

Rural Elementary Students' Engagement with a Place-Based Literacy Curriculum: Examining Evidence from Their Stories

Friday 6 August 2021 - Parallel Session 6 - 11.30am to 12.30pm (GMT+1)

CAMERON - Embedding Learning in Culture

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Providing the best possible literacy instruction to rural students, particularly those experiencing poverty, is essential in the pursuit of educational equity. Rural teachers of writing can leverage curriculum connections to place to improve students' perception that what they are learning in the classroom is useful to their lives outside of school, thus increasing motivation and achievement. As part of a larger study, Promoting PLACE in Rural Schools, 237 rural fourth-grade students attending school in high-poverty areas were taught using the Fiction Unit of a place-based language arts curriculum across one school semester. As the culminating project, students wrote narrative fiction stories which were inductively analyzed to discover how students demonstrated connections to place in their writing. Students exerted agency and expressed their identities through creative writing while demonstrating mastery of needed language arts skills. Although students were empowered to write about any topic and in any genre they chose, 43% of students' stories contained elements reflective of their rural sense of place (e.g., characters spoke in rural vernacular, engaged in rural activities such as farming and hunting, and showed appreciation for nature). The study illuminated the value of emphasizing place in literacy instruction, the importance of providing choice in writing assignments, and the need to foster the writing talent of rural students as a matter of social justice. Session attendees will take away ideas for incorporating place-based pedagogies into their own literacy curricula for the benefit of rural students and communities.