

Drawing and Play as Windows into a Child's Multimodal Meaning-Making Development during COVID-19

Laura Brass et Jennifer Jenson

Volume 25, numéro 2, 2023

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1105974ar>
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.20360/langandlit29641>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada

ISSN

1496-0974 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Brass, L. & Jenson, J. (2023). Drawing and Play as Windows into a Child's Multimodal Meaning-Making Development during COVID-19. *Language and Literacy / Langue et littérature*, 25(2), 28–56.
<https://doi.org/10.20360/langandlit29641>

Résumé de l'article

Framed within multimodality and situated in a bounded socio-geographical context (i.e., Vancouver), this ethnographic case study provides an in-depth analysis of a bilingual 8-year-old girl's literacy practices of meaning-making established across varied semiotic modes (i.e., linguistic, visual, audio, spatial, embodied, kinesthetic) during COVID-19. The study draws upon 13 open-ended informal interviews, three sessions of imaginative play, and 16 participant-generated artifacts. The findings revealed two themes (i.e., drawing as collective meaning-making; play as embodied, anthropomorphic meaning-making) that show how the child's interactions with humans and nonhumans (e.g., toys, objects) contributed to her multimodal meaning-making during the pandemic, which might be beneficial for children in different contexts.

© Laura Brass et Jennifer Jenson, 2023



Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

<https://www.erudit.org/fr/>

Drawing and Play as Windows into a Child's Multimodal Meaning-Making Development during COVID-19

LAURA BRASS

University of British Columbia

JENNIFER JENSON

University of British Columbia

Abstract

Framed within multimodality and situated in a bounded socio-geographical context (i.e., Vancouver), this ethnographic case study provides an in-depth analysis of a bilingual 8-year-old girl's literacy practices of meaning-making established across varied semiotic modes (i.e., linguistic, visual, audio, embodied, kinesthetic) during COVID-19. The study draws upon 13 open-ended informal interviews, three sessions of imaginative play, and 16 participant-generated artifacts. The findings revealed two themes (i.e., drawing as collective meaning-making; play as embodied, anthropomorphic meaning-making) that show how the child's interactions with humans and nonhumans (e.g., toys, objects) contributed to her multimodal meaning-making during the pandemic, which might be beneficial for children in different contexts.

Keywords: multimodality, literacy, semiotics, meaning-making, drawing, play

Introduction

On March 12, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the COVID-19 virus as a pandemic. The pandemic has deepened socioeconomic inequalities (Daniel, 2020; Kaden, 2020; Morgan, 2020), such as no access to free meals provided by schools, and has accentuated "the learning gap between children from lower-income and higher-income families" (Kaden, 2020, p. 2). It has also contributed to digital inequalities (Daniel, 2020; Kaden, 2020; Lee, Ward, Chang, & Downing, 2021; Williamson, Eynon, & Potter, 2020) due to lack of access to computers and the Internet, but also due to education being experienced differently by different learners. Cowan, Potter, Olusoga, Bannister, Bishop, Lannon, and Signorelli (2021), too, acknowledge that digital inequities have been accentuated by the pandemic; however, their 15-month study highlights the benefits of digital play on child literacy practices during the lockdown, most significant of which is social connectivity, which has helped "children's play to endure, adapt, and respond to restrictions" (p. 14). While Kaden (2020) and Morgan (2020) emphasize digital connectivity as a major source of pandemic inequities, Williamson et al. (2020) raise awareness of the resulting pandemic pedagogies, which have decentralized schools into "students' own homes, largely disaggregated from the institutions and practices of education" (p. 108-109). Similarly, Stewart, Cho, Leslie, and Smit (2020) discuss school

literacy practices turned into home literacy practices by the lockdown, which they refer to as *parentagogy*, noting that it led to “soft and hard approaches to school-home literacy ... [that] threw parents into an unexpected educator’s role” (p. 10). The soft approach is more flexible and less structured than the school system, whereas a harder approach involves additional at-home activities made available through educational websites, more reading and writing, piano and violin lessons, imposed at-home quarantine schedules, along with some parents’ direct involvement in their children’s completion of assignments. Interestingly, while most scholars bring into discussion the negative impact of COVID-19 on education, the four parents interviewed by Stewart et al. (2020) attest to having “very positive experiences with their [sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade] children’s education during the pandemic” (p. 7). These positive experiences include literacy practices ranging from riding bikes, watching movies, playing (board games), exercising, walking, doing homework with friends, and discussing current events, to discovering things outside of the mandatory school curriculum, such as different genres of books and short story writing._

The socioeconomic inequalities in tandem with digital inequalities brought on by the pandemic have affected the trajectories of literacy development of children from diverse backgrounds differently. Little is known, however, about children’s home and school literacy practices during quarantine. Moreover, it was not generally possible to find comprehensive accounts of children’s various modes of meaning-making but rather individual literacy practices that were analyzed as separate modes of meaning-making. As such, as a means of illustrating a young child’s home and school literacy practices, I draw on her multimodal meaning-making established through and across semiotic modes (i.e., linguistic, visual, audio, embodied, kinesthetic) and artifacts (e.g., drawings, cartoons, written texts, books, toys, objects, art, photographs). I argue that this study answers the need to investigate child literacy practices to find new ways of being and doing in the world during COVID-19. My exploration takes as its focal point the following research question: How is meaning-making established for an 8-year-old girl through and across semiotic modes during the pandemic? In the following section, I introduce the main theoretical perspective that guided this current study.

Theoretical Framework

Multimodality

Scholars generally agree that communication is multimodal and language represents only one aspect (Cummins & Early, 2011; Grapin, 2018; Early, Kendrick, & Potts, 2015; Kress, 1997, 2000, 2010; Mills, Davis-Warra, Sewell, & Anderson, 2016; Smith, Pacheco, & Khorosheva, 2021). Connecting multimodality with human senses, Kress (2000) argues that written and spoken language is a multimodal phenomenon. Similarly, Early et al. (2015) utilize the concept of multimodal ensembles to explain multimodal speaking and writing as two distinct productive skills that make use of different semiotic resources (e.g., font, size, color for written texts and volume, rhythm, intonation for spoken texts) and different semiotic modes (e.g., spatial relations afforded by the page as opposed to embodied face-to-face communication). Mills et al. (2016) posit that multimodal literacy is “the ability to encode or decode linguistic, visual, spatial, gestural, and audio modes of meaning within texts” (p. 2) and raise awareness *vis-à-vis* differences in the interpretation of available semiotic modes inherent to culturally different contexts. Dicks, Flewitt,

Lancaster, and Pahl (2011), too, concur that “any instance of literacy is a multimodal ‘event’” (p. 230). Furthermore, Kress (2010) gives the example of a traffic sign to illustrate the interconnectedness of semiotic modes in meaning-making, arguing that “Image *shows* what takes too long to *read* and writing *names* what would be difficult to *show*. Colour is used to *highlight* specific aspects of the overall message” (p. 1). Using a second example—a supermarket street sign—that employs the same modes differently in terms of color, drawing, and aesthetic, Kress (2010) demonstrates that “multimodality can tell us what modes are used; it cannot tell us about this difference in *style*” (p. 1). Iedema (2003), on the other hand, proposes the concept of resemiotization—“the choice of the material realization of meaning ... or the social dynamics that shape our multimodal meanings” (p. 40)—as a theoretical lens that can help us understand new ways of meaning-making.

Framed within multimodality, this case study aimed to shed light on a young girl’s meaning-making during COVID-19 using multiple artifacts and imaginative play situated in the context of Vancouver, British Columbia. The study aligns with a body of existing research that integrates child literacy within semiotics (which studies meaning) and ethnography (which studies social contexts) (Dicks, Soyinka, & Coffey, 2006; Dicks et al., 2011; Early et al., 2015; Heath, 1982; Iedema, 2003; Kendrick, 2005, 2016; Kendrick & McKay, 2016; Knobel & Lankshear, 2014; Kress, 1997, 2000, 2010; Malinowski, 2014; Mills et al., 2016; Perry, 2012; Scribner, 1984; Street, 1994; Wohlwend, 2011). Lisa—the study’s young participant—selected artifacts (i.e., photographs, drawings, written texts, musical pieces, handmade objects), thus providing samples of various literacy practices (e.g., reading, writing, drawing, listening to online stories, playing with toys, playing piano, making art), which is why I framed this study by incorporating both semiotics (i.e., how the child makes meaning) and multimodality—a *sine qua non* given the ease with which she navigates linguistic, visual, audio, embodied, and kinesthetic modes of meaning-making. Specifically, the two selected literacy practices (i.e., drawing, imaginative play) discussed in more detail in this paper point to the use of different semiotic modes (e.g., where on the page she places the characters in her drawing; how she acts, moves, and speaks with her toys when pretend playing) and semiotic resources (e.g., how big or small she draws the characters; her choice of grayscale over color pencil art; her volume and intonation when playing as opposed to answering interview questions). The research question investigated all semiotic modes that facilitated the child’s multimodal meaning-making, thus guiding my choices of data. On the other hand, data analysis considered the child’s meaning-making across semiotic modes, then narrowed focus on the visual analysis inspired by Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (2021) framework (i.e., contact, social distance, point of view) of the two selected literacy practices, paying attention to the intersection of various semiotic modes employed within the same literacy practice—drawing as oral linguistic, visual, embodied, collective meaning-making and play as embodied, anthropomorphic meaning-making.

Literature Review

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the underlying concepts that informed this ethnographic case study of a child’s literacy practices as a means of understanding her multimodal meaning-making situated in a bounded socio-geographical

context (i.e., Vancouver, British Columbia) during COVID-19. I outline below relevant scholarly research dedicated to drawing and play as semiotic modes of meaning-making.

Drawing

According to scholarly literature, drawing things precedes drawing words—which marks the beginning of writing (Dyson, 1983; Kendrick & McKay, 2016; Kress, 1997; Sidelnick & Svoboda, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). Dyson's (1983) investigation of kindergarten students' literacy practices revealed that drawing is "the earlier developed and less abstract form of graphic symbolism" (p. 4), hence children first write words as if they were drawn objects. Given that children's earliest drawings are gestures that account for their initial meaning-making when they draw more complex objects, they "do not render their parts but rather their general qualities, such as an impression of roundness" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 108). The concept of "roundness" as an inherent feature of drawing is mentioned by Kress (1997), too, in his discussion of a three-year-old boy's drawing of a series of scattered semi-circles that he calls "a car": "I'll make a car ... got two wheels ... and two wheels at the back ... and two wheels here" (p. 10). Furthermore, because children draw from memory, their drawings resemble more the oral than the written linguistic mode, as if they were telling a story: "Drawing is graphic speech that arises on the basis of verbal speech" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 112). Dyson's pertinent observation that drawing and writing overlap in three areas of meaning-making—"to graphically represent people, objects, or events; to create a graphic object for another; and to graphically represent a narrative" (p. 14)—speaks to why adults no longer "think like a child": Their symbolic representation prevents them from visually making meaning the way children do. Kress (1997), too, concurs that grown-ups suppress this ability that they have as children and recommends that we relearn it.

Sidelnick and Svoboda (2000) conducted a study with a 7-year-old grade 1 participant diagnosed with learning disabilities, which led them to theorize drawing as a bridge between different semiotic modes that connect the visual with the spoken and with the written word, which helps the child understand "whole and part relationships, analysis, and synthesis of forms, and the gathering of general information" (p. 183). In a similar vein, Kendrick and McKay (2016) conceptualize drawing as a bridge metaphor that connects images with words, highlighting its potential to showcase children's "interests, purposes, and intentions as meaning-makers" (p. 76). Their findings recommend drawing as a viable meaning-making mode that enables children to render a wide range of aspects related to the senses.

Play

As Vygotsky (1978) put it, play provides children with a space where imaginary situations become possible, and desires are achieved. It is worth noting that the affordances of play for children's development go beyond fulfilling desires that the immediate world refuses them. Through play, "cognition and imagination merge to become the same kind of activity" (Kendrick, 2016, p. 14), allowing for risks to be taken and for imagination to be expressed through various semiotic modes. In Kendrick's (2005) study, play sheds light on the young participant's perceived and imagined identities, while at the same time, it

allows the researcher to trace the young girl's preference for themes such as maintaining family relationships, celebrating family events, and caring for babies.

Based on four studies that involved participants of different ages and backgrounds, Kendrick (2016) emphasizes the affordances of imaginative play not only for children but for learners of all ages. In the first study, the young Chinese-Canadian participant builds the narrative of her make-believe play on her family's history through stories, images, and video, and creates a safe zone for meaning-making. In doing so, the child weaves past, present, and future into her embodied story. The Kenyan teenage girls from Kendrick's second study pretend to be journalists, which allows them to experience new literacies through digital cameras, voice recorders, and laptops connected to the Internet. These multimodal semiotic modes enhance the young women's confidence, helping them imagine their future professional identities and improve their writing skills. In the third study, literacy helps Vincent—a teenage boy living in a child-headed household in Uganda—entertain and maintain a close bond with his younger siblings. Whenever he goes to the trading center, Vincent listens to the radio and then updates his brothers on British soccer by playing the role of the sportscaster. Kendrick's fourth study, which involved women aged between 22 to 53 residing in Uganda, recounts the participants' "need to be recognized as active and contributing family and community members" (p. 500), which prompts them to imagine their future identities as literate. To achieve this, the women write their names in large letters displayed throughout their homes and carry printed written texts with them whenever they are in public spaces. Kendrick (2016) concludes that the "connection between play and multimodality [is] symbiotic in nature given the ways each system is beneficial to the other" (p. 51).

Multimodal Meaning-Making: Drawing and Play during COVID-19

There are a few studies that explore play and drawing during the pandemic (Brownell, 2022; Cowan, Potter, Olusoga, Bannister, Bishop, Cannon, & Signorelli, 2021; Kapoor & Kaufman, 2020; Idoiaga Mondragon, Eiguren Munitis, Berasategi Sancho, & Ozamiz Etxebarria, 2022; Malinowski, 2014; Matloob Haghanikar & Leigh, 2022; Stewart, Cho, Lesley, & Smit, 2020). Here I will focus on just three, one that examines digital gameplay (Cowan et al., 2021), one that explores outdoor play that includes drawing (Brownell, 2022), and one that specifically focuses on drawing as an activity for meaning-making (Idoiaga Mondragon et al., 2022).

Idoiaga Mondragon et al. (2022) draw attention to the excessive use of screen time during quarantine, pointing out the negative impact that lack of socialization has on children's well-being. In contrast, Cowan et al. (2021) use young participants' examples of digital gaming, online play, social media texts, and online-offline play to make the case for "new forms of hybrid play in the process, blending online/offline and digital/non-digital elements" (p. 13). Most children in Cowan et al.'s study played digitally with others through video calls in Skype and Zoom and sometimes *via* instant message apps such as WhatsApp, while others used video calls and instant messaging simultaneously, which the authors argue have added more layers to their digital play. Brownell (2022), too, discusses children's play during COVID-19 through photographs taken throughout the pandemic on her Toronto neighborhood walks, which showcase children's play monitored by adults and children's (and possibly adults') outdoor play. The examples provided range from teddy

bears, rainbows, green shamrocks, animals, and themed scavengers hunts, to the “I spy” game inviting asynchronous players to find items in window frames, trees, on the ground, or drawn on the sidewalk, to drawings of popular faces from children’s television shows (e.g., Paw Patrol dogs, characters from Monsters Inc.) and video games (e.g., Peppa Pig, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Sonic the Hedgehog), to sidewalk hopscotch and obstacle courses, to drawings and written messages of encouragement, hope, and well wishes. According to Brownell (2022), these photographed instances not only illustrate children’s (and adults’) meaning-making through chalk during quarantine, but they also help participants deal with the challenges brought on by the Coronavirus outbreak.

In a similar vein, Idoiaga Mondragon et al. (2022) explore 345 drawings collected from children between six and 12 years old, who were attending a summer camp in Spain in 2020. Their study brought to the forefront the young participants’ awareness of the virus and their incorporation of it into their meaning-making. Prevalent across the drawings were four main categories of COVID-19-related issues: 1) symbols (e.g., the virus drawn with smiley faces; protective measures visualized through face masks, social distancing, and hand cleaning; children’s homes as indoor, safe spaces as opposed to the outside—streets, the air—contaminated by the virus; health workers, vaccines, death); 2) emotions (e.g., sadness, boredom, anger, fear, loneliness, but also hope, encouragement, love, care); 3) lockdown activities (e.g., staying at home or “just being” (p. 13), watching TV, playing video games, using social media networks); and 4) impact on children’s socialization (e.g., appreciation of spending more time with immediate family, but also missing distant family, friends, and classmates). Positioning this study within worldwide perspectives of drawing and play as home and school literacy practices situated at the intersection of multimodality and semiotics offers valuable lenses that can help us analyze and understand children’s meaning-making established pre- and during COVID-19.

Methodology

Research Context and Participant(s)

To gauge the extent to which literacy practices impact meaning-making established during the pandemic, this study focuses on one child—Lisa (pseudonym)—an 8-year-old Canadian-Haitian girl growing up in a bilingual household in Southeast Vancouver, Canada. Her mother is Canadian; her father is Haitian. Both parents are front-line workers: The mother is a registered nurse; the father works as a resident care attendant. Lisa and her family live in a neighborhood with a diverse mix of European Caucasian families, immigrants of Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Indian, Latin American descent, and indigenous. She is an only child who loves to draw, read (especially the “Harry Potter” books), play with her toys and friends, and likes sushi, YouTube, and computers. Lisa identifies English as her first language and French as her second. At home and in the community, she speaks mostly English; she speaks French at school and home with her father. Lisa is in grade four in a French immersion program at Douglas James Elementary. From kindergarten to grade three, it was all French immersion; starting with grade four, Lisa is taking both French and English classes, but the focus is on English. Lisa is studying

the following subjects: French immersion, English, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, applied design skills, technologies, and physical education. Choir was offered as an extracurricular activity for two years, but it was discontinued because of the pandemic. At the time when this study was conducted (February to March 2021), Lisa was attending school in person; however, for a few months in the spring of 2020, when all the schools were closed in British Columbia due to COVID-19, classes were delivered online. Lisa attended periodical Zoom meetings with her teacher (either one-on-one or with other students) related to their coursework. Because both parents are essential workers, she was able to go back to school in June 2020. They opted for part-time at school and part-time online until September 2020, when Lisa went back to school full-time. This paper focuses its discussion on two of the young participant's school and home literacy practices: A group drawing and a make-believe play. The following section details the research method utilized for data collection and analysis, then moves on to the researcher's positionality and coding techniques.

Research Design

I employed a qualitative research design (Wolcott, 1994) in the form of an ethnographic individual case study (Bryman & Bell, 2019) that enabled me to make complex and holistic descriptions (Stake, 1978). Case studies are versatile in that they allow for data to be gathered and analyzed through multiple methods, such as ethnographic tools, multimodal artifacts, interviews, analytic memoing, coding, and developing themes (Creswell, 2014; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Stake, 2005). Given its focus on the participant's experiences (Iacono, Brown, & Holtham, 2009) and the contextual conditions and realities (i.e., a young child living in Canada during the pandemic), this research method seemed the most suited to address the underlying problem of my study (i.e., multimodal meaning-making). As an ethnographer, I had online access to a closed setting (i.e., the participant's home).

Data Collection

Before starting the data collection process, I applied for and obtained ethics clearance from the University of British Columbia. I asked Lisa and her mother to collaborate in this small case study examining a young child's multimodal meaning-making during COVID-19 by documenting her home and school literacy practices that pertained to both mandatory and leisure activities that included but were not limited to reading, writing, speaking, listening, drawing, playing, arts and crafts, music, and sports. I encouraged the young participant to add any other areas that were important to her. Due to physical restrictions imposed by the pandemic, I was not able to meet in person with the participant and her mother, hence I conducted a series of synchronous open-ended interviews. To answer the research question, I collected three sets of primary data: multimodal artifacts, open-ended videotaped interviews, and computer screen recordings. The analytic memos that I wrote while conducting a content analysis of the transcribed interviews and artifacts were secondary data. The child selected 18 artifacts created at home and school that were meaningful to her. Accompanied by her mother as a voluntary, secondary participant, Lisa provided oral accounts of the artifacts, which were recorded via Zoom, transcribed using

otter.ai (<https://www.otter.ai>) and drawn upon in my discussion of findings. The project unfolded over two months (between February and March 2021) and consisted of a total of 13 open-ended informal interviews and three sessions of imaginative play. The 120-minute interviews were broken down into 10 to 15-minute smaller sessions. In addition, the mother agreed to a separate 10-minute interview about the child's school and community, which I summarized and incorporated in the Context section.

Interviews. In preparation for the interviews, I wrote a broad set of open-ended questions (Parsons, Hewson, Adrian, & Day, 2013). Informed by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison's (2000) comparison of research with a television documentary, I positioned myself in the interviews: I shared personal anecdotes, and I invited Lisa to discuss what she did, thought, and felt when she created the artifacts. To establish an interviewee-interviewer friendly yet not too close rapport—"a delicate balancing act" (Bryman & Bell, 2019, p. 114)—that would prompt the young participant to share her meaning-making, I tried to put myself in her shoes and stayed alert to the dynamics of the conversations. As such, I showed interest in her accounts, asked follow-up questions, kept the conversation going, and kept silent so that she would have the opportunity to answer the questions. Whenever the mother-daughter exchanges took a more argumentative turn, I "handled the situation sensitively and professionally" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 422) by moving the conversation along.

Artifacts. Before the interviews, the mother emailed the researcher photographs of Lisa's selected artifacts, which were organized into two main categories: home and school. Out of 18 artifacts in total, there were seven photographs, seven drawings, and four written texts. Lisa's home literacy practices revolved around drawing, reading in English and French, writing in French, playing with toys, playing piano, and doing Math homework. Only six artifacts illustrate the child's school literacy practices consisting of drawing with peers, cartoon drawing accompanied by written texts in French and English, and pottery. The goal of using artifacts was to analyze their "content and structure as a way to gain insight into their meaning for those who engage them and who are engaged by them" (Parsons et al., 2013, p. 107).

Positionality

I have known the participant's mother since 2008, when I moved to Vancouver, Canada, and have stayed in touch *via* phone calls, emails, and occasional visits. I was aware of entering the child's world even if temporarily; I informed her that I would be interacting with her as a researcher and not as an acquaintance. I was open to Lisa's accounts in either of the two languages that she speaks—English and French; she chose the former. As a white able-bodied woman researcher, I paid attention to (un)balanced power relations due to our age difference, lived experiences, backgrounds, status, and beliefs. Although the mother was present throughout the interviews, we both focused the interviews on the child: We did not speak to each other as friends and limited our verbal exchanges with each other. Given the young participant's age and my research interest in child literacy practices sparked by the multimodal graduate course that I was taking at the time, this study was a timely endeavor that allowed me to extend the otherwise scarce conversation on drawing and play during COVID-19. In terms of (at times) unbalanced power relations between myself and the young participant, while communicating with her, I steered the conversation

back on track whenever it veered (and it often did) toward Harry Potter characters, scenes, and dialogues. I made a conscious effort to “think like a child” and engage in dialogues where toys can talk, eat, and play, asking follow-up questions that a child—not a grown-up—might ask.

Data Analysis

Analytic memos. Defined as brief descriptions of participant-generated data (Miles et al., 2014), analytic memos help the researcher connect data with concepts, interpretations, and theories. Writing analytic memos while reading the transcripts allowed me to get a general idea of what was said during the interviews, corroborate the child’s verbal with embodied language, and connect the main themes across the interviews. Written on the side margin of the transcribed interviews, the analytic memos were in the form of comments and/or rhetorical questions, such as “Lisa brings up her love for the “Harry Potter” book series and her drawings, which is not always related to the question asked or artifact discussed: Does this point to reading and drawing as favorite modes of meaning-making?” or “It’s interesting to see how Lisa uses her toys as tools that allow her to ask indirect questions of her mother, reminisce about past literacy practices, and make plans for the future—This points to the multifaceted uses/meanings/implications of play with toys seen as animate beings.”

Coding. Lisa added more artifacts during the two months that the study unfolded, hence inductive coding, which reflects the flexibility of the research site and the researcher’s openness to changes in the data collection process (Miles et al., 2014), seemed the most appropriate approach for this research. I opted for In vivo codes, which use participant direct quotes, thus allowing for her voice to be heard. It was important to keep Lisa’s language from the interviews as a way to honor her voice, but also to address the research question and support the data analysis. For example, the high frequency with which Lisa refers to reading the “Harry Potter” books points to reading as a regular, preferred mode of meaning-making as part of both her school and home literacy practices. To differentiate the participant’s direct quotes from the researcher’s codes, the In vivo codes (on the right-hand side of *Table 1* below) are written in capital letters and placed within quotation marks.

Table 1.

Example of In vivo coded interview transcript

<p>“And then, during school, umm, my class started reading the first [Harry Potter] book, and then, after school, when I got to the Y[MCA], they had the [Harry Potter] books at the Y[MCA], so I started reading ... I’m where we were on the fifth book at the Y[MCA]. I mean, at school, umm, I started reading there and I got all the way up to the fourth book... And then, during Christmas, my mom got me the Harry Potter book, so I did the fifth to the seventh and then I was all finished” (interviews, February 12, 2021)</p>	<p>“FIRST HARRY POTTER BOOK”</p> <p>“FIFTH BOOK”</p> <p>“FOURTH BOOK”</p> <p>“FIFTH TO SEVENTH BOOK”</p>
---	--

The first cycle of coding was inspired by Alvarez’s (2017) discussion of patterns among children’s narratives and drawings. *Table 2* displays the three most frequent codes (i.e., who, what, where) and examples across Lisa’s semiotic modes of meaning-making.

The second cycle of coding allowed for a clustering of the first round of codes and their subsequent organization into patterns, which were corroborated with primary (i.e., interviews, artifacts), then with secondary data (i.e., analytic memos). A closer read—first cycle of coding—of Lisa’s narratives across the interviews brought to the forefront the child’s preferred semiotic modes (e.g., visual through reading and drawing, and embodied, kinesthetic through playing with toys, playing piano, and making art). A further read—the second cycle of coding—focused on the most frequent coding categories (as can be seen from the highlights in *Table 2* below), which helped me summarize the child’s narratives, keeping relevant ones as In vivo codes that were used as illustrative examples in the Findings section. Then I narrowed down the coding categories into patterns, which led to identifying and framing the two themes of this study. Lisa’s obvious pleasure in detailing her drawing and play, and her frequent mentioning of them (regardless of the focus of the interviews) as her favorites explain why this paper analyzes them together.

Table 2
Highest frequency codes in participant’s multimodal meaning-making

Coding Scheme	Coding Category	Examples
Who Human and Non-human Participants	a. self b. family c. friends d. peers e. teachers f. pets g. extended family h. community members i. imagined characters j. pop-culture characters	a. Lisa b. Mother, Father c. Camila, Nora, d. Camila, Nora, Sarah, Maya e. Madame—French Teacher f. (imaginary) Cat g. Cousin, Grandmother h. YMCA staff i. Unicorn j. Harry Potter, Hermione, Ron, Pikachu, Pokémon
What Events and Activities	a. playing b. reading/writing/doing HW c. making something d. liking something e. describing something f. going somewhere g. celebrating something h. eating something i. learning something	a. With Friends, Peers, Doll, Toy Cat b. “Harry Potter” Books, Library Books in English, French Books, Online Stories via Boukili App, Math Homework c. Pottery: Tea Pot d. Drawing, Reading, Chocolate, Sushi, Hot Dogs, Burgers, Electronics, iPad, YouTube e. “Harry Potter” Characters, Scenes from “Harry Potter,” Online App: Boukili, Cartoon: French Book/Story, Drawing Game Rules, Drawing Characters, Toys’ Appearance, Toys’ Clothes f. Park, Beach, Cousin’s, Grandmother’s, California, Disneyland g. Lisa’s Birthday h. Cake, Sushi, Hamburger, Hot Dog, Chocolate i. Play Piano
Where Places and Locations	a. home b. extended family’s home c. school d. community e. nature f. peer’s/friend’s house g. out of town h. out of country i. online	a. Reading, Drawing, Playing with Toys, Playing Piano b. Celebrating Birthday, Eating, Playing c. Reading “Harry Potter,” Talking and Playing with Friends d. Reading “Harry Potter,” Playing Games e. Walking, Playing at the Park f. Playing, Drawing g. Going on Vacation h. Visiting Disneyland i. Listening to Stories in French, Reading in French, Doing Math

Findings

Next, I connect the participant’s narratives and artifacts with my interpretations and the literature review. First, I provide a summary of the artifacts (i.e., photographs, drawings, written texts), followed by a summary of the child’s literacy practices grouped around linguistic, visual, audio, and embodied designs. I conclude the section with a visual

analysis of two artifacts (i.e., drawing, computer screenshot) along with a discussion of the main findings generated by the two artifacts.

Summary of Artifacts

The 18 artifacts—seven photographs (see *Appendix 1*), seven drawings (see *Appendix 2*), and four written texts (see *Appendix 3*)—included in this study are summarized below.

Photographs. The first photograph showcases Lisa reading in French with her father on her mother’s Chromebook. In the second and third photographs, Lisa is lying on the couch with two English books: One is a “Harry Potter” book, and the other one is called “The Baby-Sitters Club.” The fourth photograph is of Lisa’s purse and favorite doll—the protagonist of two impromptu imaginative plays. Photographs five and six show Lisa playing piano and doing Math, whereas photograph seven is of a cat-shaped teapot that she made from clay in art class.

Drawings. The first drawing—the only colored one as per her teacher’s instructions—shows a cut-out shape of Lisa and a big bubble above her head filled with things that she likes, such as books, drawing, sushi, electronics, computers, iPad, and TV. Outside the bubble, Lisa drew other things that she likes (e.g., turtles, sun, food, trees, pink snow), which she explained “are just for decoration” (interviews, February 6, 2021). Drawings two to five are dedicated to “Harry Potter” characters—Harry, Hermione, Ron, and Hedwig—whereas drawing six consists of an amalgam of human and non-human characters that are the result of a group game that Lisa played at the after-school program in January 2021. The last drawing—“La jument masquée”—is based on a French book called “My little pony” and represents a cartoon story written in French about a magic pony who does good deeds.

Written texts. The first written text, which is in French, is the linguistic representation of the colored drawing of self and favorite things. The second text, also written in French, describes a summer day when Lisa visited close relatives (e.g., grandmother, cousin) and ate some of her favorite foods (e.g., hot dogs, burgers, cake). The third and fourth texts—both written in English—go together as part of “A winter story”: One is an 18-square prompt provided by the teacher to create the story; the other is Lisa’s composition, which consists of drawings of two characters and six short sentences.

Summary of Literacy Practices of Multimodal Meaning-Making

The 18 artifacts and 13 interviews showcase the child’s multimodal repertoire that draws on what the New London Group (1996) identifies as elements of multimodal design: linguistic, visual, audio, and embodied. Below I present an overview of the artifacts and interviews structured around these five semiotic modes.

Linguistic meaning-making through reading and writing. Research question: How is meaning-making established for an 8-year-old girl through reading and writing? Lisa borrows English books from the library and French books only sometimes. Reading—one of her preferred modes of meaning-making—is omnipresent across the interviews. A “Harry Potter” books *aficionada*, the young participant provides a timeline of her reading history. She read the first book at school, then at the after-school program, which is how she “got addicted” to “Harry Potter,” and continued reading at home during the winter

break. Lisa clarified that Camila—one of her friends—finished the “Harry Potter” books before her and she finished before Nora—another friend—which suggests a reading Olympics with assigned gold, silver, and bronze reader medals. The child’s avid “Harry Potter” reading materializes linguistically as rich vocabulary (e.g., addicted, chamber, detention, enemies, flexible, potion, prophecy, vaguely). Reading in French—Lisa’s and the mother’s second and the father’s first language—is twofold. It illustrates the young participant’s funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) that incorporates both parents’ linguistic repertoires and contributes to father-daughter bonding: The child usually reads in French with her father. In pre-pandemic times, Lisa—assisted by her parents—would read free online books *via* links that her teacher would provide, which became an important part of her home literacy practices during the lockdown. At the time of the study, her favorite was an online app called Boukili, whose readings are structured in distinct, colored levels, and provides an audio version of the online books._

Visual meaning-making through drawing and art. Research question: How is meaning-making established for an 8-year-old girl through drawing and art? The number of drawings (i.e., seven altogether) speaks to how important this semiotic mode is for the young participant. The four grayscale pencil drawings of the “Harry Potter” characters are each allocated one page. During the interview, however, instead of describing these characters, Lisa chooses to recount a scene from the second “Harry Potter” book. When drawing the cartoon for the winter story based on a book that she read in French, she confessed that it was not easy to choose which parts to incorporate. For this activity, the young artist combined visual (i.e., drawings of two characters) with linguistic elements (i.e., written text of story), which speaks to her multimodal meaning-making. Interestingly, this story—written at school in December 2020—displays no element that might suggest a full-blown pandemic at the time when it was completed. As far as the group drawing is concerned, it illustrates the child’s world that is made up of imaginary (e.g., Pikachu, unicorns) and real participants (e.g., a cat, trees, the desert, a cactus, the sun, mountains, a boat, a house). Lisa also makes meaning through art (i.e., pottery), which allows her to put her creativity to good use and show her affection: She made the clay teapot as a Christmas gift for her mother.

Audio meaning-making through listening to stories and playing piano. Research question: How is meaning-making established for an 8-year-old girl through stories and playing piano? Lisa reads on her own in English but needs her parents’ support with vocabulary when reading in French—her second language. She usually reads a story in English and then listens to it in French, which attests to her bilingual, audio, visual, and linguistic semiotic modes of meaning-making—all of which complement each other in what seems to engage the child more with her second language. Lisa has recently started taking piano lessons *via* Zoom every weekend, alongside 50 to 70 other children. She enjoys playing the piano, hence the last-minute impromptu addition to the final interview—her performance of a short one-hand piece called “Go Tell Aunt Rhode.” Furthermore, Lisa informed me that she was working on a longer and more difficult song.

Embodied meaning-making through drawing and play. Research question: How is meaning-making established for an 8-year-old girl through drawing and play? When describing the rules of the drawing game, Lisa puts her hands in fists and shakes them before she opens them again, while explaining that “You have to do like this, ‘Twenty-one’” (interviews, February 13, 2021). Sometimes, instead of a verbal response, the child opts for embodied actions: She grabs a glass of water and takes a sip to agree with her mother that she learned about the “Harry Potter” books from her friend Nora and nods her head to confirm that she had fun playing a scene from “Harry Potter.” Moreover, Lisa uses her toys to perform daily activities (e.g., washing, braiding her hair, going to the park, attending Zoom sessions) and activities that she likes (e.g., eating chocolate, doing splits, dressing up).

Discussion

For this paper, I selected one drawing and one play session that I believe are representative of Lisa’s overall literacy practices, while at the same time, they showcase her use of semiotic modes (e.g., visual, linguistic, audio, embodied, kinesthetic) and resources available (e.g., paper, page, pencils, toys) for multimodal meaning-making. In the following sections, I discuss these in more detail.

Visual Analysis of Drawing

The drawing below is the result of a group activity that Lisa and her friends—Isabella, Maya, and Sarah—completed at the after-school program one month before this study (January 2021); the other children, however, did not participate in the study. Turning this activity into a game like “Twenty-one,” the players took turns asking the other members what to draw within a one-minute time limit; all the characters in this drawing were made by Lisa (see *Figure 1*). The following analysis was informed by Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2021) visual framework.



Figure 1. Lisa’s drawing

Contact. The human and quasi-human characters (i.e., devil cat girls, Pikachu) establish eye contact with the viewer, which qualifies the image as a demand, as if “the image *wants* something from the viewers—wants them to do something” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 117). Except for the unicorn, Lisa’s characters are looking at the viewer, as if they were asking to be acknowledged. Both devil cat girls are drawn out of proportion (i.e., their head is as big as the rest of their body) and are wearing skirts, as opposed to the chef girl in the middle who is wearing pants, which might suggest the child’s interpretation of perceived roles associated with normative and non-normative gender roles.

Social distance. Conceptualized as “a set of invisible boundaries beyond which we allow only certain kinds of people to come” (Kress & van Leeuwen, p. 124), social distance may be personal (i.e., close shot)—which reveals the represented participant’s head and shoulders, social (i.e., medium shot)—which shows the subject down to their waist or knees, and impersonal (i.e., long shot)—which displays the whole body. The characters in Lisa’s drawing are represented from a long shot, which showcases their full figure, allowing the viewer to look at them from afar as a stranger or unseen observer. By placing the characters at a distance from the viewer, the child makes us aware that we have not fully entered her world.

Point of view. The human and quasi-human elements at the top of the page are drawn from high and frontal angles. The former “bestows the power of knowledge to the viewer” (Kress & van Leeuwen, p. 141), whereas the latter establishes direct involvement with Pikachu and the two devil cat girls. In contrast, the unicorn is drawn from an oblique angle, which says, “What you see here is *not* part of our world, it is *their* world, something ‘we’ are, at this moment, not engaging with” (p. 136). By choosing the oblique angle for the unicorn, Lisa is detaching herself from it, as if to suggest that unicorns do not usually inhabit her world. Interestingly, she drew the tree in detail, showing how the branches look beneath the leaves, which qualifies it as an objective or an X-ray point of view that “does not stop at appearances, but probes behind the surface, to deeper, more hidden levels” (p. 140).

Drawing as Oral Linguistic, Visual, Embodied, Collective Meaning-Making

Vygotsky (1978) and Dyson (1983) concur that children’s drawings in an early stage of their development are gestures rather than drawing, which recommends visual and embodied designs as complementary to children’s meaning-making. Lisa’s drawing stands for a monomodal turned into a three-layered multimodal design that integrates oral linguistic, visual, and embodied elements. The girl accompanies the oral description of the drawing game with movements of her fingers and hands to explain the rules of the game and to convey the movement of the small ball: “You know how those balls go rolling in the desert like in movies” (interviews, February 13, 2021).

10 of the children in Matloob Haghanikar and Leigh’s (2022) study opted for grayscale pencil art. Likewise, Lisa prefers black-and-white drawings. Her choice, however, is not related to Coronavirus, but to her understanding of what makes a good drawing: “When I draw pictures, I don’t like to color them, like, when you color pictures,

to me, it seems you wreck them. I like them plain” (interviews, February 13, 2021). Lisa’s drawing playfully blends very familiar elements (e.g., cat, mountains, sun) with somewhat familiar ones from seeing pictures (e.g., cactus), watching movies (e.g., the desert and the rolling ball in the desert), reading (e.g., the unicorn), playing online video games (e.g., Pikachu is from *Pokémon*, the tree is inspired by *Minecraft*), as well as from her own lived experience (e.g., the boat—Lisa has been on a boat), her future plans (e.g., the house—she wants a bigger house for herself and her parents), and her friends’ future plans (e.g., the chef girl—Maya’s vision). Lisa’s ease of making meaning between and across semiotic modes, categories, and formats ties back into Cowan et al.’s (2021) discussion of children’s play during the pandemic as a hybrid of online/offline, traditional modes and digital media.

Lisa’s drawing echoes Vygotsky’s (1978) socio-cultural theory in that it shows how her meaning-making does not happen in a vacuum, but through social interaction. Instead of choosing a drawing that she made on her own, Lisa chose one that she completed with her peers, which speaks to how important social connectivity is for her. This is reinforced by the mother, who attests to her daughter feeling socially isolated due to the lockdown: “When she went back to school in September 2020, that first week, [Lisa] was so excited to see all her peers, like, that first night, it was hard for her to sleep” (interviews, March 27, 2021). The mother’s observation echoes Idoiaga Mondragon et al.’s (2022) discussion of the impact of COVID-19 on children’s socialization (or lack of it, thereof), with children feeling sad for not being able to interact in person with their peers, but also looking forward to resuming social activities. Like the children in other studies carried out during the pandemic, Lisa, too, is aware that she cannot travel to Disneyland because of restrictions in place due to the virus: “But we can’t go this year. That’s sad” (interviews, March 20, 2021) and “I used to do cheerleading, like gymnastics, [but I had to stop] because of COVID” (interviews, March 5, 2021).

Visual Analysis of Computer Screenshot of Imaginative Play

The screenshot below is representative of the child’s overall narrative of embodied meaning-making and social interaction with the audience (i.e., me as a researcher, and the mother as a voluntary co-participant) (see *Figure 2*). The following analysis of the computer screenshot draws on Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2021) visual framework.



Figure 2. Computer screenshot of Lisa's imaginative play

Contact. The girl is looking at her stuffed animal and not at the audience, which positions the viewer as an outsider or “invisible onlooker” (Kress & van Leeuwen, p. 118), and recommends the screenshot as an offer. Lisa's attention is geared toward her toys and not the webcam: She is playing with her toys toward, not for, the camera, thus positioning herself as “an object of contemplation” (p. 118). I argue that the gaze is directed away from the camera lens because the girl is engaged in make-believe play, placing an indirect or implicit demand on the viewers, engaging them in a more subtle way as visible onlookers. This contradicts Kress and van Leeuwen's claim that “a real or imaginary barrier is erected between the represented participant and the viewers” (p. 119) when the former does not look directly at the camera.

Social distance. Defined in terms of varied degrees of familiarity between participants, social distance may be visualized along a continuum that goes from intimates to friends to acquaintances to strangers. Close personal distance, which refers to “the distance at which one can hold or grasp the other person” (Kress & van Leeuwen, p. 124), recommends the computer screenshot as a personal close shot. Lisa herself chose her distance from the webcam, thus positioning herself (rather than being positioned) in a close shot. The close-up shot is subjective in that it gives viewers the impression that they are entering the subject's space as if they were intimate friends. The participant's face is only half revealed to the camera, which points to her focus on the toys rather than on herself. Lisa is holding the doll's hand and patting her toy cat, which suggests her motherly attitude toward her “babies.” In doing so, the child embodies the adult version of herself or maybe she is mirroring her mother.

Point of view. The frontal angle, which carries within “a built-in point of view” (Kress & van Leeuwen, p. 130), positions the interactive participants (i.e., researcher/viewer) in front of the represented participant (i.e., the child) and puts the screenshot under a subjective point of view or “the angle of maximum involvement” (p. 140). Lisa's three-quarter frontal angle slightly reduces this involvement. Although the screenshot does not

capture her gaze, the frontal angle lets us know that she is aware of the viewers' presence, otherwise, she might have turned her back to the webcam. The low angle, on the other hand, shifts the power balance between represented and interactive participants, investing Lisa in a powerful stance and making her look imposing. The two toys that she is displaying for the camera are at oblique and eye-level angles. The oblique angle indicates detachment, which suggests that the two toys are "not part of our world" (p. 137); the eye level angle stands for equality, which conveys an emotionally neutral stance on the part of the photographer. Because in this case there is no photographer, Lisa assumed that role and positioned the objects at an eye-level angle, which establishes a balanced power relation between the viewer and the two objects, thus placing the audience into the story of the visual text.

Play as Embodied, Anthropomorphic Meaning-Making

Kendrick's (2016) argument that children take on a new identity when they are engaged in make-believe play is reflected in Lisa's play, too. She acts as a responsible mother, older sister, or maybe pet owner who feeds, washes, and dresses her toys. Lisa plays the traditional role of a mother in charge of the household who caters to her "babies," whereas her plans to travel to Disneyland with her toys place her outside of the home, which mirrors the working mother who balances work with family life. Both girls—in Kendrick's study and the current study—display feminine narrative styles that focus on home, school, parents, and friends.

Wohlwend (2011) uses the metaphor of avatars to draw attention to adults' dual positioning of children as vulnerable innocents attuned to nature, raising the question of the extent to which children's meaning-making is shaped "by the ways we see them" (p. 144). Based on how Lisa interacts with the two toys that she brings to the interview—Tabor—the toy cat and Lily—the doll—I wonder whether they could be considered to play the role of avatars. As such, Tabor could be said to embody the pet that the child would like to have, while Lily could be seen as an avatar for Lisa: "Lily is like me ... Her skin's brown just like me ... And she has curly brown hair and brown eyes just like me" (interviews, March 5, 2021) or an avatar for a little sister that she would like to have. For Lisa, the doll and stuffed animal are also her "best friends in Dolly world" (interviews, March 20, 2021), which explains why she talks with them as if they were humans or animated beings, thus displaying an anthropomorphic stance.

Lisa's anthropomorphism throughout the play pretend sessions mirrors one of the four-year-old participants in Cowan et al.'s (2021) study of digital play during the pandemic, who "[will] get her cuddly toys and make them talk to the camera and [the support worker] would talk to them" (p. 13). Similarly, Lisa's detailed description of her stuffed animal culminates with her rendering of what a cat would say, "Meow" (interviews, March 20, 2021), which she repeats throughout the interview, thus enacting embodied toy cat language. Lisa's anthropomorphism enacted through play also echoes similar instances of anthropomorphism displayed through drawing by an 11-year-old Sri Lankan girl in Matloob Haghanikar and Leigh's (2022) study. The former washes, dresses up, feeds, and talks with her toys as if they were humans, not non-humans; the latter assigns COVID-19

human features by drawing the virus with a face, eyes, eyebrows, mouth, and teeth as if it was an animate, not inanimate, thing. In her make-believe play, Lisa feeds Tabor special cat treats, which are, “Like, you know, chocolate rocks, but cat rocks” (interviews, March 20, 2021) and again displays an anthropomorphic attitude by addressing her toy cat directly: “Tabor, here, here, little treaty” (interviews, March 20, 2021). The child feeds heart-shaped chocolates to her doll, whose delight she illustrates with a few “Yum’s” (interviews, March 5, 2021), followed by her failed attempt to convince the mother to let her have one chocolate. This embodied doll and toy cat language is called ventriloquizing by Tannen (2004), who situates it “at the intersection of two linguistic phenomena: ... constructed dialogue ... [and] framing in discourse” (p. 402). Through play, the young participant turns her toys into resources that help her make meaning of the world around her, mediate interactions with her mother, and formulate requests. In doing so, Lisa establishes a quadriad unit (i.e., daughter-toy cat-doll-mother) that includes verbal and non-verbal participants in what seems to be a sealed ad-hoc family unit.

Conclusion

Situated at the crossroads of multimodality (which looks at different modes of meaning-making) and ethnography (which focuses on the social context of meaning-making), this study sought to gain a deeper insight into the literacy practices of a young girl residing in Vancouver, Canada. The findings of this study recommend multimodal meaning-making as a rite of passage. The participant’s collaborative drawing and imaginative play connect the here and now with there and then, allowing her to surf close and distant real and imaginary worlds and travel backward and forward in time—pre- and post-pandemic. Drawing and play revealed how Lisa’s interactions with humans (e.g., parents, friends) and non-humans (e.g., toys, drawings) contributed to her meaning-making, which enabled her to gain “access to symbolic and material goods” (Paechter, 2006, p. 15).

Future Research and Significance

The additional interview with the mother shed light on the parents’ struggle to balance work with childcare and at-home online education. The participant’s parents are both essential workers, hence future research is needed to document literacy practices during COVID-19 of children whose parents are not front-line workers. Another aspect worth considering by further research is literacy practices during COVID-19 by socio-economically disadvantaged, marginalized, and physically and/or mentally impaired children, who represent categories of higher risks.

Despite its limitations (e.g., one participant, bounded context, carried out over two months) and given the currently limited research on child literacy practices during COVID-19, this study has significant implications for researchers, teachers, and parents who are seeking to support young learners’ literacy skills and development. First, one major contribution of this study is that it offers multimodal representations of a child’s home and school literacy practices (e.g., reading, speaking, writing, drawing, making art, listening to stories, playing, playing piano) of meaning-making during the pandemic, thus adding to

the otherwise scarce online ethnographies with young participants. Second, this work provides visual analyses of a child's drawing and play during COVID-19, which is rare across existing research in the field. Third, the findings point to the affordances of inviting children's home literacy practices into mainstream school literacy practices. Classroom pedagogies informed by students' home literacy practices have the potential to allow for lessons to be co-constructed by incorporating students' funds of knowledge (Moll et. al., 1992), which contributes to student-centered learning that can motivate their investment in learning and enhance teachers' awareness of children's multimodal meaning-making. Fourth, Lisa's drawing and play highlight the role that inanimate beings (e.g., toys, objects, handmade art, musical instruments) play in her everyday meaning-making, being, and doing. Therefore, classroom pedagogies that acknowledge the human and non-human worlds and pay closer attention to children's anthropomorphic stances in their interactions with the world around them might create more inclusive learning environments. In turn, this may prove beneficial moving forward in an era of climate change that calls for teaching young people to be environmentally aware and act responsibly toward the outside world—animals, pets, plants, vegetables, and minerals seen as equals rather than subordinates. Finally, Lisa's meaning-making established through drawing and play—whether taking place in person or virtually, offline or online, individually or as part of a bounded community of practice—reverberates with hope and creativity—features noted by other children's studies during COVID-19 (Brownell, 2022; Cowan et al., 2021; Haghanikar & Leigh, 2022; Mondragon et al., 2022). Her multimodal meaning-making is proof that her creativity expressed through a wide range of semiotic modes was one way—her way—of navigating challenges inherent to COVID-19. In turn, this speaks to creative expression as a way of making meaning and as a coping mechanism that “can serve to buffer against the negative effects of living through the pandemic” (Kapoor & Kaufman, 2020, p. 1), while at the same time, it has benefits for mental health and productivity of people of all ages.

There is yet no definite answer to the question, “When will the pandemic end?” and it is uncertain when we can resume normal life. As such, taking precautionary measures to preserve everyone's health, well-being, and access to (online, in-person, or hybrid) learning, while at the same time making efforts to repair the socio-economic, health, and educational setbacks that it has caused globally is as essential as ever. Lisa's (and if extrapolated, children's far and wide) resilience through creativity in the face of Coronavirus—she kept the reality of COVID-19 at bay by acknowledging it, yet not letting it take over her meaning-making—teaches us a valuable lesson: Never give up!

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, sincere thanks go to Lisa and her mother for making this research possible. We also thank the two reviewers for their incredibly supportive, critical, and valuable feedback. Finally, a heartfelt thanks to Dr. Maureen Kendrick, who inspired me (Brass) to conduct this study, worked closely with me on the first draft of this paper and encouraged me to publish it.

References

- Alvarez, A. (2017). Drawn and written funds of knowledge: A window into emerging bilingual children's experiences and social interpretations through their written narratives and drawings. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy* [online preprint].
- Brownell, C. J. (2022). Navigating play in a pandemic: Examining children's outdoor neighborhood play experiences. *International Journal of Play*, 11(1), 99-113. doi.org/10.1080/21594937.2022.2042932.
- Bryman, A., & Bell, E. (2019). *Social research methods* (5th Canadian ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). Case studies. In Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (Eds.), *Research methods in education* (pp. 181-190).
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.). Routledge.
- Cowan, K., Potter, J., Olusoga, Y., Bannister, C., Bishop, J. C., Cannon, M., & Signorelli, V. (2021). Children's digital play during the COVID-19 pandemic: Insights from the play observatory. *Je-LKS*, 17(3). doi.org/10.20368/1971-8829/1135590.
- Creswell, J., W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Cummins, J., & Early, M. (Eds.). (2011). *Identity texts: The collaborative creation of power in multilingual schools*. Trentham Books.
- Daniel, S. J. (2020). Education and the COVID-19 pandemic. *Prospects* 49, 91–96.
- Dicks, B., Flewitt, R., Lancaster, I., & Pahl, K. (2011). Multimodality and ethnography: Working at the intersection. *Qualitative Research*, 11(3), 227-237.
- Dicks, B., Soyinka, B., & Coffey, A. (2006). Multimodal ethnography. *Qualitative Research*, 6(1), 77-99.
- Dyson, A., H. (1983). The emergence of visible language: Interrelationships between drawing and early writing, presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montréal, Canada, 1983.
- Early, M., Kendrick, M., & Potts, D. (2015). Multimodality: Out from the margins of English language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 49(3), 447-460.
- Grapin, S. (2018). Multimodality in the new content standards era: Implications for English learners. *TESOL Quarterly*, 51(2), 30-55.
- Heath, S. (1982). What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school. *Language in Society*, 11, 49-76.
- Heath, S. B., & Street, B. V. (2008). *On ethnography: Approaches to language and literacy research (An NCRL Volume)*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Iacono, J., Brown, A., & Holtham, C. (2009). Research methods—A case example of participant observation. *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 7(1).
- Idoiaga Mondragon, N., Eiguren Munitis, A., Berasategi Sancho, N., & Ozamiz Etxebarria, N. (2022). Drawing the COVID-19 pandemic: How do children incorporate the health crisis and its consequences into their everyday thinking? *Psychology & Health*, ahead-of-print, 1-20. doi.org/10.1080/08870446.2022.2066103.
- Iedema, R. (2003). Multimodality, resemiotization: Extending the analysis of discourse as multi-semiotic practice. *Visual Communication*, 2(1), 29-57.

- Kaden, U. (2020). COVID-19 school closure-related changes to the professional life of a K-12 teacher. *Education Sciences*, 10(6), 1-13.
- Kapoor, H., & Kaufman, J. C. (2020). Meaning-making through creativity during COVID-19. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 595990. doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.595990.
- Kendrick, M. (2005). Playing house: A 'sideways' glance at literacy and identity in early childhood. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 5(1), 5-28.
- Kendrick, M. (2016). *Multimodality and literacy in global sites*. Routledge.
- Kendrick, M., & McKay, R. (2016). Drawings as an alternative way of understanding young children's constructions of literacy. In M. Kendrick (Ed.), *Multimodality and literacy in global sites* (pp. 56-80). Routledge.
- Knobel, M., & Lankshear, C. (2014). Studying new literacies. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 58(2), 97-101.
- Kress, G. (1997). *Before writing: Rethinking the paths to literacy*. Routledge.
- Kress, G. (2000). Multimodality. In Cope, B. & Kalantzis, M. (Eds.). *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and the design of social futures* (pp. 179-200). Routledge.
- Kress, G. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. Routledge. doi.org/10.4324/9780203970034.
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2021). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Lee, S. J., Ward, K. P., Chang, O. D., & Downing, K. M. (2021). Parenting activities and the transition to home-based education during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 122(105585), 1-10.
- Malinowski, D. (2014). Drawing bodies and spaces in telecollaboration: A view of research potential in synaesthesia and multimodality, from the outside. *Pedagogies: An International Journal*, 9(1), 63-85.
- Matloob Haghani, T., & Leigh, S. R. (2022). Assessing children's drawings in response to COVID-19. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 36(4), 697-714. doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2022.2042431.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Mills, K. A., Davis-Warra, J., Sewell, M., & Anderson, M. (2016). Indigenous ways with literacies: Transgenerational, multimodal, placed, and collective. *Language and Education*, 30(1), 1-21.
- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132-141.
- Morgan, H. (2020). Best practices for implementing remote learning during a pandemic. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues, and Ideas*, 93(3), 135-141.
- New London Group (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: Designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), 60-93.
- Paechter, C. (2006). Power, knowledge, and embodiment in communities of sex/gender practice. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29(1), 13-26.

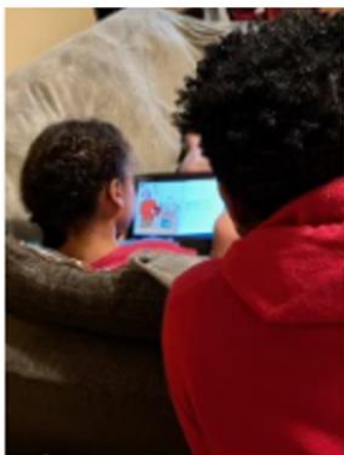
- Parsons, J., Hewson, K., Adrian, L. & Day, N. (2013). *Engaging in action research: A practical guide to teacher-conducted research for educators and school leaders*. Brush Education Inc.
- Perry, K. (2012). What is Literacy? A critical overview of sociocultural perspectives. *Journal of Language and Literacy Education*, 8(1), 50-71.
- Scribner, S. (1984). Literacy in three metaphors: The development of literacy in the American schools. *American Journal of Education*, 93 (1), 6-21.
- Sidelnick, M. A., & Svoboda, M., L. (2000). The bridge between drawing and writing: Hannah's story. *The Reading Teacher*, 54(2), 174-184.
- Smith, B.E., Pacheco, M.B., & Khorosheva, M. (2021). Emergent bilingual students and digital multimodal composition: A systematic review of research in secondary classrooms. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 56 (1), 33-52.
- Stake, R. E. (1978). The case study method in social inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 7(2), 5-8.
- Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 443-466). Sage Publications.
- Stewart, E. S., Cho, J., Lesley, M., & Smit, J. (2022). Home literacy initiatives of middle school families during the 2020 quarantine period: Transformation in education? *Current Issues in Middle Level Education*, 26(2). doi.org/10.20429/cimle.2022.260202.
- Street, B. (1994). Cross-cultural perspectives on literacy. In J. Maybin (Ed.), *Language and Literacy in Social Practice: A Reader* (pp. 139-150). Open University.
- Tannen, D. (2004). Talking the dog: Framing pets as interactional resources in family discourse. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 37(4), 399-420.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Wenger, E. (2019). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Williamson, B., Eynon, R., & Potter, J. (2020). Pandemic politics, pedagogies, and practices: Digital technologies and distance education during the coronavirus emergency. *Learning, Media and Technology*, 45(2), 107-114.
- Wohlwend, K. (2011). A is for Avatar: Young children in literacy 2.0 worlds and literacy 1.0 schools. *Language Arts*, 88(2), 144-152.
- Wolcott, H.F. (1994). *Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis, and interpretation*. Sage.
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2020). *WHO director-general's opening remarks at the Mission briefing on COVID-19*. <https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-mission-briefing-on-covid-19---12-march-2020>.

Author Biographies

Laura Brass is a Ph.D. candidate in Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia and an SSHRC and UBC Public Scholars Initiative fellowship holder. She received her MEd in TESL from the University of Calgary. Her research interests include bi-/multilingual language teachers' identity, immigrant women's issues, multimodal digital literacy, new materialism, and feminist theory.

Dr. Jennifer Jenson is a Professor of Digital Languages, Literacies, and Cultures in the Department of Language and Literacy Education, Faculty of Education, The University of British Columbia. Her research interests include digital, multimodal, and game-based literacies, gender and education, and online learning.

Appendix 1
Lisa's Literacy Practices through Photographs



1. Reading French with Dad on iPad



2. Reading English: "Harry Potter"



3. Reading English: Library Book



4. Two Favourite Toys



5. Practising Piano



6. Doing Math Homework



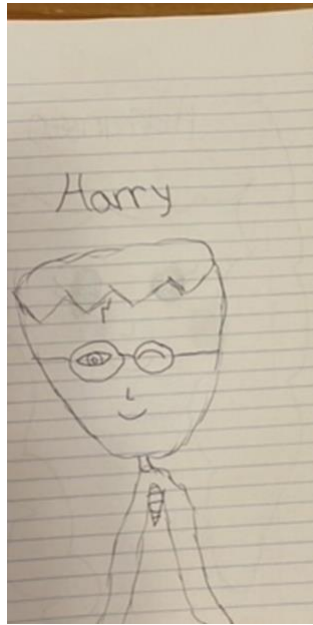
7. Pottery

Appendix 2

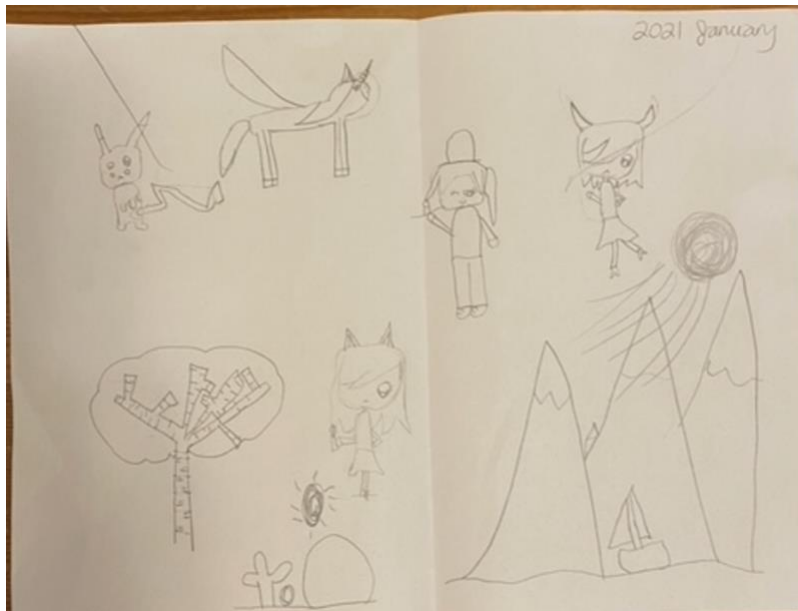
Lisa's Literacy Practices through Drawings



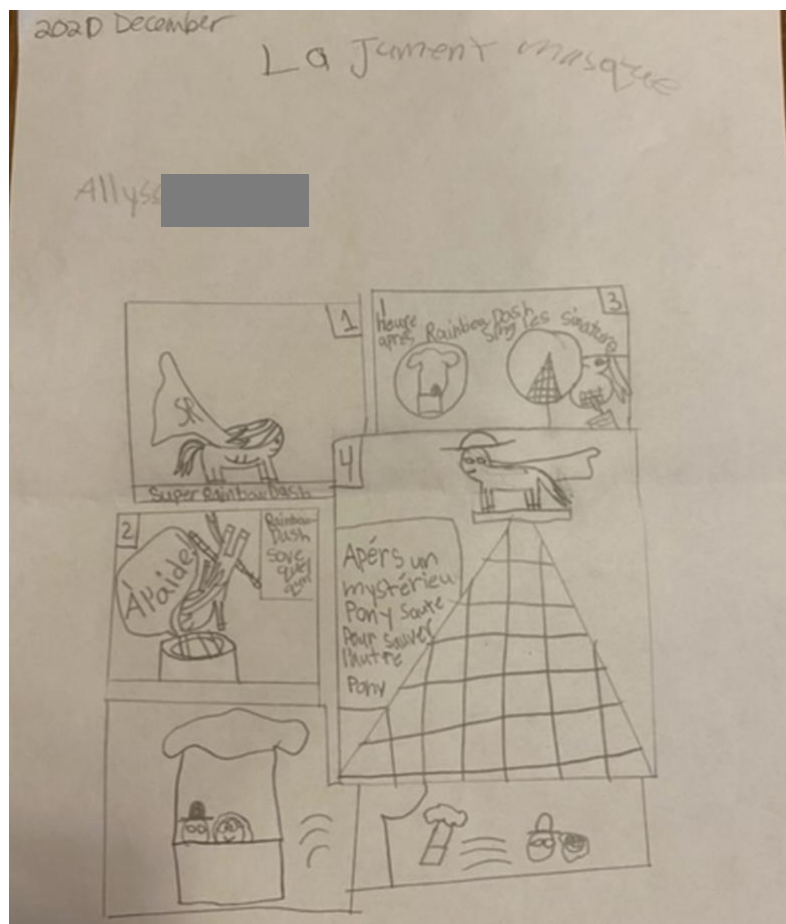
1. School drawing that accompanies a French-written text



2, 3, 4, 5. Home drawings of characters from the “Harry Potter” books



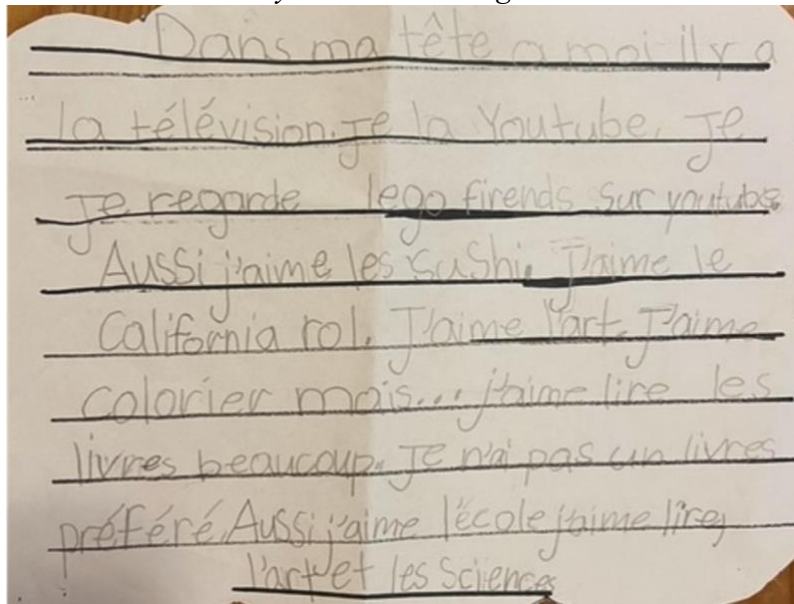
6. Drawing—group game played at an after-school program



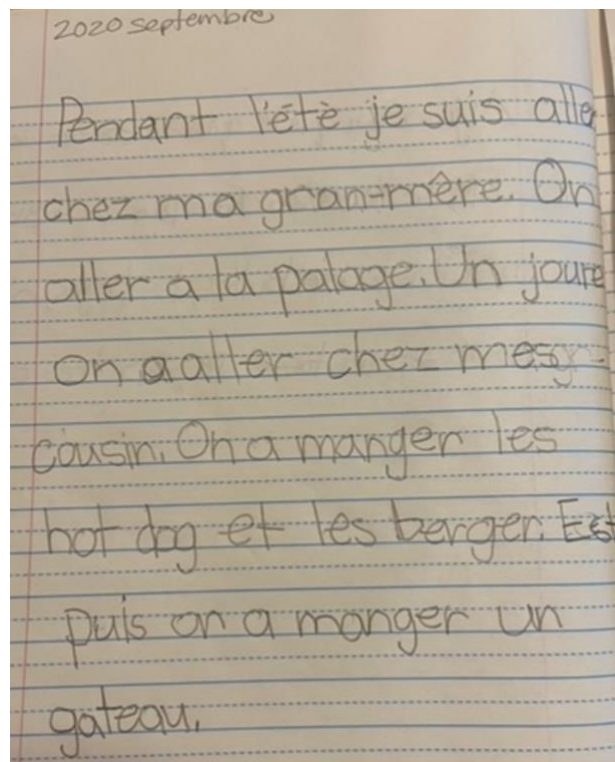
7. School cartoon with French-written text

Appendix 3

Lisa's Literacy Practices through Written Texts



1. French-written text that goes with self-colored drawing




2. French-written text about a fun summer day







Create a Winter Story

Name: Alyssa

In pairs, roll the dice to create your setting and characters.

1. Decide what will happen in your story (problem and resolution).
2. Act it out!



	1 st Roll Setting	2 nd Roll Character 1	3 rd Roll Character 2
	Snowy forest	A little boy	✓ A naughty elf
	Aboard the Arctic Express	Santa Claus	A silly penguin
	Santa's workshop	✓ A little girl	A forgetful snowman
	Polar bear party	A gingerbread man	A mischievous fairy
	✓ Elf village	✓ A clever elf	A funny penguin
	Ice palace	A magical fairy	A runaway reindeer

Page 1 of 2

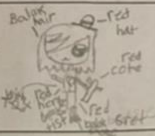
Create a Winter Story

2020 December

Describe the setting: Elf village


Describe your 1st character:

A little girl named Tessa



Describe your 2nd character:

a naughty elf named Lysa



Plot - Problem: The naughty elf Lysa steals all the presents.

Plot - Resolution: She sells all the presents because she never gets presents. She makes new presents.

Page 2 of 2

3. An imagined winter story is written in English