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A Review of Urban literacies: Critical perspectives on language, learning, and community.

Kinloch, V. (Ed.) (2011) *Urban literacies: Critical perspectives on language, learning, and community*. New York: Teachers College Press. 240 pp. ISBN 978-0807751824, \$39.95 (paperback).

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The atmosphere of increasing linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversity coupled with ongoing advancements in technology has ignited discussions in the educational arena about what constitutes literacy. Even though literacy as social practice, a broader view of the term, has gained more acceptance, educators still face the challenge of developing relevant pedagogies to bridge literacy practices in schools and communities. Taking up this challenge, Valerie Kinloch applied her expertise in the field of literacy by compiling several research studies intended to demonstrate the power of pedagogies grounded in the view of literacy as social practice. The ten chapters in *Urban Literacies* present studies by well-known and emergent educational researchers whose main goal is to show how urban children, youth, and adults of color enact their identities through literacy practices in the real and virtual worlds and how those practices are invaluable resources educators need to better understand in order to expand students' possibilities.

The book is divided into three sections that present research on family and community literacies, in teaching and teacher education, and in popular culture, popular media, and forms of multimodality. Studies in section I, comprised of four chapters, emphasize the integration of students' funds of knowledge in the classroom. Chapter 1, by Machado-Casas, Sanchez and Smith, relies on qualitative methods and a framework based on sociocultural, New Literacy Studies, and language ideologies paradigms to illustrate how twenty-three bilingual teacher candidates were mentored in conducting research about language and ideologies in their own Latino community. In chapter 2, Hill uses a sociocultural approach as a framework for an ethnographic study that explored Black people's identity construction as readers through engagement in book reading, discussions, and writing in a bookstore specializing in Black literature. Based on formal and informal interviews with customers among other data sources, the author concludes that the bookstore functioned as literacy counterpublic, i.e., a space where dominant social narratives are challenged.

Chapter 3 expands on the issue of identity construction and its complexities through the case study of a nine-year-old daughter of Mexican immigrants. Martinez-Roldan and Malave apply critical discourse analysis grounded in constructivist and sociocultural approaches to analyze parents' and daughters' narratives. In doing so, the authors cast light on tensions and ideologies surrounding what constitutes Mexican heritage and how identities are negotiated in the U.S context. Chapter 4, by Carter and Kumasi, examines the participation of six Black students in a book club that was part of a pre-college afterschool literacy program. As in Hill's chapter, the goal was to understand Black students' racial identity construction through reading Black literature and openly discussing sensitive topics such as race, racism, and Whiteness.

Section II addresses issues in teaching and teacher education. In chapter 5, Souto-Manning uses a diversities framework to illuminate the journey of eight in-service teachers to reach conscientização or meta-awareness regarding teaching theory and practice through Freirean cultural circles. Souto-Manning argues that this dialogical technique gives teachers agency to transform curriculum and reality. Chapter 6, authored by Haddix and Rojas, uses a critical

literacy framework to assist teachers in developing the necessary critical skills to analyze representation of Latino identity in the teachers' edition of textbooks widely used in English language arts classrooms. In Chapter 7, Winn relies on a critical ethnographic approach to support the claim that engaging marginalized incarcerated girls in interpretation and production of play scripts that relate to their own life struggles can be a fruitful venue for collaboration, dialogue, and reflection leading to the envisioning of new possibilities.

Section III emphasizes the combination of popular culture and critical pedagogy as means of collective resistance and empowerment. In chapter 8, Jocson and Cooks apply theories of empowerment and critical pedagogy to explore low-income high-school students' creation of multimodal texts involving significant issues such as race, gender, and immigration. Poetry, music videos, rap songs, postings on blogs, and Facebook were some of the sources students used to convey critique of power relations and experiences of oppression. Also from a critical pedagogy approach, Kim, in chapter 9, presents the case study of a high school English teacher whose passion for hip-hop and its historical roots motivates her to incorporate rhythm in the curriculum. The teacher's practice not only aims at bridging classroom content and students' interests but also has the purpose of raising students' awareness of hip-hop in its complexity. While hip-hop has a tradition of resistance, as a form of mass culture, it may convey oppressive messages that serve as material for critique in classroom discussions. In chapter 10, Paris and Kirkland's study deconstructs the oral/written dichotomy through the analysis of two multimodal events. Text messaging and twitter conversations involving the use of African American Language by secondary students were examined as "attempts at capturing embodied realities in printed form" (p. 181). Participants are portrayed as "verbal artists" whose vernacular literacies represent the enactment of their cultural and ethnic identities in different spaces/modalities.

The progressive studies presented in *Urban Literacies* greatly contribute to a deeper understanding of literacy as social practice, thus evidencing the need to defy polarities that validate certain forms of literacy while others are looked down upon and excluded from traditional educational settings. Both scholars and educators may find *Urban Literacies* a valuable source of learning as each of the innovative and methodologically rigorous studies links research and practice in ending sections titled "critical perspectives." The book also includes a conclusion comprised by the insightful thoughts of Valerie Kinloch, Sonia Nieto, and Peter Smagorinsky. Nieto, for example, underscores the importance of connecting school and students' lives; however, she realistically reminds readers that working with families "is not always easy or fluid" and that educators may not be prepared for "unexpected tensions and misunderstandings" (Nieto, 2011, p. 197).

Even though *Urban Literacies* offers a thoughtful rationale to support the need to connect out-of-school and school literacy practices, adding one more link to the rationale could have made it stronger. The integration of non-standard literacy practices in schools is undeniably a means to validate identities and diverse ways of knowing. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to stress the relevance of those practices as scaffolding for students' development as productive and engaged

citizens. As the New London Group (1996) asserts, “Effective citizenship and productive work now require that we interact effectively using multiple languages, multiple Englishes, and communication patterns that more frequently cross cultural, community, and national boundaries” (p. 4). Although all studies presented in *Urban Literacies* advocate for the integration of students’ multimodal practices in the curriculum, there is no mention to the benefit of doing so as far as students’ identity construction as active, creative, conscious citizens and workers. Despite this missing link, *Urban Literacies* is a highly recommended book not only for the richness of research presented, but also for the critical perspectives offered. A final message by Kinloch well summarizes the powerful content of the book: “We cannot do anything less than critical, our work cannot be anything other than transformative, and our teaching, research, and advocacy cannot be anything other than relevant” (p. 196).

References

- New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), 59-92.