



Literacy Development in A Multilingual Context: Cross-cultural Perspectives

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During the past decades, literacy has gradually become a major concern all over the world. Though there is a great diversity in both the distribution and degree of literacy in different countries, there has been an increasing awareness of the number of illiterates and the consequences of being illiterate. However, literacy is no longer seen as a universal trait. When one focuses on culturally-sensitive accounts of reading and writing practices, the concept of literacy as a single trait does not seem very feasible. A multiplicity of literacy practices can be distinguished which are related to specific cultural contexts and associated with relations of power and ideology. As such, literacy can be seen as a lifelong context-bound set of practices in which an individual's needs vary with time and place.

This volume explores the use of literacy outside the mainstream in different contexts throughout the world. It is divided into four sections. Section 1 presents an anthropological perspective--analyzing the society and the individual in a society. Section 2 presents a psychological perspective--focusing on the individuals themselves and analyzing the cognitive and affective development of young children as they acquire literacy in their first and second languages. Section 3 presents an educational perspective--highlighting the variations in educational approaches in different societies as well as the outcomes of these approaches. Section 4 summarizes the studies presented in this volume. Both theoretical issues and educational implications related to the development of literacy in two languages are discussed. An attempt is also made to open up new directions in the study of literacy development in multilingual contexts by bringing these various disciplinary perspectives together.

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