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English learners left behind: Standardized testing as Language Policy. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters. 216 pp. ISBN 9781853599972, \$39.95 (pbk).

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The *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001 dramatically changed educational policies in the USA. Creators and supporters of NCLB maintain that the intentions of the law are to increase standards and the academic performance of all students. Under the law, a new accountability system has been implemented which holds schools and school personnel responsible for the performance of students on mandatory standardized exams. Critics of NCLB, such as McNeil and Valenzuela (2000) and Amrein and Berliner (2002), claim that the negative consequences of the law far outweigh its expressed intentions. Kate Menken falls into the latter camp and her book *English Learners Left Behind: Standardized Testing as Language Policy* provides a systematic critique of NCLB, focusing on the law's negative impact on English language learners (ELLs). Menken provides compelling evidence, calling for a re-evaluation of current testing practices and the implementation of an official language policy. In a single volume, she provides a historical and political framework, original research, and numerous recommendations.

English Learners Left Behind is well suited for graduate seminars and teacher training. In addition, it should be required reading for education policy makers and researchers. *English Learners Left Behind* provides an excellent overview of educational policies affecting ELLs, examples of how schools are coping with federal mandates, and the voices of students and teachers affected by these new laws.

Menken explains that her primary interest is investigating the impact of testing on instruction and the educational experiences of ELLs through the lens of language policy. She has two main arguments. First, she states that the current policies implemented at the state level to meet the mandates of NCLB are unfair and unjust. For example, she claims that requiring ELLs to pass the New York Regents exam in English in order to graduate from high school is discriminatory and prohibits capable students who have not had sufficient time to acquire academic English from pursuing higher education. Her second argument is that NCLB is covertly making English the USA's *de facto* national language. According to Menken, instead of carefully engineering a national language policy, the USA has instead allowed its language policy to be the result of testing mandates. She doesn't pull any punches when stating that NCLB 'has become a means to suppress languages other than English in this country' (p. 35). She explains, 'Testing and accountability under the law ultimately reflect a "language-as-problem" or "deficit model" orientation in recent U.S. language policy, where language has become a liability for ELLs' (p. 160). Part of Menken's argument rests on the fact that NCLB repealed the *Bilingual Education Act* and eliminated the term 'bilingual education' from federal legislation (p. 162). Using New York City as an example, she explains that historically the city has provided bilingual education to ELLs; however, since the passage of NCLB, there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of bilingual programs.

The nine chapters of *English Learners Left Behind* are divided into three parts. 'Part 1: Language Policy Context' provides a brief history of the evolution of US language policy and federal education legislation. 'Part 2: Standardized Tests in Daily School Life' demonstrates the effects of standardized testing and high school exit exams on students and teachers. 'Part 3: Expansion and Recommendations' provides additional information on the detrimental effects of high-stakes testing, calls for the implementation of a clearly stated language policy in the USA, and offers numerous suggestions for improving ELL education.

Menken begins by offerings an excellent summary of how the political climate in the USA has affected language education policies since the country's inception. In addition, she provides a context for her inquiry. She likens the history of US language policy to a pendulum which swings between language tolerance and language restriction. She explains that the pendulum has swung dramatically in the direction of language restriction, which ominously corresponds with increased immigration. According to the 2000 US Census, almost one out of every five Americans speaks a language besides English at home (p. 19) and the US Department of Education (2006) predicts that by 2025, ELLs will constitute 25% of all school-aged students (p. 21).

Menken describes New York's attempt to meet the demands of No Child Left Behind and the effect of the law on ELL students. In anticipation of the passage of NCLB, New York mandated that all students pass high school exit exams, which were previously required only of college-bound students (p. 41). Since the exit exams were implemented, the dropout rate for ELLs almost doubled and the number of ELLs opting for Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED) courses dramatically increased. To investigate these disturbing statistics, Menken conducted a qualitative study using the testimony of teachers, administrators, and students from ten New York Schools.

Part 2 examines test items and the impact of standardized exams on the learning experiences of ELLs. The test items analyzed are from states with the largest ELL populations, namely Texas, California, and New York exams. Menken discusses many of the concerns raised by researchers regarding the validity of standardized tests when used with ELLs. These problems arise from the fact that under NCLB, ELLs are required to take exams which were not intended for them. To address this [assessment] disparity, schools provide ELLs with test accommodations and translated versions of exams.

Chapters 3, 5, and 6 substantiate the negative effects of high-stakes tests on instruction and the educational experiences of ELLs. These chapters are particularly powerful because they present the voices of students and teachers. For example, one teacher claims that at a certain point, ELL students realize they will not be able to pass the high school exit exams due to their limited English proficiency – a consequence among his ELL students: 'There's a daily level of frustration, anxiety, fear' (p. 110).

English Learners Left Behind explicates the ways in which schools and teachers have modified their programs, curricula, and instruction in response to NCLB. In chapter 6, the majority of the schools examined increased the amount of English classes their ELLs received. One interesting anomaly was a school which deviated from the path of others by offering students more classes in their native languages as a test preparation strategy. Seemingly counterintuitive, the results of their strategy have been substantially higher pass rates on the high school English exit exam. It would be interesting to know if the schools which attempted to follow suit were able to do so successfully.

Part 3 provides additional evidence of the detrimental effects of NCLB. Menken acknowledges that the law has caused increased attention to be paid to ELLs; however, she maintains that the attention is largely negative. Rather than closing the achievement gap, she argues that higher standards and increased accountability punish schools and provide incentives for schools to not serve ELLs at all. Part of the problem is that schools are assessed on students' passing scores instead of their growth.

A strength of *English Learners Left Behind* is the logical and well-supported criticism it provides of the current accountability system. It is hard to argue with Menken's claim that the attempt made in New York to level the playing field for ELLs by providing translated versions of exams has instead created a language hierarchy. Effectively, the five minority languages in which the exams were translated have come to be valued above others. In addition, these selected languages represent the most common minority languages spoken in New York State, but not those spoken in New York City schools.

Menken's case studies of New York City schools are powerful for several reasons. The studies provide compelling evidence that NCLB and the high-stakes testing movement is having a negative impact on ELL students' school participation, educational attainments, and psychological well-being. In addition, the case studies demonstrate that the issues and problems existing in New York are indicative of those occurring throughout the nation.

Menken concludes *English Learners Left Behind* by offering a list of recommendations to policy makers and school personnel. Foremost among these is the call for clear and coherent schoolwide language policies and 'Top-down educational policies that support local language policies and practices' (p. 185). Menken urges policymakers to use multiple measures to assess students' growth instead of relying primarily on standardized test scores which measure outcomes, and to acquire tests designed specifically for ELLs.

The contribution of *English Learners Left Behind* to the field of ELL education is undeniable; however, there are a few areas in the book which could be expanded upon. Menken states, 'When test scores are attached to high-stakes decisions like high school graduation, they can limit the future opportunities of ELLs' (p. 184). This argument would be strengthened with statistics associated with the consequences of not obtaining a high school diploma and effects on future employment and earnings. Certainly it is imperative to consider the path traveled by the ELLs pushed-out of our educational system. Also, the book does an exceptional job of including the voices of students and teachers; therefore, it would also be beneficial to have the perspectives of parents and family members of ELLs. Lastly, a concern of this reviewer is that the book assumes that the audience is already familiar with the position of those who favor increased accountability and NCLB. For those unfamiliar with NCLB and high-stakes testing, Menken's extensive criticism may appear to be unjustified and perhaps difficult to follow. However, her passion is understandable when one considers that the stories she relays are those of students and concerned educators and that before becoming an assistant professor of linguistics, she taught English as a second language.

English Learners Left Behind is an engaging read that not only documents the negative impact of high-stakes testing on ELLs, but also calls for the development and implementation of a language policy that supports the maintenance of minority languages and bilingual education. Menken provides reasonable suggestions for ameliorating the damage being done, but considering the USA's current climate of language restriction, her requests may unfortunately be denied.

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