



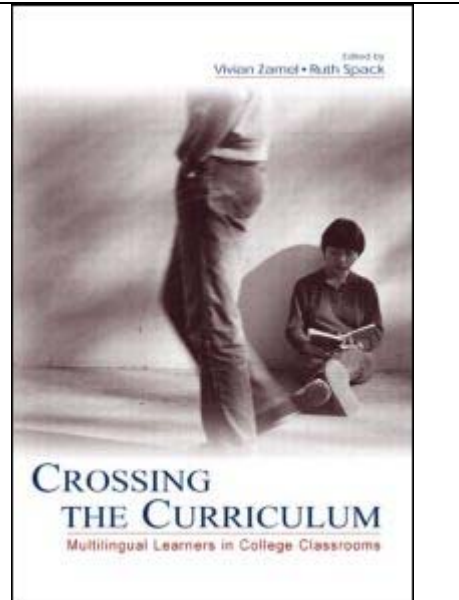
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Crossing the Curriculum: Multilingual Learners in College Classrooms edited by Vivian Zamel and Ruth Spack (2004)

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Crossing the Curriculum: Multilingual Learners in College Classrooms is a collection of articles which present deeply contextualized accounts of how multilingual students, for whom English is not a native language, join the discourses of American university courses. As the editors, Vivian Zamel and Ruth Spack, state in their preface, the aim of the book is to respond to the changing trends in the linguistic and cultural composition of American higher education, trends which present challenges for all, including faculty across the curriculum. Despite the book's exclusive focus on American education, the insights and practical suggestions presented here could be applied in other educational contexts, especially those where students are engaged in acquiring disciplinary discourses through the medium of a second or foreign language.

There are three parts in this book, presenting stories of ESOL composition researchers, multilingual students, and faculty. The chapters in the first part collectively argue that ESOL composition classes provide space where students' learning about writing in the academic fields only begins. It is impossible to prepare students for all types of writing requirements and tasks, and therefore ESOL and faculty across the curriculum should collaborate in developing pedagogies that would allow students to enter and engage with zones of learning as writers, researchers, and culturally-sensitive human beings. Vivian Zamel opens this section by arguing that faculty should stop viewing ESOL learners' language and their development through the lens of deficit models and should instead embrace a richer understanding of how language, discourse, and content learning are intertwined. She concludes with a reference to the double-character representation of the word "crisis" in Chinese: one meaning, "danger," and the other "opportunity." She urges content and language specialists to face crises in their teaching, take risks, and cross the invisible yet strong boundaries between disciplinary communities in order to create learning opportunities for themselves and their students.

Ruth Spack in the next chapter reports on her longitudinal study of Yuko, a student from Japan. This chapter, which is a shorter updated version of the original 1997 article that appeared in *Written Communication*, includes Yuko's response to the study after it was first published. Marilyn S. Sternglass then presents the story of a Dominican student who initially failed to pass a standardized writing test at the university but who went on to complete both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees at the same university. Sternglass shows persuasively how critical the faculty's role was in encouraging or constraining the student's development and suggests that teaching approaches which allowed the student to use her cultural background were most successful in opening up learning spaces. Following this, Trudy Smoke describes her work with Writing Fellows, doctoral students of various disciplines who act as brokers between writing specialists and faculty across the university by acting as writing consultants within the various departments of the university. She exemplifies her work by revisiting her study of a Chinese student's writing experiences in several disciplines. Finally, Eleanor Kutz concludes this part of the book with a report on a project she developed for her composition course in which students became researchers of various discourse communities, ranging from immediate family units to disciplinary courses. She skillfully shows how by engaging in this project her students learned not only about the larger patterns that characterized discourses and participation in their courses but also their own place within the course communities.

The second section contains chapters written by two multilingual learners, Martha Muñoz and Motoko Kainose, about their experiences of taking courses in different disciplines and the role of literacy in them. It is rather unusual to see academic chapters written by students about their experiences, and this makes the book unquestionably unique. The chapters show that the students' major difficulties lay in their discomfort with using English in earlier stages, the teaching approaches, and classroom contextual matters. They show that while some courses alienated them and put them on peripheries of course communities, other courses opened up spaces where the students could build on their strengths as multilingual and multicultural learners and contribute to course conversations in meaningful ways. They show that in the latter cases, the learning of both the multilingual students and other mainstream students was enhanced. The pictures presented here are so personal and so vivid, that one could only wish the book contained more chapters like these. The fact that the editors decided to preserve the students' writing styles contributes to the sense of authenticity and makes it possible for the voices of the learners to truly speak for themselves and for the reader to see that linguistic perfection should not be conflated with intellectual abilities.

The third section presents accounts of disciplinary specialists about their experiences of working with multilingual students. The chapters contain a range of opinions on what counts as learning in different courses and exemplify pedagogical approaches which are not set in stone but are instead evolving, changing with each class and even adaptive to individual students. In his chapter, Tim Sieber analyzes his ESOL students' contribution to his anthropology courses and the kinds of intercultural analyses that their backgrounds help them to engage in. Stephen M. Fishman and Lucille McCarthy present a case study of an Indian immigrant student writing and reading in a predominantly American philosophy course. They detail the difficulties the student had with completing assignments and the changes in the instructor's assumptions about the student's abilities and his own pedagogical approach. Kristine Beyerman Alster presents a strong case for why writing is important in her area of expertise, nursing, while Rajini Srikanth eloquently describes her approach to teaching writing about literature and how it could benefit ESOL learners. While most chapters deal with writing, Estelle Disch focuses on ESOL students' oral participation in class, and finally Peter Nien-chu Kiang shares the assignment he uses in his Asian American Studies course to create space within which students can share their life stories and learn about others, space which also provides opportunities for teachers to learn about their students. All the chapters in this part demonstrate that these teachers are not afraid to show they were wrong in some of their initial assumptions about ESOL students and that they were brave to acknowledge and modify these

assumptions, all in the goal of helping their students feel involved, expand their learning activity, and experience success.

Overall, the book makes a significant contribution to the literature on working with ESOL students in tertiary settings, on writing and learning across the curriculum, and, most importantly, on models of collaboration between language and content specialists. Its unique strength is in bringing together the voices of ESOL researchers, multilingual students, and faculty across the curriculum. Though impressive, the collection has two obvious shortcomings. First, it is limited in terms of disciplinary coverage, with most of its contributors in Part III coming from social sciences and humanities. While this is probably expected as usually representatives of these areas are more likely to be sensitive to issues of language learning in their courses and are more likely to engage in collaborative activities with language specialists, perspectives from practitioners in engineering and “hard” sciences would have contributed tremendously to the book. Second, nine out of the thirteen chapters of the book cover experiences at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Though these experiences might be transferable to other universities, both in the US and in other countries, a broader geographic coverage would have appealed to broader audiences. These limitations notwithstanding, *Crossing the Curriculum* is a remarkable contribution and should be read by anybody interested in how students really learn. It could also provide insights and practical suggestions for developers of programs aimed at stimulating dialogues between ESOL specialists and teachers across other university departments.

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