



Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms

Shirley Brice Heath

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"Ways with Words" is a classic study of children learning to use language at home and at school in two communities only a few miles apart in the southeastern United States. "Roadville" is a white working-class community of families steeped for generations in the life of textile mills; "Trackton" is a black working-class community whose older generations grew up farming the land but whose current members work in the mills. In tracing the children's language development the author shows the deep cultural differences between the two communities, whose ways with words differ as strikingly from each other as either does from the pattern of the townspeople, the "mainstream" blacks and whites who hold power in the schools and workplaces of the region. Employing the combined skills of ethnographer, social historian, and teacher, the author raises fundamental questions about the nature of language development, the effects of literacy on oral language habits, and the sources of communication problems in schools and workplaces.

Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms Details

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From Reader Review Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms for online ebook

Melissa says

Fascinating ethnography of language acquisition in two North Carolina Piedmont communities in the 1970's. In a way, though, it's still relevant today, and I'm left wondering about the various ways students are learning language from their parents/communities and whether that does or does not align with the language I expect in my classroom. So much to think about! I'll be considering the kids in this book for a long time.

Andrea says

Another important book for teachers. Heath looks at the way people talk and the literary experiences we have growing up. It's important that those of us who teach in multicultural classrooms realize that talking differently than a "normal white middle class person" isn't talking wrong. And different families, cultures, classes (I could go on and on here) have experienced literature differently and, again, different literary experiences can be learned from, there is not one right way to experience literature.

J-Lynn Van Pelt says

This book is an amazing example of qualitative research. Heath was in the field for 11 years and gathered an unbelievable amount of data from two very different communities in the south--one White and one African American. She observed differences in the use and exposure to language by the children of the communities and then went into classrooms and observed how the differences impacted children during schooling. Her extensive work is to be praised and this book makes all the labor very accessible and enjoyable.

Edy says

Interesting look at children learning to use language at school and at home. Read it as part of the prep work I had to do to write a dissertation on bilingual education.

Grace says

I was really impressed by this book. Shirley Brice Heath does excellent research in this accessible book. I loved reading about the different communities of Trackton and Roadville. Each community had a certain way of bringing up their children, and Brice Heath studied the way language developed among the children. It was very fascinating. I was even impressed by some of the teacher techniques mentioned later in the book. The very ending was slightly depressing, because it hints that teachers aren't given as much freedom in their creative teaching methods as they were in the past because of the restrictive standards implemented. That part was depressing as a future educator. However, the rest of the book overshadowed that detail, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I learned a lot and plan to implement some of my knowledge into my teaching. I

highly recommend this work.

Audra says

I have certain excerpts and sections of this book printed out from CU's online library. One in particular that any conscientious person, especially one who is planning on having children or just working with them, is a piece called "What No Bedtime Story Means". Heath describes the sociolinguistic teaching methods in an affluent West Virginia family, a lower middle class Appalachian family, and an African American family. What is discovered is crucial to every person's success in American schools; that if a child is not read to, and subsequently taught that the two-dimensional thing in the story is a thing in the real world, that they will suffer the ill effects of what she refers to as "the inability to decontextualize". Seriously, read it if you care for humanity.

Mr. Brammer says

Brice Heath's ethnography of two communities in Piedmont South Carolina illuminates ways that culture influences language and literacy learning. Her conclusions show that schools cater to the success of "townspeople", students from middle class, educated backgrounds, while students from rural or blue collar communities fail and drop out at alarming rates. By training teachers to look at instructional strategies from an ethnographic standpoint, progress was made in student retention, engagement and performance. The ending is bittersweet because, as her study ends during the Reagan era there was a shift to federal mandates for student performance, which has reached absurd proportions today under "No Child Left Behind". A one-size-fits-all approach will never work in a country as diverse as the U.S.

Tracey says

Wonderful ethnographic study of the ways in which children use language in their homes and communities. I appreciated the rich, detailed description that the researcher gave of all three communities and their ways with words. It truly honored and respected their knowledge and the fact that it is not the quantity of language utilized, but rather the kind of language used.

The teachers in the study, also used ethnographic methods to study their ways with words and begin to realize that they, too, bring their ways to school. This enabled them to see their classrooms and students in new ways, providing bridges between the community ways with words and the school ways with words.

Rather than subtract the resources of the community, add to their ways with words and provide spaces for children to explore language and the way that language is used in different contexts.

This community work is close to my heart---and this study resonated with me in so many ways.

Tabitha says

Fascinating look at literacy practices in two different Southern communities, and the impact these contrasting

practices have on children's success at school. Would highly recommend to anyone interested in education, language socialization, or issues of inequality.

JodyReads says

Another book for school, this one is the foundation for the type of research I'm doing -- looking into family literacy usage before school and how it mirrors (or does not mirror, as the case may be) how students are taught literacy in school. As it was published in the 1980s, it is obviously out-dated in some of the ways families behave -- like not using the telephone because it costs so much money. But, once Heath gets into the context of how language is used it does become informative. I can see how I speak to children is reflected in the ways that children are taught language. More importantly, I am beginning to understand how children's early lives effect how and what they learn in school.

Jo says

A classic on how students' home lives and culture affect their experiences in school, starting on day one. All teachers should read this and adapt their curriculum accordingly. Probably not for those who don't work in education, anthropology, or sociology, since it could appear to be a very dry read. But for those who are interested in how one's sub-culture interacts with formal education, then it's necessary.

Carrie says

This book covers a researcher who goes in to two rural communities, literally on either side of the tracks. One is predominantly white, the other black. The researcher looks at how children learn to speak, read and write before considering the wider implications on teaching and learning. Fascinating study.

Jenny says

Read this year's ago. Remembering it as I start to read Hillbilly Elegy. Family traditions, ways of speaking and being in the America that we don't usually read about.

Denise says

Read it long ago as part of my Rhetoric and Tech Com degree. Left a big impression and I continue to recall its lessons about the connection between literacy to both homelife and schooling whenever in a discussion of literacy. These lessons also extend to other home influences and do much to explain why some succeed and others don't. It has a lot to do with the fact that the institution of schooling favors certain dominant elements of society and presents obstacles to minorities.

Alexis says

I read this in college after a professor recommended it. It's a wonderful eye opening book that shows daily life in physically close but culturally different communities.
