

Multilingual Literacies: Invisible Representation of Literacy in a Rural Classroom

Lydia Kananu Kiramba

Abstract

In many countries, educational policies typically mandate school activities that promote a homogeneous and narrow range of academic literacies for all learners despite the diverse nature of human learning. This ethnographic case study examines how a 12-year-old Kenyan fourth-grade student performing below average on all standardized tests used multiple invisible literacies while documenting his knowledge and life experiences in a rural context. Invisible literacies are covert meaning-making literacy practices that are not privileged in the classroom. Examination of these practices shows a convergence between school and home literacies, suggesting a need for education stakeholders to identify literacies that are otherwise marginalized and to reposition multilingual learners in nondeficit ways by centering and integrating these literacies. This study demonstrates that a monolithic and monolingual approach to literacy, in isolation from other visual, oral, and practical forms of literacy used by multilingual rural students, denies such learners access to and development of literacy in general.

Keywords: multilingualism, comparative literacy education, language learners, academic language, decoding, family literacy, ethnography, Vygotskian

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