



# Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies

## Paper 231

### **The potential of collaborative drawing for literacy engagement and identity affirmation in multilingual settings: Guidance for practice and research**

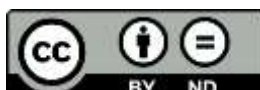
by

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# **The potential of collaborative drawing for literacy engagement and identity affirmation in multilingual settings: Guidance for practice and research**

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In this article we explore multimodal communication, specifically drawing in a team, as a tool for literacy engagement and identity affirmation. For this, we developed and trialled collaborative drawing (CD) activities to engage 9 children and 8 adults in non-verbal and verbal communication. We collected photographic, video and audio data which we analysed using an exploratory approach, incorporating thematic analysis. Current research on collaborative drawing does not consider literacy engagement, identity affirmation or how teachers could use this communication method to engage diverse learners, and our study contributes to this gap. Our findings suggest that the CD approach has potential to facilitate literacy engagement and identity affirmation in multilingual settings, but its application in classrooms also has its challenges. This article, thus provides guidance for teachers with an interest in exploring collaborative drawing in practice, and it prepares the ground for further research in this under-researched field.

**Keywords:** Multimodality, collaborative learning, literacy engagement, multilingualism

## **Introduction and literature review**

Today's children are arguably growing up at a time when international collaboration is increasingly required to address the problems our world is facing, and we expect that future generations need to communicate and collaborate across linguistic and cultural

boundaries. It might be expected that in classrooms that consist of speakers of different languages, which is increasingly the norm, learners can practice relevant skills with one another. This means we need to think creatively about how teachers can support learners to participate in classroom learning, whose languages they sometimes do not speak (Conteh & Meier, 2014, Weber, 2014). This article identifies and addresses a gap in research, and reports relevant findings from a small study that explored the use of collaborative drawing in a multilingual after-school club situation, especially set up for the study.

Cummins et al. (2015) found that there is an important link between literacy practices that are identity affirming and literacy engagement. In turn they see both identity affirmation and literacy engagement as related to achievement, or indeed under-achievement, for instance when schooling is conducted in a language unknown to the learners, or when school content does not represent different home languages, traditions and knowledges (see Battiste, 2013), or what some people refer to as funds of knowledge (Mercado and Moll, 1997). This means that at least a part of the learners' identity may be ignored and/or not valued at school, and it is hard to engage in literacy if the language and content are unfamiliar. As scholars of language and education we were interested in the idea of adopting creative and multimodal approaches to literacy, understood as

“creative writing and other forms of cultural production or performance (e.g., art, drama, video creation, etc.) [that] represent expressions of identity, projection of identity into new social spheres, and recreation of identity as a result of feedback from and dialogue with multiple audiences” (Cummins et al. 2015: 557).

The above quotation suggests that different formats of learning and engagement with others can enable linguistically and culturally diverse learners to engage in expressing

their ideas, knowledge and identities. From a creative arts perspective, Wood & Hall (2011: 267) argue that

“drawings can be theorised as intellectual play and as authoring spaces for children’s identities. By playing at, in and with their drawings children reveal the complex imaginative and meditational processes that underpin their playful transformations of their social and cultural worlds, in which concepts of power, agency and identity are embedded.” (267).

While most existing research, such as Wood & Hall 2011, is about drawing as an individual activity, the authors had the hunch that drawing together with other people may be worth exploring, as it resonates with work in language classrooms, such as by Cummins et al. (2015). Based on this hunch we defined *Collaborative Drawing* as a creative and multimodal approach to literacy engagement that has the potential to affirm identities and overcome some linguistic boundaries based on funds of knowledge, by inviting alternative ideas, languages, ways of knowing and understandings into the classroom; an approach that potentially supports participation in classroom life. This led to the following research questions (RQ):

- What is the potential of collaborative drawing in relation to literacy engagement (RQ1) and identity affirmation (RQ2)?
- How can collaborative drawing be facilitated to support the above? (RQ3)

Thus, we recruited a group of participants of different ages and cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Table 1 and 2). For the purpose of this article, we refer to these individuals as multilingual participants, as they are all developing more than one first and further languages at home, in school or in other contexts (see table 1 and 2). This understanding is based on the idea that all people have a plurilingual repertoire that can be emergent, developing and changing throughout a person’s lifetime and in different

contexts (Meier 2017).

In the article, we first introduce guiding concepts, describe our research design and report our findings. We close this article by presenting a roadmap for further research which we see as our main contribution to knowledge.

### **Main concepts**

While children might well engage in various forms of *collaborative drawing* in school and at home, our review of literature shows that the term itself is not normally found in educational lexicons. An exception is the study by Van Dijk et al. (2014), which used a collaborative drawing project to test the effect of question prompts to stimulate students to engage in verbal elaboration. A couple of relevant studies were published (Sakr, 2018; Park & Kang, 2018) after we collected our data, indicating that there is a budding interest in the topic. However, none of these have specifically explored the idea of literacy engagement, identity affirmation or valuing alternative languages, knowledges or ways of knowing, or indeed how teachers can use or support collaborative drawing in a classroom.

There is an increasing number of studies that look at literacy engagement enabled by digital tools, for instance through *multimodal and/or multiliteracy engagement* (Thibaut & Curwood, 2018). We, however, took a low-tech approach, similar to that proposed by Cummins (2006, 2015). Cummins used drawing and writing in a known language to help linguistically diverse learners engage in the expression of ideas on paper, as an intermediary stage in the process of learning to write in the school language. Thibaut & Curwood (2018: 49) argue that “teachers must design learning contexts in order to scaffold and evaluate students’ composition processes”. While we focus on preliminary literacy engagement, rather than on writing compositions themselves, similar to the digital approach to writing proposed by Thibaut & Curwood,

we understand collaborative drawing as using “diverse semiotic resources, [that] involve multiple modes of representation, and embody new literacy practices.” Cummins et al. (2015:4) understand “identity texts” multimodally, in that they can be “written, spoken, signed, visual, musical, dramatic, or combinations in multimodal form”. Thus, we expected collaborative drawing to help participants with diverse backgrounds to use diverse resources to express ideas multimodally for which they may not (yet) have words, and to get them engaged in expressing and sharing their ideas.

Multimodal approaches to literacy, such as suggested above, seem to enable students to “express their identity, exercise agency and foster a sense of authoring through multimodal production” (Thibaut & Curwood, 2018: 49). Moreover, the link between such ‘texts’ and *identity affirmation* is due to “students’ identities, cultures, languages, and past and present experiences” being “reflected back in a positive light.” The notion of sharing ideas with others is important in terms of identity, since “students will engage actively with literacy only to the extent that such engagement is identity-affirming” (Cummins et al. 2015: 5). Thibaut & Curwood (2018: 191) indeed posit that educational models that support teachers and pupils in developing their identity as persons in relation to one another is related to transformative pedagogy as proposed by Freire (1970), that might empower those who might be at a linguistic or cultural disadvantage in a conventional classroom.

### **Methodology**

In this section, we explain our exploratory inductive approach that over-arches our research, and how we designed a collaborative drawing after-school club for a multilingual and multi-age group to find answers to our research questions introduced above. We then describe the recruitment of participants and the data collection procedure, before we explain how we developed the themes we present and illustrate

below.

### **Setting up the study**

Given the dearth of studies in the field of collaborative drawing, our study is partly exploratory and inductive, as we had the goal to discover new insights that had not been explored before and that could enable us “to see plausible connections that have previously not been seen, explored or understood” (Reiter, 2013:11). It also has a deductive component as we expected to learn something related to literacy engagement and identity affirmation, based on previous studies from related fields. It also has an ethnographic component, in the way that Kellehear (1993) understands ethnographers, namely as researchers who are at the same time participants who experience a social reality, in this case collaborative drawing, both as insiders and as researchers who reflect on what they observed and experienced. Some of the researchers were also parents of participating children, which meant that we had an additional layer of insider knowledge. Kellehear argues that theory can be developed, using this insider approach, as we can move “from the particular case (the study) to the general social theory. As in Kellehear’s study (1993: 21), our inductive part shares features with ‘grounded theory’”: Based on our regular reflections, we inductively developed new ideas to understand collaborative drawing. At the same time we used the deductive sub-themes that helped us find answers to our research questions. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) guided our analysis based on both deductive and inductive themes and categories. Inductive categories were developed during and following the data collection. For this we read and re-read our reflective notes and developed a list of categories. Once the data collection was complete, we organised these categories guided by the research questions to produce a thematic framework with deductive themes and sub-themes that include a series of inductive categories each (see Table 3 below).

## Participants

The workshops we developed involved opportunities for adults and children to draw together. Participating adults largely adopted a facilitator role encouraging children to draw together with other children and other adults. Thus, we recruited eight adults, including researchers and/or parents (Table 1) and nine child participants (Table 2) with different linguistic backgrounds. To make the findings more reader-friendly, we use pseudonyms starting with ‘R’ for researchers (adults), and pseudonyms starting with ‘C’ for children.

*Table 1: Adult participants*

	Gender	Re-searcher	First language	Additional languages	Parent of
Ramona	F	Yes	German	English, French, Spanish	--
Roza	F	Yes	English	French, German, Hungarian	--
Rami	M	Yes	Arabic	English	Cemal, Chahrazad
Riyadh	M	Yes	Arabic	English	Chaker, Chadia
Rong	F	Yes	Chinese (Mandarin)	English, Cantonese	--
Ran	F	Yes	Chinese (Mandarin)	English	--
Rui	F	Yes	Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese)	English	--



Raffaela	F	No	Spanish	English, Italian	Cristina, Carolina
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Child participants were recruited by a mixture of convenience and purposive sampling. Some children were sons and daughters of the co-investigators, others of other members of staff at the university where we conducted the study. We offered these colleagues to participate alongside their children, and one additional parent (Raffaela) joined the project. Child and adult participants were selected based on language backgrounds, as we wanted a linguistically diverse group of people who were expected to bring alternative knowledges, languages and ways of knowing to the collaborative drawing workshops.

*Table 2: Child participants Participant*

	Age	Gender	Years in UK	First language	Other languages studied in school
Cristina	4	F	4	Spanish, English	English
Carolina	6	F	6	Spanish, English	English
Chaker	6	M	5	Arabic	English
Cemal	7	M	5	Arabic	English, French**
Catherine	9	F	9	English	French, Spanish*
Claudia	9	F	9	English	French, Spanish*
Clara	11	F	11	English	French, Spanish*
Chadia	12	F	5	Arabic	Spanish & English
Chahrazad	12	F	5	Arabic	French & English**

\* The parent stresses that they learn very little French and Spanish. \*\* plus private Arabic tuition

We obtained ethical approval from the University ethics committee, and we obtained informed consent from parents and children. The collaborative drawing activities were

neither uncomfortable nor stressful for the children, on the contrary they were disappointed when the series of collaborative drawing workshops came to an end. The workshops seemed to be fun and enjoyable for all.

### **Data collected**

In order to answer our research questions, we designed four after-school workshops. These were held at the University between 10 and 31 May 2017, in a room normally used for primary teacher training. This was deemed to be a practical and safe place. We arranged the tables in clusters and placed paper and felt pens on each table. We also placed three audio and two video recorders on the three tables to capture conversations and drawing activities. Researchers adopted different roles at different times: some participated in the drawing activities, while others observed and photographically documented the activities. Five to seven researchers and six to eight children, were present during each collaborative drawing workshop, and we had between three and four participants per table.

To test the equipment and some of the activities, a pilot workshop, in which only researchers participated, informed the first workshop. The format of each subsequent workshop was informed by team reflections on the previous workshop. These reflections took place at the end of each session in a kind of a focus group with the research team. We audio-recorded these reflections and produced summary notes, which we then used to design the following workshop, and identify inductive categories as described above.

We started each workshop with warm-up activities, which had the purpose of getting participants to draw and generate ideas and learn how participants can draw together. Warm-up activities included brainstorming on a whiteboard and individual drawing on A4 paper or on smaller cards. For the main activity we allocated participants

to tables, usually one or two adults plus one to three children of a similar age. This did not always work, as especially younger children wanted to draw with their parents in some of the sessions, so we made some ad-hoc changes to ensure all were as comfortable as possible at their tables. Each workshop was one and a half hours long. The data collected consisted of:

- (1) four sets of written reflection notes produced as a summary of our researcher discussions following each event;
- (2) audio-recordings of the above reflections (128 mins);
- (3) audio reflections by participants at the tables (95 mins),
- (4) 7 audio recordings of workshop conversations at individual tables (317 mins)
- (5) 7 videos of workshop activity at individual tables (313 mins) and
- (6) 217 photographs of context and drawings.

In the following we will use the letters (a to f) to refer to the different data sets, we used to generate or illustrate themes.

### **Inductive thematic analysis**

We started developing initial themes during our reflections at the end of each workshop (a+b). Following the data collection, we inductively identified 96 categories based on the full set of reflections (a+b). We then removed duplications and combined overlapping categories, e.g. “expression of identity” and “personal expression” into one category “expression of identity”. We thus sorted the final 31 inductive categories into nine sub-themes that are in turn related to the three main deductive themes (literacy engagement, identity affirmation, support for collaborative drawing) that are related to the our research questions (RQ1-3), as can be seen in Table 3.

*Table 3: Thematic Framework based on researcher reflections (a and b)*

Main/Sub-themes	Categories
<b>Literacy Engagement</b>	
Multimodal literacy engagement	Drawing as a code; blurring between writing and drawing; use of written and spoken languages; validate all languages as part of multimodal repertoire;  drawing helps expression, when words are missing;  cooperative or collaborative drawing
Formats of CD	Brainstorm; one person draws, one instructs; in groups; between several groups
<b>Identity affirmation</b>	
Different knowledges	Drawing on cultural linguistic resources; building on previous knowledge (funds of knowledge); creativity and imagination
Affective dimension	Expression of identity; ownership of learning
Social dimension	Build relationships; help each other; division
<b>Supporting collaborative drawing</b>	
instruction of skills	Focus on drawing process not product; practice CD skills through warm ups; collaboration skills need to be taught
Choice of appropriate topics	Culturally appropriate; age appropriate; learners are given a choice; topics that allow complex thinking
Appropriate tasks	Encourage students to contribute and collaborate; provide reasons to ask questions; require move from descriptive to abstract
Invite previous knowledge	Discuss language use with children and make rules; encourage use of children's funds of knowledge

In the following sections, we will summarise the themes based on the coding structure

presented in Table 3. We will make use of additional data, namely photographs of drawings (f) and extracts from conversations held during collaborative drawing group work (c, d, e) to illustrate and substantiate the themes.

## **Literacy engagement**

### **Sub-theme 1: multimodal literacy engagement**

Our thematic analysis (a+b) showed that collaborative drawing may well have potential as a first step to literacy engagement that enables the expression of simpler ideas and concepts, as well as more complex language, in a known and/or in a new language. We have to add that complex language use is not necessarily automatic, hence we invited learners to talk about and label their drawing and ideas using different languages to express, share and develop ideas, maximising the multimodal approach to learning. We did not set any follow-up writing tasks, but we see potential in using collaborative drawing as a preparatory stage in this. In order to encourage literacy opportunities and more complex thinking, we encouraged the use of symbols, labels and written languages to illustrate complexity, and move beyond simple descriptions.

Collaborative drawing showed that it can blur boundaries between writing and drawing, as the object can be drawn, talked about, and labelled in more than one language.

Collaborative drawing can be used as a code to express ideas when words are missing. Cemal remarked that collaborative drawing is useful, because “you can draw it when you don’t know the word” (c).

Our data can be used to illustrate how children verbalised what they were going to draw, e.g. “I’m going to draw a cow” (Cemal, e), and then drew this (Fig. 1).

When asked whether the children wanted to give names to their characters, Cemal used phonetic letters: “k”, “æ”, and the letter name “double- u” while he added the word “cow” to his drawing.

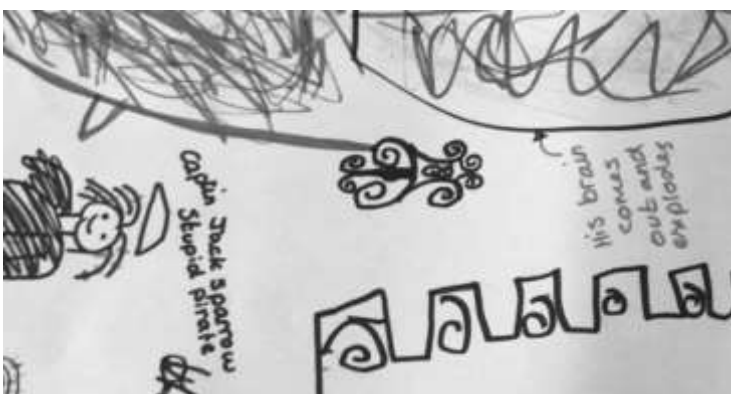
Participants also used drawing and spoken language to develop more complex ideas, e.g. “Captin Jack Sparrow Stupid pirate” (Clara, f), or to explain processes, e.g. “His brain comes out and explodes” (Claudia, f) as illustrated in Fig. 2.

While in the examples above, the children labelled their drawings without help, participants also requested help in other situations, such with spelling in Extract 1 (lines 2-9).

*Figure 1: Adventure story (workshop 4, extract from f)*



*Figure 2: Adventure story (workshop 4, extract form f)*



*Extract 1: Food Festival (workshop 3, extract from d)*

1. Chadia: ((to Rui)) So you come from China, so you can write Chinese food. ((to Chahrazad)) You can write UK and American food.
2. Chahrazad: How to spell America?
3. Rui: A, M, E, R, I, C, A.
4. Chadia: Is it USA?
5. Rui: Yes, U.S.A.
6. ((Chahrazad tries to spell))
7. Chahrazad: A, M, R?
8. Rui: A, M, R, I, C, A.
9. Chadia: You can write USA.
10. Rui: Yes, or you can draw the flag.
11. Chadia: ((to Chahrazad)) How to draw the Arabic flag?
12. ((Chahrazad helped Chadia draw the Arabic flag))
13. Chaida: It is hard because there is some writing.
14. Rui: Oh...
15. Chadia: هذا العلم الهماني فيه ثلاث ألوان (This Omani flag has three colours ) ((to Chahrazad))
16. ((Chadia asked for help from Riyadh))
17. Chadia: Sir? Does it have two swords or one in here? ((pointed to the flag she was drawing))
18. Riyadh: Sword?
19. Chadia: Yes, like knives ((makes gesture)).
20. Riyadh: Oh, خنجر (dagger). Two swords.
21. Chadia: Two swords and the writing?
22. Riyadh: No, no. This is Saudi Arabic not Oman. Which one did you?

23. ((Chadia pointed to the one on the left))
24. Riyadh: Saudi Arabia only has one sword.
25. Chadia: ((to Rui)) we wear this ((pointed to the dagger)), like you can wear it in a special occasion.

### **Sub-theme 2: Formats of collaborative drawing**

Based on our reflections (a+b), we developed four different formats of collaborative drawing. *Format 1* was kind of a drawing brainstorm, where learners drew as many objects as possible related to a topic on individual pieces of paper (e.g. things in the sky, Workshop 1) or collectively on a white board (e.g. food items, workshop 3). *Format 2* involved work in pairs, one person described food items another draws these (Workshop 3); *Format 3* consisted of groups of 3 to 5 participants drawing together on one large sheet of paper (workshops 1-3); *Format 4* circulated drawings between groups of 3 to 5 participants, each developing a part of a drawing before they pass it on to the next group to develop the drawing, until it arrives back with the group that started the drawing (Workshop 4).

Furthermore, the thematic analysis showed that there is a difference between cooperative and collaborative drawing. *Cooperative drawing*: Younger children, e.g. Cemal and Chaker tended to draw individual things around the theme, often at different ends of the table (f). In Fig. 1, it can be seen that Chaker drew a small green ghost on the right-hand side, while Cemal drew a cow on 'his' side of the drawing. Older children also drew individual objects, but they were more likely to move on to draw collaboratively (see Fig. 3), while younger children tended to draw individually throughout. *Collaborative drawing*: Older children, approached the task differently, for instance they shared the drawing task they set themselves, e.g., Chadia drew the stems



of a forest, and team members drew the crowns of the trees (e). They also discussed more with each other, which seems to lead to more collaborative drawing, as for instance Chadia and Clara who discussed features of the house they were drawing together: Clara: “you can even put ivy growing right up on the side of the house”, Chadia: “yeah, do you want to draw that?” (Fig. 3, e).

*Figure 3: Adventure story (workshop 4, video still from e)*



## **Identity affirmation**

### **Sub-theme 3: different knowledges**

In our reflections (a+b), we noted that participants were able to draw on existing linguistic, cultural, everyday life knowledge, as well as from imaginary worlds through joint engagement with a topic through collaborative drawing; content that may not necessarily be of relevance in a conventional classroom in the UK for instance.

Linguistic knowledge was invited, by brainstorming greetings in different languages as a warm-up to workshop 2. This was interesting, as it showed greetings in the participants first languages (English, Arabic, Chinese, Spanish), and those they are learning at school (French, German, Spanish, English), and that words can be written in different codes (Chinese, Arabic, Latin scripts). Following, this activity, different

languages were then used by participants to clarify, query and exclude others, as shown in Extract 1 and 3.

Extract 2 shows that drawing triggered a comparison of the Omani and Saudi flags, and relevant national symbols (dagger). Chadia and Chahrazad used Arabic to discuss this, but used English with Rui.

We noticed that older participants tended to include everyday life knowledge, including people, such as Catherine who commented “I draw my mum, because she went on a skateboard and fell off, and flying through the air” (workshop 2, d), or Chadia and Chahrazad drew the process of making stuffed vine leaves in workshop 3 (d,f).

We noticed that younger children often drew on more imaginary content, including robots (Cemal, workshop 4, e) ghosts (Chaker, Fig. 2) and dinosaurs (both).

The topic of food festival (workshop 3), made visible different knowledges and traditions, and created opportunities to contribute knowledge from individual’s cultural background, including learning and teaching each other about stuffed vine leaves (Chaida and Chahrazad), tofu (Rui), kapsa (Rami), chicken with chocolate sauce (Raffaella) and how to eat with chop sticks or by hand in workshop 3, d).

Extract 1 (lines 10-25) illustrates how learners draw on their funds of cultural knowledge, in this case about flags and the significance of daggers, as well as everyday life knowledge (Extract 2), such as bringing in a trampoline (line 12) and a hospital (line 22). However, as shown under theme 3 and 9 not all may be equally confident that their views are acceptable or welcome.

*Extract 2: Adventure story (Workshop 4, extract from d)*

1. Catherine: You’ve decapitated her and killed her.
2. Clara: Yeah
3. Ramona: You can always revise or something because it’s an adventure

4. ((Catherine and Clara argue, off-task)).
5. Rami: Could you put it on the table please.
6. Claudia: Look, they decapitated her stomach.
7. Rami: What is this here?
8. Catherine: Millie's falling off from the plane.
9. Claudia: ((making noises))
10. Catherine: And she's dead, she is hit by an arrow and she died. Clara, so horrible.  
You are mean.
11. Rami: So we have to think of... how to... wrap things up now or you think...
12. Catherine: And then there's a trampoline at the bottom that she ((unintelligible)) the  
trampoline
13. Rami: Oh...
14. Claudia: You can get to this height. OK. That will be happy ending.
15. Catherine: We are saving her by putting the trampoline down.
16. Ramona: That's a good idea
17. Rami: yeah, yeah
18. Claudia: Maybe she still dead. ((Catherine and Clara argue))
19. Claudia: Yes, you know what's going on ((Claudia starts drawing))
20. Rami: What is this Claudia?
21. Claudia: Hospital.
22. Catherine: Yes, she goes to the hospital once she land on the trampoline. Cos she's  
landed quite fine.
23. ((Catherine and Clara argue)).
24. Ramona: Stop quarrelling you. You work on this table, and you work on this table.

*Extract 3: Beach drawing (Workshop 2, d)*

1. Raffaella: What else do you have on beach? I know what to have....a palm tree?
2. Cristina: I will draw a palm tree
3. Chahrazad: نخله؟! (A palm tree?!)
4. Chadia: اول مرة اشوف نخلة في البحر (It was the first time for me to see a palm tree on the beach!)
5. Cristina: What is it?
6. Raffaella: Does look like a palm tree?
7. Cristina: It does....I know how to write a palm tree?
8. Raffaella: You know how to do it?
9. Cristina: Yes, a line...and then a line.

**Sub-theme 3: Affective dimension**

We identified (a+b) a strong affective theme related to collaborative drawing. This is based on the observation that participants were enabled to express themselves, their ideas and their emotions, even where words were missing. During the course of the four weeks, we observed (a + b) that some children developed independence (e.g. Cemal and Chaker) and others who largely drew their own things at the beginning started to engage with others more (Catherine). Importantly, we found that collaborative drawing seemed to enable greater autonomy and ownership of learning as the learning process is guided by participants' own contributions.

Collaborative drawing provided children with a space to express personal feelings (see Extract 2), such as anger (line 4), dislikes (lines 10 and 26) and sadness when Catherine included a sick friend in her drawing (Workshop 2, e).

Riyadh and Rami found that their sons Cemal and Chaker became more independent and less reliant on them very quickly in the first session, which they found

remarkable. Riyadh (b) noticed that “he [Cemal] was not confident at the beginning to be honest. But when he moved to the second drawing [after 10-20 mins], he got some confidence, he drew something from his mind, something totally different from what the story told him” (the latter refers to a story used as a warm up in workshop 1 (Ahlberg & Ingman, 2009)).

Facilitators needed to find a balance between helping and taking control. In the reflections (c), Claudia felt that adults “helped you to build your ideas...it’s easier with an adult there by your side to help you”, whereas Catherine felt that adults sometimes “interrupted” their drawing “we didn’t like we had to label or write whatever you ask.” Thus, some may require or welcome more support than others.

the younger participants interpreted a drawing that was passed to them by another group (workshop 4) differently based on their everyday knowledge of what animals looks like: “Cemal thought that the little one was a dog but Chaker thought it was a cat, so, and they developed into different, totally different stories” (Ran, b)“, thus, displaying agency and autonomy.

In workshop 3, we observed that some children started to collaborate with others more. Riyadh (b) observed

“I was with Catherine in the first session. She liked to draw alone, she doesn’t, she didn’t like anyone to interfere with her drawing. But in this, the last session, I noticed that she likes to share with people, to give people her ideas [...] and she likes to share with people what she had done”.

### **Sub-theme 5: Social dimension**

Based on our reflections (a+b), we identified we found that collaborative drawing can lead to positive or divisive social situations, as well as agreement or disagreement. Our workshops allowed participants to build rapport through working beside (cooperation)

and/or with each other (collaboration), as explained above. This enabled participants to get to know each other, help each other and develop ideas together. However, it also led to division, through quarrels and linguistic exclusion and can be seen in the following.

In workshop 2, Catherine remarked that collaborative drawing helps to get to know each other (c). In addition, it seems that a certain amount of trust and understanding is required from co-drawers, as Clara and Chadia felt “friends” were the best people to draw with, as certain people, such as “sisters” and “some people in the school they don’t understand you.”

We observed that children helped others understand, draw and develop ideas, such as in Extract 1 (lines 1-15), where jointly they establish the features of flags. The children have noted (c) that collaborative drawing enables the inclusion of “everyone’s idea” (Catherine) and “we get more ideas” (Claudia).

Constructive interaction and collaboration of some complexity is shown in Extract 2, in which Catherine presented her idea to Rami, Claudia understood and drew her ideas (line 12-15), and Catherine developed the storyline based on Claudia’s drawing (line 22).

There was extended quarrelling or division between the sisters, Catherine and Clara, in workshop 4 (Extract 3: lines 18, 23, 24). Extract 3 further showed that controversial topics may lead to exclusion of others, in this case through the use of Arabic (lines 3-4) to express their surprise related to palm trees on a beach (Fig. 4). This made Chadia and Chahrazad keep their disagreement with others to themselves, by using Arabic to exclude others from their conversation.

In contrast, Extract 2 illustrates how Catherine and Claudia openly express their disagreement with Clara’s work (lines 4, 10 and 22), but they are sisters, know each other well and are presumably less inhibited.

Figure 4: Beach drawing (workshop 2, extract from f)



## Support collaborative drawing

### *Sub-theme 6: Special skills required*

In order to participate constructively in collaborative drawing workshops, the thematic analysis of our reflections (a + b) shows that it is necessary to teach collaboration skills and enhance participants, awareness of what and how they can contribute. This potentially includes: collaboration skills, language awareness, creativity and imagination.

Like anyone facilitating group work with children, especially where siblings are involved, we found that we had to deal with minor disciplinary issues, when children were quarrelling with each other (Extract 2, lines 23-24).

We used the warm-ups (Fig. 5) to elicit what good collaborative behaviour is, e.g. “we need to listen to each other’s ideas” (Clara Workshop 2, b). In Workshop 1, we

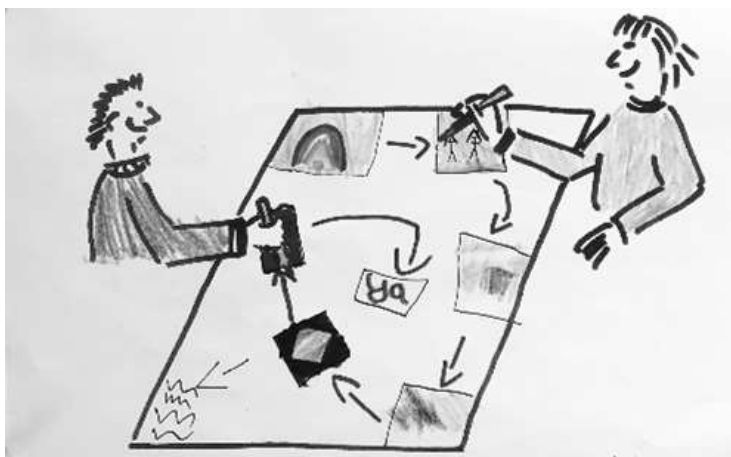
explained that it is not the product that matters, but the process of drawing and understanding things together, and no artistic talent is necessary, just an interest in drawing together.

We felt it was necessary to raise awareness of language use and funds of knowledge. We encouraged a multilingual approach by brainstorming greetings in different languages and talking about food in different languages and from different cultures.

We did not explicitly develop rules. However, based on our experience we feel it may be beneficial to develop a language regime, where groups decide for what purpose what languages can and should be used, to avoid exclusionary language use as shown in Extract 3, lines 3, 4).

As facilitators we could scaffold thinking and learning through collaborative drawing. For instance in Extract 2, scaffolding was provided to encourage children to develop their creativity (line 3) and story development (lines, 13, 16 and 17).

*Figure 5: Warm-up activity (workshop 2, f)*



### **Sub-theme 7: Appropriate topics**

An important consideration identified through our thematic analysis (a+b) was the



choice of appropriate topics. We either let the participants select the topics (workshop 2) or the facilitators selected the topic instead (workshop 1, 3, 4). The thematic analysis (a+b) further identified challenges associated with topics that were potentially culturally inappropriate and/or violent.

The beach topic selected by one group (Fig. 4, Workshop 2), showed that certain topics can lead to conflict, exclusion or alienation. When the participants with a Mexican-English background started drawing women in bikinis, the participants with an Arabic-English background first did not participate. In the absence of relevant data, we can only speculate that this may be due to different traditions of what leisure activities are expected at a beach. Instead of participating, Chadida and Chaharзад engaged in an exclusive conversation in Arabic, in which they seemed to distance themselves from their co-drawers. After a while, however, they did join in and added to the drawing (Fig. 4, d). While this was probably not a serious intercultural breakdown, greater preparation to enable intercultural learning may have led to valuable learning experiences for all participants.

In Extract 1, we document a more positive learning opportunity, in which Chadia and Chaharзад worked out the difference and similarities between the Saudi and Omani flags with the help of more capable others (lines 11-15). We argue that such discussions may be suitable to make visible cultural knowledge, affirm identities and create opportunities for learning.

As shown in Extract 2, the adventure story became quite violent, as one group created the character “Millie”, and the following group made her fall out of a plane, and de-capitated her during her fall, while she was shot by an arrow (lines 1-10). This was rather upsetting for the group who created “Millie”. However, as this group had the chance to develop the conclusion, they drew a trampoline at the bottom to soften her

fall, and took her to hospital to deal with her injuries (lines 12-26). The topic of adventure may have triggered this, as some adventure stories contain a measure of violence.

### **Sub-theme 8: Appropriate tasks**

The reflections (a+b) show our struggle to develop tasks that would sufficiently challenge the participants linguistically and in terms of higher-thinking skills. The reflections show that the food festival theme (workshop 3), in which we encouraged participants to think about the process of producing food and inviting people, enable more abstract thinking “with the recipes this was a bit more complicated than just depicting the objects” (Ramona, b).“

Certain collaborative drawing tasks tended to stay in the linguistically and cognitively less challenging descriptive domain (Workshops 2-3). For example, one group decided to draw a beach, and then added individual things they each associated with the topic, such as a palm tree. The type of language used was less challenging and included “what else do you have...?”, “What is it?”, “Does it look like...?” “I know how to...” (Extract 3: lines 1-9).

We found that some topics were conducive to using more complex language and more abstract higher-order thinking (Workshops 3-4). For example, in workshop 4, participants had to interpret what could be seen on a drawing that had been passed on to them from another group. Thus they needed to speculate. Younger children did this in a simpler way, e.g.: “it might be a Zombie”, “this has a big hat and this has a small hat on” (Cemal, e); and older children in a more complex way, when for instance they discovered that people in Arabic countries eat with their hands: “it’s quite hard to eat with your hands though.” (Clara); “so you cut it with your hands like this?” (Carolina).“

And the more mature children engaged in a conversation about cooking in English their

second language, drawing on their cultural knowledge: “You know the leaves is from Lebanon, not from our countries [...] first you get fresh leaves. I don’t know how to do them, I don’t know how to cook them. How do you cook them?” (Chadia). “First you take the leaves, then you take a bit of rice and then you put them inside” (Chaharзад) (e).

### **Sub-theme 9: Activate previous linguistic and cultural knowledge**

The thematic analysis (a+b) showed collaborative drawing can potentially be used as an inclusive method to engage with content that relates to participants’ linguistic repertoires, knowledge related to their international backgrounds and every-day knowledge developed at home, in school or through other activities, as presented under sub-theme 3. However, in our case there were also opportunities lost (b), as is illustrated in the following evidence. Thus, facilitators should be aware of this.

As reported above, Raffaella and Cristina, decided to add a palm tree to a beach, presumably based on the beaches they know in Mexico that feature palm trees.

However, there was an opportunity lost for learning, as Chadia and Chahrazad used Arabic to express their surprise of seeing palm trees on the beach (Extract 1: lines 3 and 4), but decided not to share this with their non-Arabic speaking co-drawers.

Based on our study, we found that we missed some opportunities for participants to learn from each other’s backgrounds, such as in workshop 2 (Extract 3). Thus, greater cultural mediation may be necessary to make use of the potential for learning inherent in such incidences.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

In this article, we have presented an exploratory study in which we developed and trialled collaborative drawing workshops with mixed-age children and adults to learn

about its potential for literacy engagement, identity affirmation and how this could be supported. Based on our findings, we argue that our work adds importantly to a small number of studies on collaborative drawing (Sakr, 2018; Park & Kang, 2018; Van Dijk et al., 2014) and drawing for learning (Madsen, 2014). Indeed, we demonstrated that collaborative drawing can form part of a multimodal repertoire of skills that can be activated for learning with others, and as (pre-) literacy engagement that enable or scaffold verbal and in all likelihood written communication. Thus our study lends strength to Sakr's (2018) argument that collaborative drawing enables multimodal communication.

While we cannot generalise or show any cause and effect, our exploratory research design enabled us to show the potential of collaborative drawing in two domains: multimodal literacy engagement and identity affirmation. Furthermore, we have started to establish how teachers could use collaborative drawing to support literacy engagement and identity affirmation, especially in groups that have different linguistic backgrounds, something that had not been done before. In the following, we will not only offer answers to our three research questions, but also discuss our inductively developed insights on activation of diverse knowledges, higher-order thinking and social interaction.

### **Potential literacy engagement**

We found that collaborative drawing seemed to lower the affective filter and reduce anxiety in learners in our study, perhaps because drawing is a less precise skill than writing and ideas can be expressed even if words are missing. In terms of literacy development, Cummins (2000), showed that learners, especially those who operate in a new language, need to progress from basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) to cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) in order to engage with more

complex academic material. The collaborative drawing activities that we developed provided opportunities for children to use their BICS to talk about their drawings at a conceptual and descriptive level, as well as to develop their CALP, for instance through explaining processes, speculating and problem solving. However, the extent to which more abstract thoughts were enabled through collaborative drawing, depended on the age of learners and the type of collaborative drawing activity as discussed above. Thus, we have shown that collaborative drawing can be used to encourage different types of verbal expression. Thus, our observation that collaborative drawing can empower learners to verbalise complex content in one or more languages, suggests that collaborative drawing could be incorporated into related work on identity texts (Cummins, 2000), translanguaging (Wei, 2011), Content and Language Integrated Learning (Coyle, Hood & Marsh, 2010), and English as an additional language (Edwards, 2009), as well as with talk for writing (Corbet & Strong, 2017).

In answer to research question 1, we argue that collaborative drawing practice may well have potential as a preliminary step towards developing and engaging in literacy and using verbal and written skills for communication. Thus, our findings build on previous work (Cummins, 2000; Cummins et al., 2015; Thibaut & Curwood, 2018), by adding an additional low-tech tool to the multimodal toolbox of teachers who aim to include learners with different linguistic backgrounds and abilities in a more level playing field. We did not ask our participants to write up their drawings or discussions, but this could be done as a post-collaborative drawing activity, a point to which we will return below.

### **Potential to affirm identities**

In response to research questions 2, our findings show that collaborative drawing can encourage diverse identities, by inviting diverse knowledges and languages to the table

both literally and metaphorically. This builds on the work by Cummins and colleagues (2006, 2015), who argue that affirming identities at school is associated with literacy engagement. They also make the point that teachers should make an effort to invite diverse knowledges into the classroom, involving all children. They show that producing bilingual texts by inviting children to write a personal story in their first language, which is then translated into the school language, can be associated with positive outcomes. Our findings add to this insofar as some learners in our study gained confidence and independence relatively quickly and collaborative drawing enabled them to participate on relatively equal terms. Our findings have further shown that collaborative drawing has the potential to encourage the activation and expression of existing knowledge and enable learners to link this to that of others to understand more or less complex issues, and jointly develop content or solve problems, depending on their age. Thus, our work enhances existing research in the area of, developing creativity and higher-order thinking (Cummins, 2000; Meyer et al, 2015), funds of knowledge (Mercado & Moll, 1997), and intercultural understanding (Guilherme, 2002; Cavalli et al. 2009).

### **Facilitation of collaborative drawing**

In answer to our third research questions, there are aspects that should be considered if anyone would like to try out collaborative drawing with a multilingual group. Our study has shown that collaborative drawing can take different forms, and topics and tasks need to be selected wisely in order to maximise literacy engagement, moving from BICS to CALP and identity affirmation, while reducing conflict. Furthermore, as is the case with all group work in schools, it is important to develop collaboration skills, for which explicit instruction may be required. Van Dijk et al.'s (2014) work on 'scripting' and other work on collaborative learning skills (e.g. Naughton, 2006) may provide

guidance for this. Teachers have to be aware that collaborative drawing is not a silent activity and that talk is a crucial aspect of this. Meier (2014) suggests that noise in classrooms, does not need to mean unruly behaviour, but can mean that learners engage with a subject when given an opportunity to talk in more than one language. Indeed our workshops were at times rather noisy, which made much of the data hard to analyse.

While multi-modal learning is often associated with digital technology (e.g. Thibaut & Curwood, 2018), we must not forget that working with other persons, and with paper, pens, talk and writing, enables joint experiences that potentially makes the production process transparent and co-authored, as is argued by Oliver (2007).

Moreover, our findings suggest that collaborative drawing has potential for learners to build relationships with others and to get to know each other, thus creating rapport and a sense of belonging and empowerment, but like anywhere where people work together there can be conflict and division. This resonates with Sakr's (2018: 1) study, which compared paper and on-line collaborative drawing. Her research showed interaction patterns among 5-6 year olds to be "1) working together, 2) collaboration 'coming loose' and 3) vying for control". Thus, our work suggests that collaborative drawing research may have potential for social engagement, and should therefore be read in combination with existing understandings of how learners develop rapport, cohesion and wellbeing, where their multiple and multilingual identities are recognised and accepted (Ligorio et al., 2017; Sakr, 2018; Meier, 2017). In our study we described "working together" as collaboration, and side by side or as "coming loose" as cooperation. However, we did not observe 'vying for control' as a pattern in our study. Perhaps because there were plenty of pens and space to draw, so if collaboration was difficult, looser cooperation was always an option. In terms of facilitation, our study further showed that it may be an advantage to explicitly encourage and validate the use

of several languages, but that the development of language rules may be necessary to avoid linguistic conflict and exclusionary use of different languages.

### **Where next**

We have shown the potential of collaborative drawing and aspects that need to be observed when trying out collaborative drawing. Thus, what we were able to do – and what we consider this article’s main contribution to knowledge – is to generate a roadmap for future research, partly based on the limitations associated with our study.

We did not assess language ability or literacy engagement of our participants before or after the workshops. Informally, we would say all learners had BICS in English and some had English as their first language. Research would have to show to what extent learners with different linguistic repertoires, abilities, difficulties and engagement levels may benefit from collaborative drawing.

The topics in our study did not explicitly include school subjects, but we see much potential in this respect. Therefore, we recommend further research on using collaborative drawing to scaffold content learning, to complement studies such as those by Sakr (2018) and Van Dijk et al. (2014).

As shown above, collaborative drawing has an important affective dimension, and further research could examine the role of collaborative drawing in learner wellbeing, including coping with stress and challenges, sense of belonging, identity and classroom cohesion.

This is a small-scale pilot study that involved 9 mixed-aged children and 8 adults to facilitate collaborative drawing in afterschool workshops. Therefore, the adult-child ratio as well as the age range is an unlikely occurrence in most formal school environments. This means more research is required in ‘ordinary’ classrooms.



Our study is inconclusive as to whether there are skills that are specific to collaborative drawing. Therefore, further evidence would be required to establish if this is the case and how they can be taught or learnt.

Further studies could examine to whether and to what extent collaborative drawing skills are transferable to situations outside the school or educational context, including in related areas, such as therapy (see Park & Kang, 2018) and work settings (see Oliver, 2007).

Further research could include collaborative drawing trials in specific multicultural and multilingual contexts, including family settings and different age groups, including adults (see Oliver, 2007).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion we argue that our findings confirm that collaborative drawing has potential to support literacy engagement, not only at the preliminary level (pre-literacy), but also at more developmental levels, namely engaging learners in complex verbal communication, which has been recognised as a road to literacy. Our study has demonstrated the potential of collaborative drawing to affirm identities, by being learner-led and including different knowledges and ways of knowing. We showed that this may have important affective ‘side effects’ such as empowerment, learner autonomy and inclusion of learners who may not otherwise feel they can fully participate in conventional classrooms. Furthermore, based on our findings, we argue that teachers should not be afraid to try out collaborative drawing and employ collaborative drawing as a multimodal learning tool which has the potential to support inclusive collaboration activities in multilingual contexts, using simple inexpensive resources. We argue that collaborative drawing may well be able to develop skills and ways of engaging with diverse groups that is conducive to tackling collaborative

problem solving, as it can bring different world views and understandings to the table and generate creative potential.

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