



Briefing Papers

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Pluriversal Literacy

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Pluriversal Literacy

Literacies are defined as the ways and means through which people make meaning, communicate, and relate to each other and the world. Including, but far exceeding, reading and writing, literacies include the semiotic practices fundamental to human engagement.

Everything in world is communicative; all things draw upon semiosis. From gestures to root patterns, from senses to temperatures, from sound to pattern formations, people and our ecosystems function amongst many complex sign systems or iconic and indexical referencing.

It is rightly recognised that education, and specifically, literacy education, plays a fundamental role in supporting more sustainable futures for people and the planet. However, formalised frameworks of literacy education have become dominated by one “universal” way of being literate: reading and writing print text.

Pluriversality is a concept that emerges from a decolonial movement of thought that provides a counternarrative to contemporary Northern assumptions of the universal and, in Escobar’s (2018) words, to “the hegemony of modernity’s one-world ontology” (p. 4). The universal is an onto-ethico-epistemological concept; in other words, what is understood as common across the universe depends on where you stand (figuratively and literally) and how you see and experience this universe. We might then imagine that there are many universals depending on where the teller is positioned. The pluriversal concept does not equate to a world where everything is different and therefore incomparable, but a world that is home to many worlds (Ziai, 2018).

Dominant discourses, policies, and practices in education, as well as across other public sectors, have become stabilized or sedimented in one version of the universal, one that has been defined by a post-Enlightenment, Eurocentric understanding of the concept (see UNESCO, 2016; Wickens & Sandlin 2007). There is growing recognition that literacies of water, land, materials, faith, agriculture, embodiment, making – that is, “pluriversal” literacies that enable critical and cultural ways of being in and with the world – are vital for supporting sustainable and pluriversal futures that meet the diverse needs of the worlds’ population.

Responding to the intersecting crises of climate change, ecological decline, erasure of local and critical knowledges, and the related socio-economic vulnerabilities such conditions pose for human and non-human eco-systems worldwide pluriversal literacies call for an expansion of global definitions of “literacy” in education.

Within this field of inquiry and practice, CR&DALL in partnership with the [Sustainable Futures Global Network](#) and the School of Education at the University of Glasgow are taking forward a number of interrelated research and innovation initiatives. These include a) a forthcoming book: *When words are not enough: Toward a pluriversal literacies education that*

sustains us (Perry, M. forthcoming, Routledge); b) a research project *Renewing Literacies Education for Sustainable and Equitable Futures*; c) the establishment of a Global Literacies Hub hosted as part of the Sustainable Futures Global Network.

Further reading:

Perry, M. (2020). Pluriversal literacies: affect and relationality in vulnerable times. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 56 (2), 293-309.

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Wickens, C.M., & Sandlin, J.A. (2007). Literacy for what? Literacy for whom? The politics of literacy education and neocolonialism in UNESCO- and World Bank–sponsored literacy programs. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 57(4), 275–292. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0741713607302364>

Ziai, A. (2018). Internationalism and speaking for others: What struggling against neoliberal globalization taught me about epistemology. In B. Reiter (Ed.), *Constructing the pluriverse: The geopolitics of knowledge* (pp. 117–136). Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

UNESCO. (2016). *Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656.local_e=en



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