools represented by the collection’s contribu-

tors include a mix of two- and four-year institutions, and cut a wide swath across the continental U.S.

There is the threat, of course, that acknowledgements of significant diversity among HSI's and their students might dissolve the justification for the designation itself, and thus the need for a collection such as this one. But in fact, like the term "Latino/a," the range of the designation's referents arises out of the different geographic, socioeconomic, ethnic, and historical inflections given to what remains a socioculturally and statistically significant appellation. As Beatrice Méndez Newman notes in her chapter, Hispanics continue to be historically underrepresented in U.S. postsecondary schools, graduate at significantly lower rates than white students from college, and tend to be first-generation college students, and HSI's attract students whose economic and academic circumstances limit their access to postsecondary education (17-18). Whatever diversity exists among HSI's and their students does not efface these structural inequities. Of course, the reach of such inequities goes beyond HSI's and their students. As several of the contributors observe, insofar as the Latino/a population is a growing one in the U.S., the work of teachers at HSI's serves as a reminder of what teachers and writing program administrators elsewhere are also experiencing or will experience soon (vii, 1). And insofar as the structural inequities currently visited upon Hispanics in the U.S. intersect and overlap with those of class and race, the accounts presented here of experiences at HSI's will be immediately relevant to teachers working at schools not identified as "HSI."

The collection is divided into four parts: two introductory chapters that make up Part 1 are followed in Part 2 by four chapters exploring the interface between faculty and student expectations and practices, primarily as these play out in pedagogies; Part 3 consists of three chapters presenting arguments for developing effective writing programs at HSI's; and Part 4 offers two chapters on the uses of personal narrative as a way of exploring culture. These are preceded by a foreword by Michelle Hall Kells and the editors' introduction. Both the foreword and the editors' introduction provide useful overviews of the issues with which all the contributors to the collection continue to wrestle. Michelle Hall Kells sets the collection in the context of legacies of colonization, the U.S. civil rights movement, recent immigration demonstrations, trends in composition scholarship, and the history of higher education practices, including disparities in the working and learning conditions obtaining in postsecondary education. The book's introduction offers a brief history of HSI's put in the context of both the monolingual ideologies afflicting U.S. culture and the individual editors'

personal and professional histories that have brought them to work on this collection.

Because of space limitations, I restrict the focus of my comments to those chapters that, to me, present most sharply both the distinctiveness and broad significance of the authors' work teaching writing with Latino/a students at HSI's. The authors of the second introductory chapter—"Teaching English in a California Two-Year Hispanic-Serving Institution"—rather than offering a simple account of work at one school, model the myriad intersecting ways in which to locate such work by placing their teaching in a broad and layered context of useful statistical and other studies on differences in schools and student populations and the larger economic and political climates in which these operate. Presented as a conversation between three Santa Barbara City College teachers (Jody Millward, Sandra Starkey, and David Starkey), the chapter highlights especially the ways in which, as their experiences at SBCC show, the chief deficits many of their Latino/a college students face are limits of time, funding, and academic support resources and services, not lack of commitment, intelligence, persistence, or energy. Perhaps more than any other chapter, this chapter gives a feel for the variety of pressures, challenges, and rewards of working at an HSI.

The four chapters comprising Part 2 demonstrate, individually and collectively, that HSI students, schools, teachers, and their pedagogies are "Not All the Same." In "Discovering a 'Proper Pedagogy'" (i.e., one proper to the location of one's teaching and one's students,) Dora Ramírez-Dhoore and Rebecca Jones of the University of Texas-Pan American present their attempts to work past, and help their students work past, numerous disabling myths about language: that students must choose between a reified, monolithically-conceived academic discourse or a home language; that any possession of Spanish is a mark of shame; that there is a "game" to be played in academic writing; and so on. In Chapter 4, Isabel Araiza, Humberto Cárdenas, Jr., and Susan Loudermilk Garza challenge myths about HSI's and HSI students. They report that their study of the literacy and language practices of first-year students at TAMU-CC and faculty perceptions of those students revealed that the language used by the vast majority of TAMU-CC students more than 90% of the time was English, and that there was little difference between the monolingual Latino/a English-speaking students and the Latino/a students who also spoke Spanish and/or Tex-Mex in either their parents' schooling history or in their participation in "cultural" activities with high value in dominant culture (e.g., attending concerts): instead, pretty much all students at TAMU-CC are marked, or markable, as "at risk." However, they also found that many TAMU-CC faculty had mistakenly expected TAMU-CC students would speak Span-

ish, as is the case at some (though clearly not all) HSI's, and they showed little understanding of TAMU-CC's significance as an HSI.

These authors' conclusion that "we cannot make assumptions about our students' dominant languages and literate practices . . . [but] have to discover their lived literacies and language use" (95) is further illustrated by the contrasting picture of student language and literacy practices presented by the authors of *"Más allá del inglés: A Bilingual Approach to College Composition."* Working at Miami University, a private, four-year HSI in a community where bilingualism is maintained and carries far less social stigma, Isis Artze-Vega, Elizabeth I. Doud, and Belkys Torres argue for teaching courses in bilingual composition. Drawing heavily, and by necessity, on the much larger scholarship on bilingual education in K-12 schools, they provide a compelling argument and helpful suggestions for developing such courses to combat monolingualist ideologies and to acknowledge and strengthen their students' linguistic sophistication in using more than one language. And in *"Un pie adentro y otro afuera: Composition Instruction for Transnational Dominicans in Higher Education,"* Sharon Utakis and Marianne Pita, of Bronx Community College, argue for composition courses that teach a "critical bicultural curriculum" to meet the needs of their students, who expect to maintain not only two languages but a transnational identity, and whose interests are at odds with the hidden curriculum of "Americanization" they find operating in many ESL courses. Such a course is needed, they argue, to "problematize the teaching of English" by challenging dominant and damaging myths about English and other languages and their relation to identity (126-27).

Of the several chapters offering lessons in program-building, I was most interested in Isabel Baca's account of the development of a basic writing course at El Paso Community College, whose student population, unlike the students at TAMU-CC, is far more likely to be bilingual in Spanish and English. Baca bases her argument on a range of concepts regarding bilingualism: François Grosjean's "functional" definition of bilinguals as "not two monolinguals in one person, but different, perfectly competent speaker-hearers in their own right" (471; quoted in Baca 151); Guadalupe Valdés's concept of "incipient bilinguals," who "use their native language to help them learn the linguistic rules of a second language" (152); and scholarship on the effect of language attitudes on language learning. These support Baca's argument that students' acceptance of the dominant "fractional" view of bilingualism (as less than the sum of two discrete parts, English and Spanish) interferes with their ability to draw on their linguistic knowledge in one language when using another. And this leads her to call for a pedagogy of bilingualism understood as fluency not in two discrete

languages but in creative movement between and with them, an argument in close alignment with other recent arguments for pursuing cross-language relations in composition (156; see Canagarajah, Lu).

*Teaching Writing with Latinola Students* shows, above all, the inadequacy of reified linkages of language and identity for understanding and undertaking the work of HSI's. At times, individual arguments in the collection may reinforce such linkages in the terms invoked for defending what seem immediate, urgent, and legitimate institutional and student needs and rights—terms like “home language,” “Standard Written English,” “academic discourse,” and “code switching.” These terms suggest discrete, uniform communities of homogeneous language use and identity. Yet, taken as a whole, while insisting on the educational rights, abilities, and contributions of HSI students, the collection serves to “disinvent” comfortable, disabling myths about the homogeneity of HSI students, their language(s), the academy, HSI's, and about any uniformly appropriate pedagogy for HSI's and HSI students.<sup>1</sup> In the absence of the comfort such disabling myths proffer, and in recognition of our students' rights and abilities, we must, as the collection's title suggests, instead learn to teach not “to” or “for” but “with” our students. While this lesson is in many ways not new, the contributors to this collection show that it is a lesson that we must continue to keep re-learning, and to keep finding new ways to articulate to, and with, our students, our schools, and each other.

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup> On the need to “disinvent” common notions about language and identity, see Pennycook (6-7).

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