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Multilingual Literacies: Invisible Representation of Literacy in a Rural Classroom

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Invisible literacies involve higher order thinking skills.

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

After 14-year-old William Kamkwamba (2007) in Malawi innovatively built a windmill using junkyard scrap metal and wood to provide his family with electricity, his story caught the attention of the world. In his co-authored book, *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* (Kamkwamba & Mealer, 2009), he describes how he had to rely on pictures of windmill designs that he found in books, because he could not understand English well. In a similar way, Richard Turere (2013), a 13-year-old Kenyan boy, invented “lion lights” to protect his father’s cattle from lions. Besides being inspiring, these stories reflect the innovative nature of young African multilingual children growing up in rural settings. Yet, they seem exceptional because one of the obstacles to acknowledging and supporting children’s talents and harnessing them is a too narrow institutional understanding of literacy, one that fails to recognize the legitimacy of children’s local languages and multiple forms of literacies at school.

In this study, Mosi (all student names are pseudonyms) is a 12-year-old fourth-grade student in a rural village in Kenya, whose literacies in music, drawing, and technical innovation went beyond the reading and writing acknowledged in his school. Like Kamkwamba and Turere, Mosi’s engagement draws attention to a configuration of

literacies that children from rural multilingual settings can engage in at schools that are under-resourced and where such students are marginalized by both the school language of instruction and economic disadvantage.

The purpose of this study is to document the invisible literacies of one multilingual boy, defined by English-only standardized tests as an underachiever. Invisible literacies comprise all knowledge practices and skills from the world within and outside of school that are either unacknowledged or discouraged in the classroom (Hamel, 2006) yet have the capacity to scaffold or enable literacy learning. In this study, invisible literacies include funds of knowledge, the forms of knowledge and skills that are necessary for individuals’ operational well-being in the nondominant society (Moll et al., 1992) and emphasize the invisibility of such knowledge because of narrow dominant culture definitions of literacy that often do not privilege nondominant culture literacies. In this way, representations of invisible literacies within the classroom denote the covert and/or prohibited literacies in the curricular setting. They include students’ linguistic and cultural knowledge, experiences, and abilities that remain invisible because they do not align with traditional classroom pedagogy and assessment practices.

Recognition of invisible literacies will potentially benefit all educational stakeholders by enabling them to find the strengths of learners that are not aligned with school norms and to reposition them from a strengths-based view. Capturing the multilingual, multimodal, and pragmatic literacies as a measure of competence and success will enable better educational outcomes overall. Mosi's engagement with literacy both in and outside of school offers further insights from a rural student about the current mismatch between expectations and actual engagements with literacy.

This study grounds the view that educators' and schools' understanding of literacy would benefit from being broadened to include the multilingual, multicultural, multimodal, flexible, pragmatic, and other literacies that children bring to school as measures of competency and success. Schools' and educators' support and appreciation for this multiplicity in the classroom will enable innovation, production of knowledge, and thus learning in students' lives.

Literature Review

Goody and Watt (1963), Olson (1991), and Ong (1980) defined literacy principally in relation to written texts while bracketing out oral cultures as primitive. Literacy and orality were linked to cognition, privileging the language demands of texts and individual acquisition of psychological skills. This definition proposed a division among world cultures biased against oral cultures. Literacy in this sense was seen as a tool for modernization and progress, and the ability to read and write a language became a metonym for intellectual capacity in general. That view has since shaped literacy policies and programs.

In postcolonial African societies, ex-colonial languages often still serve as the language of instruction in schools; in Kenya, it is English. Literacy and illiteracy remain framed in terms of reading and writing texts in these languages. An implicit assumption is that this form of literacy leads to intellectual and economic advancement and mobility (New London Group, 1996). This ignores other literacies that children may bring to school, including modes of representation (aural, visual, and linguistic). Such literacies are at times deemed impediments to school success because they do not align with traditional classroom pedagogy and assessment practices. Nonetheless, scholars have cautioned educators against the danger of ignoring children's literacies (Dyson, 2015).

In a study on the relation between literacy and schooling, Scribner and Cole (1981) challenged the deficit view of oral cultures by showing the sophisticated uses of multiple literacy practices among the Vai people of Liberia. The researchers noted how the multilingual and multiliterate

Vai people used different scripts (English, Arabic, and Vai) for distinct purposes in business, religion, and politics. Similarly, Heath (1983) comparatively studied two communities and found that school practices mirrored forms of literacy practiced in the white households (i.e., text-based storytelling) and did not align with forms of literacy practiced in the black households (i.e., performative oral storytelling). These ethnographic language socialization studies disclosed how literacy is not neutral but a social practice arising out of delimited cultural needs and goals. As such, there can only be literacy by ignoring the ubiquity of literacies.

Educational standardizations, especially around the skills of writing and reading, continue to be privileged over other language functions, such as storytelling, singing, and drawing (Kiramba, 2016; Razfar & Rumenapp, 2014). Souto-Manning, Dernikos, and Yu (2016), for instance, described how normative discourses of literacy and learning framed U.S. immigrant boys of color as unsuccessful because their behaviors did not mirror the expected literacy norm at school.

Educational policies often react to issues around literacy by focusing on even more narrowly discrete forms of it (Dyson, 2008). Teachers begin to teach the skills necessary only to navigate to standards, often simply so students do well on standardized tests. Kiramba (2016) described how fourth-grade rural teachers in Kenya focused exclusively on English-language examination drills to help students pass the standardized county exams.

Scholars have questioned the adequacy of normative literacy practices (Dyson, 2015; Heath, 1983; Orellana, 2016; Souto-Manning et al., 2016), especially those that are monolingual (Bakhtin, 1981). Meyer and Benavot (2013) observed that most learning takes place outside of formal educational establishments and advised educators and researchers to identify and build on less visible literacies.

Carrington (2003) argued that literacy provides skills and knowledge to mediate the self in relation to one's social and cultural context, and Luke, Freebody, and Land (2000) distinguished different literacy roles for learners in a postmodern, text-based culture. That is, readers are not only code breakers, who must decode systems of written and spoken languages and visual images, but can also move beyond rote memorization of words and phrases to become meaning makers (i.e., readers who participate in the text and construct cultural meanings from it).

Research on African classrooms has underscored how students engage in a myriad of activities in and outside of the classroom. Mkhize (2016) illustrated how fourth-grade South African bilingual students used a network of literacies, which included designing multilingual birthday cards, reading newspapers, and oral storytelling. Similarly, Kiramba (2017) demonstrated how multilingual children

used multiple linguistic resources in composing essays, although such practices were penalized in the classroom. Lisanza (2011) noted that multilingual students deviated from a classroom English-only mandate and used home languages to compose stories. These studies demonstrated that literacy practices are embedded in the sociocultural contexts of students.

Despite extensive literature that has acknowledged literacies that students bring to school, little research to date has interrogated what it means to be literate and in what ways literacy and illiteracy are determined in multilingual African rural societies, where oral traditions are part of children's lives. Moreover, research has not comprehensively considered literacy from multilingual, rural schools, where literacy remains framed in a foreign language of instruction, distanced from students' localities. Thus, there is a dearth of research detailing multilingual literacies in multilingual rural classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

This study is influenced by sociocultural approaches to literacy (Bakhtin, 1981; Vygotsky, 2012) and the New London Group's (1996) pedagogy of multiliteracies. These approaches view literacy within the local and larger contexts where individuals learn and live, situated within students' needs. Specifically, this study adopts a multiliteracies lens to capture a sense of the multiplicity used for meaning making (New London Group, 1996).

For the New London Group (1996), literacy encompasses much more than reading and writing and includes drawing, synthesizing images, singing, and oral storytelling. These other literacies, although positioned as secondary to reading and writing in most school curricula, involve higher order thinking skills situated within the actual contexts of learners. The term *multiliteracies* underscores two critical aspects: "the multiplicity of communications channels and media, and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity" (p. 63). Multiliteracies generates a kind of pedagogy where language and other modes of meaning are caught in their actual, lived use, as dynamic, culturally and linguistically diverse representational resources constantly being reshaped and locally deployed by people to achieve their daily and actually lived sociocultural purposes in the world.

In discussing what students need to learn, the New London Group (1996) proposed a concept of design to replace static representations of meaning.

Design in the sense of construction is something you do in the process of representing meanings—to oneself in sensemaking processes such as reading, listening or

viewing, or to the world in communicative processes such as writing, speaking or making pictures. (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009, p. 175)

Design involves three major aspects of meaning making: the available designs (the already available cultural, linguistic, and material resources for meaning making); designing (the work one does to make meaning, including how available designs are appropriated, revoiced, and transformed via semiotic processes); and the redesigned (how, through the act of designing with available designs, the world and the person are transformed). The redesigned comprises the resources reproduced or transformed by designing, which becomes part of the cultural repertoire of available designs for others (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; New London Group, 1996).

As a process of meaning making, six principal resources are available to designers: linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial, and multimodal. In combination, meaning making is seen as an always active, dynamic, and adaptive process not governed by strictly applicable laws:

The process of shaping emergent meaning involves representation and recontextualization. This is never simply a repetition of Available Designs. Every moment of meaning involves the transformation of the available resources of meaning. Reading, seeing, and listening are all instances of Designing. (New London Group, 1996, p. 75)

As such, the redesigned outcome of a designing process is a new meaning, something by which and through which meaning makers remake themselves and their world. The redesigned represents a unique product of human agency, a transformed meaning. Understanding literacy through multiliteracies framework helps better document and illuminate how Mosi leveraged the locally available design resources and presented the redesigned representations of his invisible literacies in his sociocultural context.

Methods

This qualitative case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Stake, 1995) comprises part of a wider ethnographic case study carried out for six months in a rural, Kenyan, multilingual fourth-grade classroom. Kenya is a multilingual East African country that attained independence from British colonialization in 1963. It has approximately 67 live languages (Lewis, Simons, & Fennig, 2016), with English and Kiswahili as official languages, the latter being also the national language and the language of wider communication. Since independence, English has been the official language of

instruction from fourth grade onward, and Kiswahili is taught as a subject in grades K–12.

The study was conducted at Tumaini Public Primary School (pseudonym), selected for its rural location, where students do not have access to English outside school. The school served economically disadvantaged families in the community. Although children in this school were multilingual (speaking two or three local languages), English-only instruction was emphasized at the school from fourth grade onward. Any student speaking in another language was punished, and students sometimes policed one another. In the classroom, this English-only rule left most of the students silent, simply repeating English phrases after the teacher or copying from the chalkboard.

Two questions motivated this research:

1. How does a multilingual early adolescent student in a rural fourth-grade classroom represent literacy in his daily life?
2. How does this representation of literacy relate to the current reified curricula?

Participants

Using purposive sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), I selected Mosi based on my month-long interaction with students at the school. He was always disengaged from teachers' instruction but always busy doing something. His teachers ranked him as a below-average student. As a 12-year-old, Mosi was the oldest male student in the classroom. He had been retained in the same grade for two years because he was not able to read in English. He was performing poorly on different tests. An orphan who lived with his grandmother, Mosi had no access to books outside of the school. He spoke Kimeru, Kikuyu, and Kiswahili fluently and some English. After school in the evenings, he fed his grandmother's sheep and rabbits.

Data Collection

Data sources included classroom observations, shadowing, artifacts from Mosi's writing and drawing, and structured and unstructured interviews with him. Recorded and transcribed structured interviews explored his biography, language background, personal interests, and literacy practices at home and at school. Unstructured interviews included weekly conversations with Mosi while shadowing him on lunch breaks or walking home in the evenings and covered topics such as his general school day and plans for the evening. I kept a researcher journal in which I made notes from shadowing and conversations.

Data Analysis

Data were coded and analyzed using both deductive and inductive approaches. I read and reread field notes and transcripts to generate codes based on the research questions and extant literature to capture Mosi's literacies within and outside of school. Codes were generated to identify his engagements with literacies valued and rewarded at school, invisible literacies that went unnoticed and were not accepted in his classrooms, and literacies used in his home. These categories of analysis all drove toward the primary research questions to describe in depth how he represented his literacies. I used triangulation to enhance the credibility of the findings via member checking with Mosi, his teacher, and his guardian. Additionally, I used progressive focusing (Stake, 1995), which involved gradually seeking clarification on issues as they emerged from the participants throughout the data collection process. Instances analyzed in this article were typical but, nonetheless, rich representations of patterns of literacies observed in Mosi's life.

Researcher's Role

I am a Kenyan-born woman and a native speaker of Kimeru and Kiswahili, and I was trained as a teacher, with graduate degrees in linguistics and language and literacy studies. I have worked as a K–8 teacher trainer in Kenya and the United States. In this study, although my status as a Kenyan who shared a cultural identity with the participant and common home languages positioned me as an insider, my knowledge as a teacher trainer, as well as my academic and theoretical knowledge about literacy that informed and differentiated my views of pedagogy in Kenyan classrooms after several years of study and research, positioned me as an outsider.

Findings

The findings are organized in terms of Mosi's literacy practices at and outside of school, to demonstrate how he made meaning of his school and home experiences and settings by taking up available designs, reworking (designing) those resources into redesigned artifacts, and thus transforming his world in meaningful ways.

The Classroom Literate Life of Mosi

Singing and Drawing. By the time I arrived at Tumaini, Mosi had been labeled a silent and below-average

student in the classroom. He had been retained for two years in second and third grades as a struggling reader. He would not respond to questions posed in English, but often sat silently while scribbling something.

As one example, during a grammar lesson on adverbs, Mosi sat silently looking at the teacher and listening to but not participating in the classroom repetition of phrases. Five minutes into the lesson, Mosi was already yawning and flipping the pages of his textbook. Then, he began singing a Kiswahili gospel song in a small voice: “*Amenitendea, amenitendea Imanueli amenitendea*” (He has done it for me, He has done it for me, Emmanuel He has done it for me). Mosi’s singing occurred during what seemed like guesswork by the other students as they attempted to address sentences on the chalkboard. Ten minutes into the lesson and still singing, Mosi picked up an English-aid text and began flipping the pages. Another student, Kitwana, who sat next to Mosi, joined him in the singing and after a minute began drumming on the desk rhythmically to accompany their song. Almasi, who until then had seemed to be listening to the teacher’s instruction, warned Kitwana that the teacher would hear them singing and punish them. Frightened about being reported, Mosi and Kitwana switched to humming as Mosi flipped through pictures in the English-aid textbook.

Here, as a designer, Mosi wove together the available designs of an English-aid textbook and locally popular gospel music to redesign meaning and relevance within a classroom experience where he felt left out because of his lack of English proficiency. This gesture was also taken up as an available design by a peer, Kitwana, as a way to make his own meaning. The designing process here kept Mosi and perhaps Kitwana in the room, minimizing classroom distraction. Instruction that did not seem to capture and/or connect to his previous and current experiences, including both linguistic and cultural repertoires, excluded Mosi from engagement.

On another occasion, rather than do the assigned English work, Mosi began to draw a *boda*, a type of motorbike common in his community. Soon after, his neighbors stopped working as well and were staring keenly at his drawing and advising him on what to draw, such as these comments by Fumo:

Weka taa na mtu akiendesha (Put the lights and a person riding it). [Mosi did not heed his friend’s advice, so Fumo began drawing his own motorbike.] *Hata hujui kuchora vizuri! yangu itakushinda* (Even you do not know how to draw well! Mine will be better than yours).

Fumo took out a different notebook and began drawing a motorbike, too. By then, their friends were busy admiring their pieces of art (see Figure 1).

Here, as a designer, Mosi drew on available designs from his lived experiences in the world, redesigning a physical artifact as a conversation piece for sociability in an otherwise alienating setting. In a conversation (translated here from Kiswahili), he explained that he started drawing because he did not understand the English task instructions and would have been punished for asking questions in his home language:

Researcher: Why did you draw the motorbike during the lesson?

Mosi: I usually see them daily.

Researcher: How about the teacher’s instruction?

Figure 1. (a) Mosi’s motorbike and (b) Fumo’s motorbike

Mosi: I don't understand English. Not many understand English. Even that big boy over there does not understand English. I do, however, understand and can read and write in Kimeru and Kiswahili because I am used to them.

Researcher: Does the teacher know you do not understand instruction?

Mosi: No one likes speaking in Kimeru or Kiswahili because you are punished for it. I choose to do my stuff.

Rather than repeating the teacher's English phrases and sentences, a task which Mosi did not find cognitively challenging, he instead engaged his invisible literacies of singing and drawing. Socially generalizing his English proficiency, he noted that he was one of many students who did not understand English and that he designed his own meaning of his experience because speaking to others would have elicited punishment. As such, by representing his literacies through singing and drawing, Mosi (re) established his identity and social presence to other students, apparently by garnering their attention toward his representations.

Over my full time at Tumaini, Mosi's drawing during English lessons continued and included a picture of his dog, a person riding a motorbike, and his grandmother's sheep, which he fed after school. These redesigned images brought his home world of competency into the classroom arena. However, he also drew pictures of internationally known individuals: John Cena, a U.S. professional

wrestler, rapper, and actor; Bradley Davis, aka DJ B-Do, a U.S. hip-hop musician; and Ronaldo, a Portuguese professional footballer (see Figure 2). Mosi noted to me that he had seen these men in daily newspapers and on television news and that he admired their work. Teachers and peers similarly described Mosi as a champion in school football; thus, he envisioned becoming a football champion like Ronaldo.

Mosi's drawings of these international figures portrayed him as someone who is aware of global sports and music and thus literate in these domains. Although he faced challenges in written and spoken English, he represented his invisible literacies around music and sports through drawing. In each of the figures, he designed his own experiences of sport by using images and English and Swahili captions. This was also a representation of his love of sports, his aspirations to be like Ronaldo, and his status in school as a champion in sports. Like the drawings of the motorbikes, these pictures, as the redesigned, signaled the validity and made sense of Mosi's presence in the otherwise alienating experience of the classroom.

In these ways, despite a restrictive English-only policy in the school, Mosi found a way to reflect on the routine practices and broader themes in his life that were made invisible and unacknowledged in the classroom. Using these invisible literacies, he documented and represented his knowledge of the world as a way to transform the otherwise unmeaningful experiences of the classroom into meaningful ones.

Figure 2. Mosi's Drawings of international figures: (a) John Cena, (b) DJ B-Do, and (c) Ronaldo

Writing. Limiting available design resources affords only limited outcomes from designing. As such, it is illuminating to contrast Mosi's reading and writing literacy in English and Kiswahili (see Figure 3) to see how limiting linguistic design resources to English only limit the way that his formal academic expression and meaning making were appreciated at school.

The assignment was to write about a time when one was happy. In Mosi's English essay (see Figure 3a), he listed two instances but did not develop or provide details or link them together. Moreover, the several mechanical errors of spelling and sentence structure in this essay are consistent with emerging proficiency in written English and contrast markedly with the Kiswahili essay (see Figure 3b). Here, the essay is clearly organized, with each paragraph developing an idea through relevant concrete examples. The difference between the two essays is less a lack of content or cognitive inability but more the presence or absence of the needed linguistic tools to express his thoughts.

From a multiliteracies perspective, as a designer and meaning maker, Mosi drew selectively from the available linguistic designs around him as a way to design and represent his social and cultural experiences. As Cope and Kalantzis (2009) noted, "what the meaning maker creates is a new design, an expression of their voice which draws upon the unique mix of meaning-making resources, the codes and conventions they happen to have found in their contexts and cultures" (p. 177). As such, Mosi expressed his voice clearly and fluidly in Kiswahili but not in English, challenging his labeling as an underachiever and also disclosing the inability of the monolingual perspective to accurately assess student achievement.

Literate Life of Mosi Outside the Classroom: Literacies for Use

Along with the redesigned artifacts of his invisible literacies in the classroom previously discussed, Mosi also translated his available designs into an invention: a lighting system for his grandmother's home built with materials from the local junkyard (see Figure 4). Collected materials included used-up dry cells, wires, and LED bulbs from dead spotlights, radios, and even cell phones. With these, he built lights for his grandmother's house. This redesigning process is transformative, as new representational work of his scientific literacy, the knowledge of connecting positive and negative terminals to produce current, which was subjective and meaningful in Mosi's contexts.

Mosi's grandmother indicated that his education and knowledge had helped him make this form of lighting for their house, which saved them energy costs. Having

invented these lights, Mosi subsequently repaired other broken spotlights, and his neighbors brought him spotlights to repair as well. His redesigned lights, which included Mosi's identity as a spotlight repairman, became an available design in the wider community. This local accomplishment, contribution to the community, and identity, however, accrued no formal recognition by Mosi's school, although it converged with his scientific literacy, consigning it to yet another instance of invisible literacy.

Discussion

Schools and educators labeling Mosi as intellectually incapable arose simultaneously from a too narrow definition of literacy as a measure, as well as a lack of recognition for those invisible literacies that demonstrated him as culturally knowledgeable, linguistically fluent, and innovative. In this way, Mosi's label was not actually based on pedagogical and cognitive abilities of the student but on the standardized educational policy. Those not engaged in formal literacy activities are consequently labeled illiterate, poor, and below average. Similar trends have been noted in U.S. classrooms (Dyson, 2015; Souto-Manning et al., 2016). Dyson argued that normative views of literacy erase children's resources and strengths.

In many African nations, low literacy levels have been reported where curricula fail to reflect the lived realities of students (Bamgbose, 2000; Jagusah, 2001). For example, Mosi's redesigned representation of literacies in music, drawing, local languages, and technical innovation were academically invisible and not taken into account in the school setting. The English-only mode of literacy representation further inhibited him from showing his knowledge and succeeding in school. Immense talents and gifts in students may go unrecognized, unexploited, or simply wasted altogether in classrooms in this way.

As Vygotsky (2012) noted, thought expresses itself through words. Although Mosi's writing and knowledge in Kiswahili seemed excellent because he could utilize his linguistic funds of knowledge (Smith, 2001) in that language, he was nevertheless ranked as below average in all subjects in terms of English-only testing. In this way, he remained at the level of a code breaker (Luke et al., 2000) and was formally excluded from becoming a meaning maker. Similarly, Mosi's technically innovative literacies that formed part of his available designs/resources for designing his learning processes remained formally invisible, even when in use.

This brings forward the relation between Mosi's redesigned representations of literacy and a reified curriculum around him. That is, the measure of academic literacy

(a)

Write an interesting story about:

THE DAY I WAS VERY HAPPY

That day I was very happy
 is when I was going into forest to see
 animals like Van W. Hyon Elephant
 Turtles Tortoise there the other day
 I go to see Mountain Kijombara 190
 up in the mountain that day I was very happy

the day I was very happy is we my
 and was coming in when I was
 coming with my son that day I was very
 happy because he hurt me a good
 thing

the day I was very happy it is
 my party I was have the my birthday
 parties and wedding ceremonies that day
 I was cooked chicken sababu that day
 I took my dog 190 walk into the market
 and sold his dog then I went to a shop
 and bought a present by the time
 he arrived home

oh that day I was enjoyed a
 will want that day he come
 soon

(b)

Andika insha ya kupendeza juu ya:

UMUHIMU WA MITI

Umuhimu wa miti mli Alimzuri
 kwenye wafu na wanyama

Umuhimu wa miti ni mli utulotea
 mwa na pata kwenye mwa joto
 kwa sababu mwa ukata kwenye wafu
 wafu kufana 190 pia wanyama wote
 umuhimu wa miti ni mli wafu na wanyama
 da sisi wafu kufana mwa na wafu kufu

Umuhimu wa miti ni mli tuta pata
 mli tuta pata baa tuta pata kufu
 jengo mnyumba da wafu za wanyama
 na pia za miti pia mli utulotea sana
 kwenye mnyumba kufu kwa sababu 190
 kufu pata kufu kufu wafu mnyumba
 mabati kufu kufu kufu kufu 190 190
 mabati wote mli utulotea kufu kufu
 mli mwa kufu kufu mnyumba la
 kufu kufu mli kufu kufu za mabati
 mabati mli kufu mli kufu kufu

Umuhimu wa miti mli kufu kufu
 na mli kufu kufu kufu kufu
 kufu kufu na mabati kufu kufu
 kufu kufu mli kufu kufu kufu
 mabati kufu mli kufu kufu kufu
 za wanyama kufu kufu kufu kufu
 kufu kufu mli kufu kufu kufu
 na kufu kufu kufu kufu kufu

Figure 3. Mosi's (a) English essay and (b) Kiswahili essay

Figure 4. Lighting made by Mosi from found materials.

barely explains how an underachiever could redesign and apply scientific skills to engineering a lighting solution for his home.

At minimum, local-language exams would serve as a more accurate measure of the development and sustainability of actual literacy in this rural setting, while also resisting the broader sociopolitical/global forces moving toward monolingualism (Bakhtin, 1981). For Mosi, the specific outcome was not simply retention for two years at the same grade levels with its consequent educational inequities but also social inequalities in that he dropped behind his age peers.

The official, English-only educational language policy not only refused permission to Mosi to use all available designs/resources to share or produce knowledge but also, as Street (1995) noted, required him to discard his own cultural identity and adopt the neocolonial aspects of the dominant culture to succeed in school. In the local classroom, the results of this are demotivated students like Mosi, distanced from their voices, identities, and cultures and, thus, effectively excluded from the world of success.

Ultimately, home and school literacies are always already connected (Dyson, 2015; Heath, 1983; Mkhize, 2016), even if not always put to work. For Mosi, the unappreciated redesigns of his invisible literacies in the classroom embodied his unique and authentic experiential knowledge and practices and marked his place in the classroom, even when he could not participate in its formal, English-only literacies. They signal a link between, and a generated meaning for, school and home literacies in the larger world that can manifest as technological innovations. Like Kamkwamba and Turere, these innovations are situated within and can have a global reach into imagination.

Implications

Dyson (2013) framed schools as zones for the evolution of a child's governed activities, where children master literacy as a means to participate in the community rather than as simply a set of skills. The high interest by other students for Mosi's nonacademic classroom activities corroborates this and has implications not only for how educators might value the literacies involved but also for how teaching methods could better accommodate a diversity of learners to make the English instruction culturally competent. Recontextualizing these invisible literacies into classroom spaces (Dyson, 2008) would potentially (re)motivate students.

Inasmuch as scholars have emphasized the need to know a student as a whole person (Moll et al., 1992; Orellana, 2016) to provide him or her with an opportunity to obtain knowledge, this study further supports the notion that school knowledge and content are best learned when school literacies, as abstract knowledge, are attached to other literacies practiced in everyday life (Vygotsky, 2012).

Despite abundant research showing that modern curricular knowledge and home knowledge complement and support each other, nonnormative practices of literacy remain invisible (Dyson, 2015; Street, 1993). As such, Mosi's case points again to the need for a curriculum that not only relates to the needs of students (Bamgbose, 2000; Kiramba, 2016) but also will provide meaningful opportunities and support for multilingual students to engage in problem solving, higher order thinking, and reflection on real-world challenges and experiences—an approach, ultimately, that elicits the innovation and creativity of people. All of society benefits from a populace educated in a variety of literacies that permit local innovation and improvement, including cultural innovations.

The findings of this study suggest that a pedagogy marked by the inclusion of not only student languages but also multimodalities for portraying knowledge in education yields a more accurate view of the intellectual capacities and literacies of a community. Multiple modalities of expression not only generate a space for learners to dialogue with the global views of literacy but also provide a space where local and global literacies can negotiate in a way that recognizes and influences academic outcomes and knowledge construction.

Although labeled an underachiever by English-only standardized tests, I urge all educational stakeholders to see Mosi and students like him beyond such labels—a situation which Orellana (2016) called “seeing with our hearts” (p. 38)—not only to value *all* students as actors in knowledge construction but also to recognize currently overlooked skills and possibilities.

TAKE ACTION!

1. Provide students with opportunities that make their invisible literacies visible in the classroom.
2. Draw the connections between students' school and home literacies and help teachers incorporate and operationalize other forms of literacy presentations in schools.
3. Take inventory of the available local literacies and epistemological expertise among students' communities.
4. Recognize and include music and drawing—of shared graphic objects and symbols—as a form of knowledge production to support learning and an understanding of complex or abstract concepts

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MORE TO EXPLORE

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- Videos about multiliteracies by Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope on the New Learning website: <http://newlearningonline.com/multiliteracies/videos>