

Juanita V. Williamson &
Virginia M. Burke, eds.

**A VARIOUS LANGUAGE:
PERSPECTIVE ON AMERICAN
DIALECTS.**

New York:
Holt, Rinehart & Winston,
1971. 725 pp. \$10.95.

The publication of an anthology of fifty articles dealing with the variousness of North American English should be a timely addition to the resources of the English teacher. Readers will become aware that dialect is not so much an aberrant form of the standard variety as it is a vestige of older speech patterns or a precursor of forms shortly to attain legitimacy. This book gives dialect an honorable parentage and a larger base, regionally and socially. One region's standard is, in fact, another region's dialect. As the distinguished dialectician, Raven I. McDavid, Jr., says in one of his four contributions to the book, "It behooves the teacher to recognize that in the long run one such variety is as good as another, and to make the diversity a source of both more interesting instruction at present and greater cultural understanding in the future" (pp. 519-20). The enterprising teacher should find in many of the papers models for investigative procedures which can be adapted to the needs of students exploring the diversity of their own linguistic environment.

But these are rather modest gains for a 725-page effort. The editors, in their attempt to go beyond the limitations of introductory textbooks which provide "brief generalized descriptions of American dialects," have included too many articles which can appeal only to serious students of American dialects and even here only to those especially concerned with

dialect geography. They too readily assume that most English teachers (for that audience is implied throughout the Introduction) are familiar with the technical vocabulary of dialect geography as well as the finely differentiated symbolization adopted for the *Linguistic Atlas* studies. Again, editorial commentary at the head of each article is too meagre to make the travail easier and more profitable. And for a textbook that professes concern with the teacher's ability to evaluate materials properly, the absence of a section on dialect theory is unfortunate. Obviously, some articles in this collection merit more attention than others. One of these, William Labov's "The Effect of Social Mobility on Linguistic Behavior," takes account of situational factors that significantly modify pronunciation, word choice, and syntax. In our own speech we may observe that in casual speech we make no distinction in pronouncing "four" and "for" before consonants; whereas, in formal speech situations, we are likely to sound the "r" in "four."

Obviously, recent speech sampling techniques better reflect today's language differences than the large number of studies in this collection based on the aging *Linguistic Atlas* materials. As the *Atlas* materials are concerned primarily with phonological and not so much with lexical and still less with syntactical features, the articles, particularly in Part 4, "Aspects of Regional and Social Dialects," and in Part 5, "Selected Sounds and Forms," reflect this emphasis. Teachers today are hardly intolerant of differences in pronunciation among their students; they need to know more about syntactic differences and to what extent these are regional, or social, or racial speech characteristics. Teachers would also like to examine at length questions which this text only serves to raise. That speakers of non-standard dialect are able to detect departures from the norm of standard English in

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the speech of others but not in their own speech, has important implications for the value of much teaching practice that dwells on error-hunting drills. It would be useful, again, to consider what factors act to maintain language differences and a resistance to the learning of standard English.

A curious gap in this collection is the absence of any discussion of non-standard "Black English" as a specific dialect. The explanation may lie in the fact that a number of articles, especially three by co-editor Juanita V. Williamson, bear the beginnings of a strong case for arguing that some of the phonological and grammatical features attributed to "Black English" can be found in the speech of a large number of Southern Whites leading one to conclude that the differences typically cited are regional rather than racial.

Despite its title, this anthology achieves only a limited perspective on American dialects.

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**CLASSROOM TEACHING
AND LEARNING: A MENTAL
HEALTH APPROACH.**

New York:
Holt, Rinehart & Winston,
1971. 429 pp. \$8.

This book will irritate those who see the school primarily as a place of academic learning, for it takes the position that the child in his whole personal development is a school responsibility. The authors find that the school is the place to begin a dynamic effort to reduce mental and emotional disorders by helping children to become more effective people. They emphasize that mental health is not a separate school activity but

a product of the *relationship* between child and school. These premises lead Tanner and Lindgren to a very thorough survey of the dynamics of teacher, pupil, curriculum, and general environment.

The teacher's personality is seen as a key factor. However, teachers do not operate in a vacuum, but within a curriculum; furthermore, consideration for the individual child and his development must take precedence over curriculum. Ultimately, the greatest asset to society is the balanced individual. Since the individual's self-concept is highly related to school performance, favorable learning experiences are a responsibility broader than the young teacher might at first realize. He must see that success in learning is an equivalent therapy.

Since beginning teachers are deeply concerned about discipline, behavior problems are not neglected in the discussion. A "problem" child is seen as one whose behavior interferes with his own learning, the learning attempts of his classmates, and his personal relationships. This topic is one of the best in the book. Attention is also given to the socio-economic factors underlying children's behavior. Common errors of interpretation are singled out and guidance offered in the management of variations from class and within any particular social class. A concluding chapter describes the teacher as learner, a self-image that prepares him not only to understand the child's struggle, but also to preserve in himself the thrust of ongoing search.

Each chapter might have been a book in itself but the authors have succeeded in producing a synthesis as an introductory text for young teachers. Technically, this is a well-written, carefully organized work. The specialized bibliographies and summaries at the close of each chapter provide the student with a sound beginning for research.

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