A Workshop on Language Diversity in the K-12 Curriculum:
Principles and Programs:

Despite the obvious need and increasing interest in school-based programs on language diversity, there are few curricular programs specifically designed to educate students about the nature and significance of language differences. We argue that such materials are essential in order to confront the present level of misunderstanding and mis-education about language differences in American society, and offer a variety of concrete examples of materials that have proven to be educationally effective in this effort.

We consider the rationale for such programs and describe the curricular formats for K-12 programs, with illustrative examples of materials and activities from current programs piloted and implemented by the staff of the North Carolina Language and Life Project (NCLLP). The rationale for curricular programs includes humanistic, scientific, historical, cultural, and utilitarian goals. The principles for this educational approach are based on the assumptions that (1) language differences are inherently interesting to people; (2) language differences are relevant to people’s lives on a personal, interactional level; (3) language differences are intrinsically connected to sociohistorical, sociocultural, and regional traditions; (4) effective public education about language variation takes place when learners discover truths for themselves; (5) positively framed presentations of language variation hold a greater likelihood of being well received than those that directly confront ideologies considered to be unassailable; and (6) language differences are embedded in a more broadly based cultural and sociopolitical context and often act as a proxy for these deeper concerns. The themes, programs, and activities illustrated in this presentation are widely applicable to students throughout the United States, although the exemplary materials are specifically designed to meet the state standards and competency objectives for students in North Carolina—in social studies and language arts.

Examples come from a range of current materials developed by the NCLLP staff that have already been implemented or piloted on educational levels ranging from Grade 4 through Grade 12, with special focus on the Voices of North Carolina middle-school curriculum for Grade 8 social studies, a 450-minute, multimedia instructional curriculum that dovetails with the North Carolina standard course of study for Grade 8, and is endorsed by the State Department of Public Instruction. Other examples that will be discussed include a 450-minute pilot curriculum on bilingualism and code-switching taught in the Durham Public Schools, materials that teach pragmatics to Grade 11 students, and materials that mesh dialect education with the study of literature commonly taught at the secondary level.

Finally, we consider practical issues of implementation, such as the need to design materials that meet current state-mandated competencies; the need to accommodate multiple learning styles (e.g., visual, aural, verbal, physical, logical, social, solitary) through activities that encourage various pedagogical approaches (e.g., inductive, deductive, reflective, comparison, summative); the need to market the curriculum effectively to teachers who already feel overwhelmed by current demands on their time and expertise; and the need to provide materials that are accessible and teachable by regular classroom teachers without linguistic expertise. The presentation will include an extensive inventory of current activities and resources.