

A  
**COMMUNITY**  
TEXT  
**ARISES**

A Literate Text and A Literacy Tradition In African-American Churches



BEVERLY J. MOSS



# **A Community Text Arises**

**A Literate Text  
and a Literacy Tradition  
in African-American Churches**

## Language and Social Processes

Judith Green, editor

Teaching Cultures: Knowledge for Teaching First Grade in France  
and the United States

*Kathryn M. Anderson-Levitt*

Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales: Preschool Children and Gender (Rev. ed.)

*Bronwyn Davies*

Shards of Glass: Children Reading and Writing Beyond Gendered  
Identities (Rev. ed.)

*Bronwyn Davies*

Children as Researchers of Culture and Language in Their Own Communities

*Ann Egan-Robertson and David Bloome (eds.)*

Constructing Critical Literacies

*Peter Freebody, Allan Luke and Sandy Muspratt*

Constructing Gender and Difference: Critical Research Perspectives  
on Early Childhood

*Barbara Kamler (ed.)*

Interprofessional and Family Discourses: Voices, Knowledge, and Practice

*Marleen Iannucci McClelland and Roberta G. Sands*

A Community Text Arises: A Literate Text and a Literacy Tradition in  
African-American Churches

*Beverly J. Moss*

Preschoolers as Authors: Literacy Learning in the Social World of the Classroom

*Deborah Wells Rowe*

Writing Ourselves: Mass-Observation and Literacy Practices

*Dorothy Sheridan, Brian Street, and David Bloome*

*forthcoming*

Funds of Knowledge: Theory, Research and Practice

*Norma Gonzalez and Luis Moll (eds.)*

Early Childhood Classroom Processes: A View through an Ethnographic Lens

*Rebecca Kantor and David P. Fernie (eds.)*

Reading to Children: Developing a Culture of Literacy

*Carolyn Panofsky*

Learning Written Genres

*Christine C. Pappas*

Discourse of Opportunity: How Talk in Learning Situations

Creates and Constrains—Interactional Ethnographic Studies in  
Teaching and Learning

*Lesley Rex (ed.)*

# **A Community Text Arises**

## **A Literate Text and a Literacy Tradition in African-American Churches**

Beverly J. Moss  
The Ohio State University



HAMPTON PRESS, INC.  
CRESSKILL, NEW JERSEY

Copyright © 2003 by Hampton Press, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, microfilming, recording, or otherwise, without permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Moss, Beverly J.

A community text arises : a literate text and a literacy tradition in African-American churches / Beverly J. Moss

p. cm. -- (Language and social processes)

Includes bibliographic references and index.

ISBN 1-57273-395-0 -- ISBN 1-57273-396-9

1. African Americans--Education. 2. African American churches. Literacy--United States. 4. Church work--United States. I. Title. II. Language & social processes.

LC2778.L34 M67 2001

251'.0089'96073--dc21

2001039644

Cover photo: Mt. Harmony United Methodist Church, Clover, SC  
Photographer: Beverly J. Moss

Hampton Press, Inc.  
23 Broadway  
Cresskill, NJ 07626

# Contents

Series Preface	vii
Acknowledgments	ix
<b>Introduction</b>	
<b>Literacy in African American Churches: A Conversation     Between the Academy and the Church Begins</b>	1
A Divine Moment	1
Views Within the Academy	2
Views Within African-American Churches	4
Literacy as Social Process	6
The Study	10
The Book	11
Negotiating the Sites of Tension	12
<b>1. African-American Church as Community</b>	<b>17</b>
Situating the African-American Church	18
Church as Community	20
The Role of the Minister in the African -American Church	23
The Role of the Sermon in African-American Churches	25
The Sermon Genre as a Speech Event: Rhetorical Aims	26
<b>2. Entering the Communities</b>	<b>31</b>
Entering Reverend M.'s Church Community	32
Reverend M.	33
Preparing the Sermon	34
Reverend M.'s Church	37
Literacy Events Surrounding the Sermon	39
Reverend M.'s Texts	41
Entering Dr. N.'s Church Community	44
Dr. N.	45
Preparing the Sermon	46
Dr. N.'s Church	48
Literacy Events Surrounding the Sermon	49
Dr. N.'s Texts	51

## VI CONTENTS

Entering Reverend P.'s Church Community	52
Reverend P.	53
Preparing the Sermon	55
Reverend P.'s Church	57
Literacy Events Surrounding the Sermon	59
Reverend P.'s Texts	59
Summary	62
<b>3. Creating a Community Within the Sermons</b>	<b>63</b>
Constructing a Community Identity:	
Identifying With the People	64
"We, Us, Our": Becoming One Community	66
Collective "I"	73
Shared Knowledge:	
"Bring It To Me In a Cup I Can Recognize"	80
"Speaking the Language of the People": Code Switching	82
Shared Knowledge, Collaboration, and Dialogue	89
Extending Boundaries Through Shared Knowledge	92
"He Sure Can Preach!"	99
<b>4. Broadening the Community Boundaries Through the Text:</b>	
<b>Reverend M. in a New Congregation</b>	<b>101</b>
Setting the Scene	102
A New Church	103
Entering a New Church: The Dialogue Continues	104
Shared Expectations and Shared Knowledge	106
The Role of the Narrative: Telling Stories	114
Interweaving Song and Sermon: Intertextuality in the Church	127
Summary	135
<b>5. The Emergence of a Community Text</b>	<b>137</b>
The Blurring of Boundaries	137
Shifts in Point of View	141
"Whose Text Is It?"	142
Exploring the Roles of Oral and Written Texts	146
Intertextual Relationships	147
Rhetorical Appeals in African-American Sermons	149
An Alternative Model of a Literate Text	152
Implications for Literacy Learning: Sites of Negotiation	153
Sites of Common Ground	155
Implications for Pedagogy	157
Conclusion	159
References	163
Author Index	169
Subject Index	171



## **Series Preface**

### **LANGUAGE AND SOCIAL PROCESSES**

**Judith Green, Editor**

**University of California at Santa Barbara**

#### **Associate Editors**

**Ginger Weade**  
**Ohio University**

**Carol Dixon**  
**University of California**  
**at Santa Barbara**

*Language and Social Processes* provides a forum for scholarly work that makes visible the ways in which everyday life is accomplished through discourse processes among individuals and groups. Volumes will examine how language-in-use influences the access of individuals and culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse groups to social institutions, and how knowledge construction and social participation across diverse social settings is accomplished through discourse.

Studies in education and other social institutions are invited from a variety of perspectives including those of anthropology, communication, education, linguistics, literary theory, psychology, and sociology. Manuscripts are encouraged that involve theoretical treatments of relevant issues, present in-depth analyses of particular social groups and institutional settings, or present comparative studies across social groups, settings or institutions. Send inquiries to: Judith Green, Series Editor, Graduate School of Education, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 93106.